

**Darij Zadnikar:
Places of Rebellion and
Empty Space**

0. Lost in Space

It is not obvious how to revolutionise modern capitalism or from which point of departure. Modern capitalism is globalised and omnipresent to such a degree that it is needless to even mention it. It makes the overcoming of capitalism unimaginable and consequently ‘impossible’. We are not even allowed to use this word any longer. We can cunningly use the words “contemporary economic order” and related expressions but when we mention “capitalism” we are running the risk of being intellectually excommunicated. It is an omnipresent taboo, an unspeakable presence. The unlimited presence without content is *the infinite space*. All the aspirations of nano-life in this infinite space are meaningless.

Is there any discontinuity that allows us to reshape the world? Any experience that sets us free from blind normality and helps us regain human dignity?

1. Reaching the Point-Less

It seems that we are living in a time of closing spaces, of lost horizons. The beginning of modernity was characterised by the crumbling of feudal walls and by the opening up of modern subjectivity. The emerging mind was primarily naval: bold enough to cross the skylines. Space was not opened up by seamen only – Columbus sailed westwards –, but also by the astronomers and philosophers, who conceived an infinite universe. They were not frightened by the stakes nor did they feel anguish when pondering the vastness. Ruthlessly everything was destroyed that prevented taking the way leading beyond safety and certainty. Not in the least and not by chance the accumulation of capital too is marked by the same logic of seemingly endless and ruthless progress.

The astrophysics of the twentieth century refuted the image of an evenly and endlessly extended universe. The universe has its beginning in a time when there was no space. Then a bang occurred, a really big bang, 13.7 billions years ago. There is a strong possibility that time as we know it will some day come to an end. Nowadays there are no stakes awaiting the scientists who radically changed the vision of the universe. At least: not yet. The connection between Giordano Bruno's vision of the universe and its social and cultural implications for the period was clear. Bruno marginalised God's creation and gave it some remote place in the universe's periphery. Would God create a sequestered suburban? Such a strong cultural claim is doubtlessly a blasphemy and its author has deserved the flames of the Inquisition. Whatever happened to indignation nowadays? Does such an emphatic scientific truth have any cultural and social implications?

Of course, there's no absolute truth nowadays and the 'eternal' institutions are as they were half a millennium ago. Through determination and bloodshed modernity has conquered horizons and opened up space for plurality and tolerance. There was enough space to share and to fight for. Sometimes the situation got out of hand we found ourselves at the edge of calamity. There were crises, revolutions and global wars. Nevertheless space was opened up, filled with ideas and colonised by countries. In fact it became crowded. There is no place to mark out and there is no returning point. Everything seems point-less.

It must be stressed that the dissolution of the ancient world simultaneously saw the birth of abstraction. The hierarchy of spheres, which constructed the Christian 'universe', were different in quality, similar to the unbridgeable hierarchy of feudal social ranks.¹ In this sense we can

understand the emanation and deep connection of the term "revolution". The spheres were shattered. In the century in which Giordano Bruno and Isaac Newton lived, to invent the universe meant to postulate space and time as abstract, as a total absence of quality, as something that could be conveyed only through quantity.

But the use of this abstract concept has been feasible only by daily experiencing the emerging modern times and the rule of this abstract and totally empty thing. The thing that in modern times and in everyday life conveys its meaning only through quantity is money. With this real abstraction we have reached point-less existence.

2. Violence

It is not the only real abstraction. The process extends itself from abstract community in the form of the political state to the singular void of the liberal subject. The communities have become dissolved in the emancipatory processes. The patriarchal family has been transformed into modern nuclear forms of cohabitation between same and different sexes and generations in which everybody is free to participate in wage labour. We have lost a sense of homeliness in the typical suburbs. Our dwellings are similar and our conversations predictable. We are somewhere, but not really at home; we are part of the crowd, but thoroughly lonely. We are caught in the abstraction that is thawing our qualities for the benefit of its incarnations, be they recognised as the Nation, State, Market, Capital, Idea, Industry, Art, Spectacle, Matrix, Power, System, Security, or Comfort.

Empty space has been filled with objects and consequently people have to be converted. But is not the objectivisation of man at the heart of violence? Could we find

any other notion of violence, directed towards either body or soul? The uniqueness of the human being has turned into an alienated subjectivity. And as we are part of endless time and space, there's always the ultimate threat of total unification with endlessness through death. Or apathy.

So it is natural to preserve humanity by avoiding objectivity. The shattered background loses its obviousness and the crockery could re-attain some worthy quality. This re-appropriation means destroying systemic violence and in some perverted sense it is also a form of violence.

We are not plotting a rebellion against the systemic powers, as negation in itself consists in the constituent conditions of subjection in the form of objectivisation. Resistance outlines some-thing from the abstractness of space and time. Just like gravity. Being (through doing) is substantially negative.

But our space is social, more precisely: anti-social. And our time is Fukuyama's desolated History.

3. Counter-Movement

Is it possible to prevent the objectivisation and dissolution in the abstract world? Is it possible taking into account the past century's failed social and cultural revolutions? The fighters were defeated mainly because they confronted themselves on the battlegrounds of empty space – the State – and endless time – abstract work. The revolutions were not transgressive enough and they just filled the gaps of lost Modernity. People, stuffed in the 'socialistic' state, were sacrificed to linear escaped Future. In some sense, we witnessed the regression to the rigid feudal hierarchy, but this time round the possibility of social mobility (albeit restricted)

was not granted through serving the Church, but through obtaining Party membership.

In my opinion the cracks in history and genuine re-appropriations of human dignity could be experienced while steering clear of frontal clashes with seemingly 'alternative' systems that do not threaten the nature of the abstract background. There has to be an overlooked rebellious realm within the system. It is better for it to be overlooked, ignored or underestimated, as the alternative is just to be normalised, pacified or destroyed by the systemic powers.

Only fast-moving, nomadic and guerrilla-trained rebels survived. They appear suddenly as a creative alternative, a steampunker's technological hack, social invention, insurrection, subculture, ecstatic encounter, artistic fancy, migrating small-scale utopias – they were and are present in countless cases and forms. But where can they plant their temporary roots and avoid being uprooted by vigilant keepers of order?

I must stress again that nor the seizure of state-power, nor the Party membership in the name of libertarian Utopia can beat the formless Empire. Its gluttony aimed to add content to endless abstraction is boundless. Even the so-called 'socialistic revolutions', which refrained from rebuilding communities, were mere mimicries of the advancing rule of abstraction. The proletariat, the class reduced to the realm of abstract labour (i.e. senseless work), has been deceived in its striving for humanity and has been subjected to inhuman conditions in the name of an evasive Future. So the class that could constitute itself only through struggle has become disposable through a fixation on sociological statistics. The epic frontal clash with the world of the Capital seems to be unlikely, suicidal and fruitless. The life-threatening nature

of Capital does not mean that it is not organic. After all, it is just another side of labour. It is a cancer. Its success causes collapse and the hasty progress is a way to flee its disastrous nature.

So, where to build rebellious strongholds? They should be concealed enough lest they are destroyed or colonised by boring normality, and accessible enough to enable swift outbreaks.

4. No-Go Zone

Hakim Bey has written about no-go zones.² He has predicted that in the following decades portions of ‘America’ will vanish from the maps as they will no longer produce, consume or be the object of governmental management: “These areas (economic/social/geographic) will cease to exist for all practical purposes of control. The consuming classes will leave these areas and move ‘elsewhere’, either socially or geographically or both simultaneously.” These words are reminding us of the Zapatista indigenous who realised that for them actual globalised neoliberal power holds no value: they are not producing, they are not buying or selling and therefore they do not exist for the ‘outer’ world.

More and more people will be excluded and abandoned by the commodified brave new world: “The cracks in the monolith will widen, and a lot of ‘us’ will miss that last helicopter out of town.” The wealthy and ‘developed’ North will disappear into Cyberspace, “leaving the other part deserted and bereft, no-go zones, cracks in the monolith”. And the South will interpenetrate the North like mycelia in a loaf of bread: “The holes and cracks in the North will become more Southern, more African, more Latino, more Asiatic, more Islamic.”

Hakim Bey is posing the crucial question of the libertarian potentiality of no-go zones. The rebirth of the social needs some place outside of the wasteland of abstract space, but away through realising ‘ideal’ kingdoms-on-earth. The no-go zones have to be fulfilled through actual freedom in everyday life. The recuperated sociability depends on an economy that we believe will arise through informal ways of survival from the disasters that happened on the other side of fence the non-hierarchic and self-organised webs of communication, the ‘black work’ (including service, production and exchange) on the basis of ‘alternative’, not necessarily hi-tech technology (hardware hacks, improvisations, recycling and so on).

We are not dealing here with alternative ‘models’. More exactly, the word is about unpretentious experiments within the frame of a utopian minimum, which are testing “a melange of whatever works within a very broad framework of organic non-authoritarianism”.

After the century of ideological debacles, which are in Europe comparable only to precedent religious wars, we should not risk our lives for the sake of Ideas. The no-go zone should become a place to build a home, even though it is just a nomadic tent.

5. Community

Recuperating the community should be at the centre of the struggle for humanity. Individual human dignity cannot exist outside of liberated and transformed community. Emancipation is a collective process, not an individual escape route. These premises are opposed to the liberal common sense that considers the community part of the political state. As a state is just an illusory community (Marx),

an abstract state, it could not be the place of common life. Therefore we situated the rebirth of the community into the no-go zone and outside of all liberal abstract containers.

The liberal emancipators have problems with the community, as they directly connect it with patriarchal sociability and traditional interpersonal bounds. They bet on the individual and on the open public space of liberal-democratic state. Such a subject is like a free skater on the skate rink. This kind of freedom can be understood as somehow infantile: as a possibility to do anything. Of course such an infantilism presupposes the exclusion of everybody else. The skaters shouldn't collide. That is the birthplace of the Law to which all the individuals must subject themselves. Consequently, it is the oxymoron of the modern subject.

Yes, there are some basic universal rules placed at the heart of the possibility of speech, as Habermas put it. But they are here only because we need to bargain for all the remaining rules. It is the productive social experimentation, our *Lebenswelt*, for which we are taking responsibility. It is close to Sartre's notion of freedom as a burden of being responsible for one's actions.

As the modern subject is narcissistic, it does not want to take responsibility; it is lazy and cowardly (according to Kant) and has to hand over rational competence to the class of lawmaking rulers. Subjected individuals have the phantasmal freedom of periodical political choice and the continuous consumption leftovers. And when the 'free' individual is confronted with lawless circumstances, with the urge of communication, with situations in which selfishness has to be abandoned, he proves to be incapable of any moral act. The morality arises from communicative situations and from disobeying orders.

The conquest of power by either 'democratic' or 'revolutionary' means in order to have controlling instruments to change society results in the objectivisation of humanity and its decomposition into individuals. Their grief has to be consoled with new religions (liberalism, communism, patriotism, consumerism, and the like) and their emptiness filled up with the goods from hypermarkets, dissolved neighbourhoods with artificial plants and promenades where no contact is established.

The recuperation of community is a radical transformation of injured social forms – including the family – on the basis of self-contemplation and the building of affinities and affectivities. There is a possible threat of constructing the collectives on the basis of applying common ideas and building an ideological community. This is the urge of intellectual sacerdotalism that invents, poses and interprets the Truth. These are not the places of common life, but the neo-traditional patriarchal sects.

Building a community cannot be done by intellectuals who are applying ideas and reconstructing institutions. There is a need for social tinkering. Tinkering happens when you try out something you do not quite know how to do, guided by whim, imagination and curiosity. The bending of social circuits could result not only in assaults on the systemic networks, it can generate interesting results also "inside and among us". The community feeds on constant encounters and its common grounds should not be mistaken for public space, which is provided by the political state in order to give the privatised individual a chance to observe the others. Being outside of the liberal democratic *quadrillage* does not mean abandoning the politics to enclose oneself in private intimacy. It is a real politics closely related to

Aristotle's sense of politics and it should free intimacy too from the chains of patriarchy. The encounters seek temporary consent in the heat of intellectual debates (in which no intellectuals participate) and there are ritual transitions to the story-telling and ecstatic mingling.

**Autonomy, horizontality and direct democracy.
There's not much to add.**

6. Language

The intellectuals of the political left are servants of the party leaders, pretending to be the prophets of a 'Better Future'. Their job is to legitimise the actual power or its desire to control people and nature. Therefore their language is essentially bureaucratic, boring and passionless. As they act from within the clouds of 'theories',³ they do not need to communicate and prove themselves. They 'know' and they are like God who has created the world by naming it. They are applying the theories to reality and do not derive them from current affairs. Their interpretations have to prevail the others'. They are building the fellowships of the same-minded and irritably attack 'opponents'. They explain, interpret, explicate, in an attempt to enlighten the multitudes. They are the 'revolutionary' vanguards.⁴

Such intellectual language consists mainly of weak connected evidences and ethnographic-like collections and is at present fashionably (Derrida, Deleuze, Negri) declinatory towards *dialectics*.

There is no need to reduce the idea of dialectics to Hegel's logic. A vast post-Hegelian re-conceptualisation of dialectics has been carried out by now. Adorno's negative dialectics is just one of the better known: "Dialectics unfolds the difference between the particular and the

universal, dictated by the universal. As the subject-object dichotomy is brought to mind it becomes inescapable for the subject, furrowing whatever the subject thinks, even objectively – but it would come to an end in reconciliation. Reconciliation would release the non-identical, would rid it of coercion, including spiritualized coercion; it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them. Reconciliation would be the thought on the many as no longer inimical, a thought that is anathema to subjective reason."⁵

We have to bear in mind the original meaning of the word *dialegein* and the need to expose the communicative dimension of dialectics in relation to its logical meaning. In the absence of the dialogical/dialectical component, there is only the residue of shattered and unconnected monologues. We can enjoy their poststructuralist wittiness, but there is no need to take a stand, since we can, in the supermarket of ideas, just change them, as we do used clothes or the channels on TV. It is not the reconciliation of and in differences – it is just the sheer ignoring of them. In this respect we can critically point at the professional activists and the activists by mission, the new-age missionaries, who are like medieval Franciscan monks wandering through the networks of resistance.

What I am proposing is a notion of *dialectics as micrological dialegein*. It is not just about approaching things but also reconstructing and restructuring them: it is in-spiralling and out-spiralling, listening and acting. The manipulative language of intellectuals has to be overcome through militant and dialogical inquiries. We have witnessed it in the Latin American *enquentrismo* of Zapatistas, Brazilian landlessness, the Aymar insurgents and Argentinean *piqueteros* and now we recognise it in social movements and collectives

worldwide. The recuperation of the community presupposes the abandonment of prophets.

00. The Revolution

The 49th hexagram is *Ge*,⁶ meaning “Revolution” or “Radical Change”. The bottom trigram is *Li* or “Fire” and the upper is *Dui* or “Lake”. Water and fire overcome each other. This phenomenon suggests a picture of revolution that abolishes the old.

The Decision says:

Proper day.

Upon it obtain confidence from people.

Supremely prosperous and smooth.

Favourable to being steadfast and upright.

Regret vanishes.

Confucius’ commentary on Decision is: “When the revolutionary tempest breaks out, faith will accord with it. Enlightened intelligence makes people joyful. Great success comes through justice. Since revolution is proper, all regret disappears. Heaven and Earth abolish the old and bring about the new, then the four seasons complete their changes. Tang and Wu ... brought about the new. They obeyed the will of Heaven in accord with the wishes of the people. The time and meaning of abolishing the old is truly great!”

But each of the six lines can change and not all the changes are favourable.⁷

1. There were no concepts such as “man” or “citizen” in the feudal world. Possibly one could come upon them through migrating in the spheres beyond the grave, facing one’s first original copy. In short, equality only came through Death.

2. Hakim Bey, NoGoZone, <http://www.hermetic.com/bey/nogozone.html>.

3. They are rather ideologies.

4. Darij Zadnikar, “Neo-Vanguardism and the Politics of the Rejection of Dialectics”, in: John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros, Sergio Tischler (eds.), *Negativity and Revolution, Adorno and Political Activism*. Pluto Press, London, 2008.

5. T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, University of Minnesota, London and New York, 2005, p. 6.

6. *The Complete I Ching*, transl. Alfred Huang, Inner Traditions, Rochester, 1998, pp. 389-396.

7. We have to pay attention to the first and third lines and avoid mistakes.