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The Persistence of Myth

'To Win the Energies of Intoxication for the Revolution'

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'To Win the Energies of Intoxication for the Revolution'

Body Politics, Community, and Profane Illumination

Sami Khatib

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article is indebted to Michael Löwy's illuminating article on *Walter Benjamin and Surrealism: The chemical nuptials of two materialisms*. It is also inspired by Marc Berdet's introduction *In the Magnetic Fields of Materialism and Anthropology* (see both articles in this issue: *Anthropology + Materialism. Issue 1*). An earlier version of this article was presented at the "Historical Materialism" conference Nov. 2011, London. I would like to thank Hannah Forbes Black, Alison Hugill, and Sam Dolbear for their comments and corrections.

"... To live an event as an image is not to see an image of this event, nor is it to attribute to the event the gratuitous character of the imaginary.

The event really takes place – and yet does it 'really' take place? The occurrence commands us, as we would command the image. That is, it releases us, from it and from ourselves."

Maurice Blanchot

Introduction

- 1 According to Walter Benjamin's 1929 essay on French surrealism, "[t]o win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" was the central "project about which surrealism circles in all its books and enterprises" (Benjamin 1978: 55). In this article I will claim that we might expand Benjamin's characterisation of surrealism, taking it as a central motto of his own revolutionary thought. Through terms like "image-space" (*Bildraum*), "body-

space" (*Leibraum*), and "profane illumination", Benjamin is able to designate a sphere of indifference between sobriety and ecstasy, individuality and collectivity, time and space, corporeal immediacy and figurative presentation. Profane illumination is a kind of materialist epiphany inaccessible to contemplative thinking and intentional acting, which ushers in the immediacy of an "image-space." This space is not miraculously emergent but can only be formed *through and within* political action. The collective subjectivity that inhabits and literally incorporates this space emerges neither through the traditional structures of disciplined cadres in party politics and nor the spontaneous anarchy of the amorphous masses. In other words, there is no authentic political community that precedes revolutionary action. For Benjamin, community, image-space, and political action mutually presuppose each other; there is no solid ground on which revolution can be predetermined. The same goes for political agency. The site of a revolutionary community, the space where this community comes into being, is the interpenetration of a collective body-space and the image-space of political action. Due to its immediate, non-representational emergence and indeterminacy, the political collective inhabiting this space has no stable essence in itself. Rather, it alludes to an "unworking" or "inoperative" community that French thinkers like Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy have conceptualised. Foreshadowing this "unworking" or self-dismantling community, Benjamin puts forward a new concept of technology according to which technology is not anymore an instrumental means to master nature but a "pure means", whereby collective politics and individual experience, human physics and inorganic nature playfully intersect, giving rise to a new post-humanist, techno-anthropological life form in which the instrumental, essentialist, and productivist paradigm of labour and production is suspended.

I. Profane Illumination

- 2 For the moment, let us start with Benjamin's paradoxical idea of a *profane illumination*, a moment of dialectical illumination when the opposition between enlightened consciousness and mythical or religious experience is suspended. The *Surrealism*-essay reads:

[A]s we know an ecstatic component lives in every revolutionary act. This component is identical with the anarchic. But to place the accent exclusively on it would be to subordinate the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance (Benjamin 1978: 55).

- 3 It goes without saying that Benjamin here refers to the classic opposition between libertarian anarchism and hierarchical structures of Leninist parties. His surrealistically inspired suggestion to overcome this non-dialectical duality leads to a materialist theory of perception and a revision of the commonplace dichotomy of sober ratio and enthusiast affect. As Benjamin's essay proceeds:

Any serious exploration of occult, surrealistic, phantasmagoric gifts and phenomena presupposes a dialectical intertwinement to which a romantic turn of mind [*romantischer Kopf*, literally: 'romantic head'] is impervious. For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday (*ibid.*).

- 4 Although Benjamin is commenting on the difference between (French) surrealism and (German) romanticism, we might read this quote in light of the 'actually existing surrealism' of the capitalist everyday. Benjamin's "dialectical optic" aims "to perceive the everyday as impenetrable" in the same spirit as Marx, when he conceives of the capitalist world of positive factuality – commodified things (*Sachen*) and facts – as the objective cover [*sachliche Hülle*, literally: objective/thingish shell] of social relations. The objective impenetrability of the everyday resides, as Marx put it, in the "mystical character of commodities." To quote from the famous opening lines of his chapter on commodity fetishism: "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very tricky thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx 1962: 85). Reading these lines through Benjamin's "dialectical optic", we perceive the most trivial occurrences and facts of the everyday precisely as a *real-sur-real*, or, as Marx put it, *sinnlich-übersinnliche*, "sensuous-supra-sensuous" sphere in which the "occult character" of capital as a purely *social* (supra-sensuous) relation is expressed by (sensuous) things (ibid.). From this perspective, the exploration of occult, surrealistic, phantasmagoric gifts and phenomena is not about an inner experience, but about the perception of the world of commodities as literally *sur-real*, *over-* or *hyper-real* shape. Hence, a materialist inquiry into the social metaphysics of physical things must rid itself of all naturalistic and positivist attitudes, thus revealing the objective, thing-ish semblance of the capitalist everyday in its *sur-real* – "over-" or "supra"-real – character.
- 5 Around the same time as Benjamin wrote his essay on surrealism, Georges Bataille, who would later become Benjamin's friend, formulated a harsh critique of Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929) accusing the surrealists of a "predilection for values above the 'world of facts'" (Bataille 1985: 33). In his essay on *The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur in the Words Surhomme and Surrealist*, Bataille mercilessly condemned any romanticist or idealist orientation "sur" or "above" reality. For Bataille surrealism's failure consists in the *elevation* of a reality beyond what he later developed as a post-surrealist *base materialism*. He argued that "since surrealism is immediately distinguishable by the addition of low values (the unconscious, sexuality, filthy language, etc.), it invests these values with an elevated character by associating them with the most immaterial values" (ibid.: 39). Apart from the question of whether Bataille rightly points to surrealism's hidden idealism, he underestimates the literally *sur-reality* of what he calls the "world of facts", that is, the meta-physics of commodified physics. In other words, the commodity form is in the prefix "sur" itself – therein lies the metaphysics of the "base" physics of capitalist everyday life.
- 6 The 'home-grown surrealism' of capitalist realism sheds light on the limits of any sort of romanticist anti-capitalist critique. Such a romantic critique articulates, as Michael Löwy argues in this issue, "a world view, a cultural protest against the capitalist disenchantment of the world, against modern bourgeois civilization, in the name of pre-capitalist values" (Löwy 2013). Against such a theoretical and literary project, we have to acknowledge that capitalism is not just about a disenchantment of the world, which could be criticised by way of romantic re-enchantment as Löwy defines, but also and moreover about an inherent mode of re-enchantment through disenchantment. From this perspective, romanticism and then surrealism are either critical or affirmative articulations of capitalism's own paradoxically immanent transcendence. That is to say, the meta-physics of the physics of the commodity form is not merely an illusion but the

very form of a “real-abstract” reality in which things act out social relations. This almost spectral – sensuous-supra-sensuous – mode of production is simultaneously both sur-real and real. Therefore, it is not enough to simply criticise capitalism’s “transcendental homelessness” (Georg Lukács) in the name of pre-modern values and to ‘homesickly’ yearn for a new aesthetic religion – a quasi-religious re-enchantment of the world out of the sources of late romanticism and late surrealism. Rather, one must perceive the world through Marx’s and Benjamin’s “dialectical optics”. This profoundly modern world is the world of capital, be it in its aesthetic, economic, political, or ethical dimension. And it is only this modern world of capital that produces a sur-reality that has become an integral part of capitalist reality – an enchanting (“phantasmagorical”) reality of merciless disenchantment.

- 7 It is the critical side of Benjamin's “dialectical optics” that takes issue with this romantic attitude – an attitude that hypostatizes the “mysterious side of the mysterious” instead of soberly recognising occult and phantasmagoric phenomena as an integral part of reality as sur-reality. In the same way, political struggle is not about tarrying with the ecstatic intoxication inherent to authentic revolutionary action but about letting its sober, profane face come to the fore. This is what is meant when a profane illumination opens up a sphere, a bodily image-space in the midst of political action. “To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution” does not mean the total immersion of the self in a collective communion of transgressive ecstasy – but to *traverse* the thresholds of these experiences, to oscillate between reality and sur-reality, in order to *exit* them and to enter the collective image-space of politics. Hence, the dream-like threshold experiences become not the final goal but a necessary transition of political action that dismantles, “unworks” the strict boundaries of the capitalist individual from within, to give rise to a non-totalitarian, non-formatted community.

In the world’s structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication. [...] But the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson (Benjamin 1978: 48).

- 8 This intoxicated introductory lesson opens up an unmediated sphere “where sound and image, image and sound interpenetrate with automatic precision and such felicity” (ibid.: 48) whereby no space is left for meaning, sense and moralism – whereby collective acting is freed from all representational tasks immediately presenting themselves as revolutionary action. Before we come back to this sphere, which is nothing else than the above-mentioned image-space, let us take a closer look at Benjamin's concept of intoxication.
- 9 As already indicated, the concept of profane illumination engages with intoxication and religion in a dialectical way that neither totally affirms these experiences nor simply negates their importance and impact. The theoretical background of this conception can be found in the traditional opposition of soberly rational thinking within the limits of reason and the enthusiastic affect always aiming at transcending rationality's boundaries. It was Immanuel Kant's distinction between enthusiasm and *Schwärmerei* (visionary rapture) that defined the hair-splitting but crucial line between potentially universal judgments about the sublime and falsely romanticist delusions.

If enthusiasm can be compared with the *delusion of sense* [*Wahnsinn*], then visionary rapture [*Schwärmerei*] is to be compared with the *delusion of mind* [*Wahnwitz*], the latter of which is least of all compatible with the sublime, since it is brooding and absurd. In enthusiasm, as an affect, the imagination is unreined; in visionary rapture, as a deep-rooted, oppressive passion, it is unruléd. The former is a passing accident, which occasionally affects the most healthy understanding; the latter is a disease that destroys it (Kant 2000: 157).¹

- 10 It is precisely this passing accident – what might be called a Freudian slip – that Benjamin is drawing upon to conceptualise the function of intoxication for profane illumination. (In this context it might be instructive to remember that Benjamin was very familiar with Kant's aesthetic of the sublime as theorised in Kant's third critique and held the Kantian text in high esteem even after his materialist turn in 1924.) Intoxication – be it triggered by drugs, religion or other threshold experiences – can be regarded as Benjamin's anthropological-materialist name for enthusiasm [*Begeisterung*], which – in Kantian terms – might be compared with the *delusion of sense* [*Wahnsinn*]. Profane illumination is thus strictly to be differentiated from its Kantian opposition, *Schwärmerei* (visionary rapture) leading to a delusion of mind. The Hegelian conceptualisation of *Schwärmerei* – that of fanaticism – elucidates the structure of profane illumination further. Whereas for Hegel, fanaticism is enthusiasm for the abstract², for Benjamin's profane illumination is enthusiasm for the concrete, or, more precisely, for the *immediate mediacy* of political action where body and image intersect. The key concept to understand this concreteness, which, in Hegelian terms, would be a “concrete totality,” is the image-space – an experimental figure of thought that Benjamin later dropped in favour of the “dialectical image” and its political-transcendental condition in the “now of recognisability” as developed in the later *Arcades Projects*.
- 11 But how are we to conceive of this image-space and how can the latter acquire a collective body?

II. Image-Space

- 12 Referring to Aragon's book *Traité du Style*, Benjamin draws a parallel of style and politics. Just as style requires a distinction between metaphor and image, so does politics. While the metaphor, literally *meta-phorein*, saying something differently, transferring meaning to an image, always employs an image to designate something else – a meaning – Aragon's image can only stand for itself. The same goes for politics, as Benjamin claims: the task for materialist politics hence is “to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover within the space of political action the one hundred per cent image-space [*Bildraum*]. This image-space, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation” (Benjamin 1978: 56). This stance against representation and moralism aims at setting free political action from all instrumental ideologies; political action is no longer the bearer of something else – a higher morale, a programme, or an embodiment of history's progress towards socialism – but an opening that presents itself as an immediate image, an image-space where all petty bourgeois moralism becomes inoperative, where all external meaning is extinguished. Nothing else is meant when Benjamin defines the task of authentic politics as the organisation of pessimism – a pessimism of the belief that politics can stand for something else, that is, historical progress, morale, teleologies. Seen from this angle, the *Surrealism*-essay follows Benjamin's early anarchic and messianic nihilism turning the latter into an anthropological-materialist theory of politics. If this

image-space of politics devoid of any moral and trans-historical meaning cannot be measured contemplatively, it can only be directly performed, staged, or embodied by political action itself. At the non-representable intersection of body, image and political language Benjamin locates the immediacy of an image-space that suspends intellectually mediated concepts of the political. In contrast to traditional Marxist critiques of ideology, he asks:

Where are the conditions for revolution? In the changing of attitudes or of external circumstances? That is the cardinal question that determines the relation of politics to morality and cannot be glossed over. Surrealism has come ever closer to the Communist answer. And that means pessimism all along the line. Absolutely. Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals (ibid.: 55).

13 We might also add here: mistrust in all forms of political representation, all contemplative concepts of politics, and all programmatic visions for the future. Moreover, the question of revolutionary conditions cannot be posited as an alternative between economic being and ideological consciousness; the Archimedean point of revolution can neither be deterministically deduced from 'objective' economic conditions nor turned into a merely theoretical question of epistemology. From this perspective, it should be clear that Benjamin acquires a singular position within the discourse of post-Lukácsian critical Marxism since his departure from deterministic 'vulgar Marxism' does not take an epistemological turn to arrive at a critique of ideology. Unlike Frankfurt School theorists, Benjamin does not conceive of ideology as an obstacle for revolution but as its very source. Phantasmagoria, dream-like fantasies, and collective dream-images can be both limiting ideology *and* transgressive medium for a revolutionary standstill, stasis. Consequently, the *lumen*, light of the profane il-lumination is not 'made' of a correct or adequate consciousness, a knowledge about certain things but is an immediate medium in which things and words, individuality and collectivity, enlightened consciousness and dream-like fantasies coincide, or, more precisely, collide. Benjamin's demand to organise pessimism is nothing else than a call to take away, to undo all moralist imperatives and politically optimistic programmes to access this medium or sphere.

14 But how are we to conceive of this space and how can political action enter it? In short, Benjamin's answer remains pessimistic and anti-utopian: the entrance into the image-space can not be intentionally found but only unintentionally opened up by threshold experiences, Freudian slips, and other unexpected deviations of collective political action itself:

For in the joke [...], in invective, in misunderstanding, in all cases where an action puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes, the long-sought image-space [*Bildraum*] is opened, the world of universal and integral actuality, where the 'best room' is missing – the space, in a word, in which political materialism and physical nature share the inner human, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains untorn. Nevertheless – indeed, precisely after such dialectical annihilation – this will still be an image-space and, more concretely, a body-space [*Leibraum*] (ibid.: 56).³

15 The image-space is the immediate presentation of collective political action without formal political representation. Where nearness looks with its own eyes, where ultimate proximity and auratic distance enter a stage of mutual indifference, the image-space becomes real. This reality is not stable, it is fully charged with dialectical tensions;

nevertheless, it contains a higher degree of actuality, more actual reality than reality can contain. This higher degree of actuality is called “the world of universal and integral actuality”, a term that Benjamin will later define as the messianic world (Benjamin 2003: 404).⁴

III. Body Politics and Community

- 16 In the *Surrealism*-essay, however, this universal and integral actuality designates a sphere emerging in the midst of political action. The transformation or deformation (in Werner Hamacher's terms one might say: *afformation*⁵) that is “at work” in this image-space “unworks” the boundaries of collectivity and individuality, body and image. If the experience of intoxication is able to loosen the bio-political cage of the modern individual subject by permeating its boundaries vis-à-vis the collective, these boundaries are totally torn down within the image-space so that “no limb remains untorn”, no line of demarcation remains at work. This is what is meant by “body-space” – a space in which the inner experience is turned inside out, the corporeal individual shares a collective body without being subsumed under it. The body-space is not the site of a carnivalesque transgression, a Dionysian communion but designates a sphere where an emancipated technology gives rise to a post-humanist, techno-anthropological community of loosened, unworked individuals sharing a collective body.

The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* [nature] that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image-space to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto* (Benjamin 1978: 56).

- 17 The key concept of this dense passage is “innervation”, a term that according to the Benjamin scholars Miriam Bratu Hansen and Sarah Ley Roff has not a primarily psychoanalytical but neuropsychological origin (Ley Roff 2004: 129). In neuropsychology innervations refer to transfers of energy between the neurological system and the mind. Benjamin's interest in innervation, however, dates back to his early sketches on “psychophysics”, a discipline originally coined by the German psychologist Gustav Theodor Fechner. Benjamin's early psycho-physical studies are concerned with the double intersection of the theological duality of *soma* [*Leib*] and *psyche* and the modern split between body [*Körper*] and spirit [*Geist*]. In the *Surrealism*-essay he adds an anthropological-materialist dichotomy to this psycho-physical problem, that is, the division between the individual and the political collective. As a result, innervation concerns the intersections, interplays, and interdependencies of (1) an individual corporeality [*Körper*] and a collective spirit – or, to use a Marxian term from the *Grundrisse* : “general intellect” – and (2) a collective body [*Leib*] and an individual psyche. The implicit reference to Marx and his famous “Fragment on Machines” from the *Grundrisse* – a text Benjamin could not have read at that time⁶ – indicates that bodily collective innervation and bodily innervations of the collective allude to a new form of technology in which a collective spirit becomes corporeal, has a collective body. It comes as no surprise that Benjamin will later quote from this passage on innervation in his most famous essay on *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* from 1935/36. In the latter essay the intertwining of individual and collective innervation by which

individual bodies literally become the nerves of the collective and vice versa, sheds light on what Benjamin calls “second technology” – a liberated and emancipatory technology the goal of which is not anymore “mastery over nature” like in capitalist-exploitative “first technology” but an “interplay between nature and humanity” (Benjamin 2008: 26). The *Surrealism*-essay already features key elements of this new emancipatory, non-anthropocentric, and non-instrumental form of technology that is able to master the interplay of *techne*, *soma* and *physis*, technology, body, and nature (One might add here that more recent elaborations like Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* point to a similar direction⁷).

- 18 Benjamin's theologically charged name for the mode of existence that inhabits the zone of indifference between politics, psychophysics, and psychoanalysis is the “creature” – a term he distilled from the works of Franz Rosenzweig, Karl Kraus, Bertolt Brecht, Adolf Loos, and the utopian science fiction novelist Paul Scheerbart. The creature denotes a post-humanist state of being devoid of all idealist notions of humanity like creativity, organic wholeness, and contemplative thinking. In other words: it marks the zero level, the most deprived mode of human existence surviving the age of capitalist modernity. As Benjamin notes in his fragment on the comic figure *Mickey Mouse*, the creature designates a form of life that “can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being” (Benjamin 2008: 338). Mickey Mouse is such a creature, a creature undermining “the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind” (ibid.). The theological charge of the term creatureliness, hence, does not refer to theology proper but to the decentring of the modern anthropocentric hierarchy of creatures. The human being is the creature that language was given to; humans are being *created* rather than Promethean *creators*. Therefore, creaturely life can never be creative in a representational sense; it cannot bear any meaning other than itself. For Benjamin, a fictional character like Mickey Mouse does not symbolise anything, be it the cultural downfall of Western civilization or the decline of bourgeois culture, but immediately performs the non-symbolic presentation of a creaturely life whose humanist features have been taken away. Nevertheless, likewise political action can immediately put forth its own image, the creature can embody an immediate figuration. The creaturely body quite literally stages an image, a bodily allegory of abstract social relations; for in the image-space organic flesh is penetrated by technology forming a bodily image [*Leibraum*]. This image does not emerge from revolutionary action (like the image-space, *Bildraum*) but arises in the midst of the capitalist everyday at the moment of its dissolution, failure, dismantling. As Rainer Nägele comments:

Kreatur, as the figure of modernity, figures human subjectivity as a sexualized body that speaks, as the flesh permeated by the word, inscribing the body in the experience of the law. Under this premise, the baroque allegorical personifications as incarnations of virtues and vices are the most precise model of a human subjectivity whose flesh can be reduced neither to a pure physis nor to nineteenth-century psychologism. It is in the *Kreatur* that, for Benjamin, the discourses of Marx and Freud intersect in a way that puts Benjamin's thinking at a far distance from the 'Freudo-Marxism' of such members of the Frankfurt School as Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, but also from the more subtle 'mediations' of Adorno (Nägele 2004: 161).

- 19 Ultimately, it is the experience of the law, of the bio-political inscription of life as “bare life”⁸ into a juridical web that has created the creature and its psycho-theological nervous system. It is in this sense that the creature might be called the persisting yet non-vitalist remainder of life at the moment when life is subtracted from itself. Creaturely life is not

simply bare life but its flip side. If bare life, a life subjected under the law, is deprived life, a life without a dimension “more” than life, creaturely life is just the “more” without the life – the surplus without its substance. As Nägele rightly points out, the creature is not reducible to a human essence; it rather designates a death-driven singularity that has lost its properly subjective form that nevertheless incorporates, embodies a dimension of life where life is more than life. The creature, hence, is the psycho-theological name of a life form, in which a certain pressure, a “too muchness of life”, exists and persists as such⁹. From a psychoanalytically informed Marxian perspective, the creature is a de-subjectified, undead life that remains once the boundaries of the atomised individual have been crushed.

- 20 In light of this reading, Benjamin's revolutionary body politics of the image-space is creaturely insofar as it does not allude to a carnival of bodies, an ecstatic communion but, on the contrary, to a de-potentialisation (radisation, *radix*, root), an implosion of organic wholeness, an “unworking” of binding energies, an undoing of all humanist essences – be it physics, metaphysics or psyche. Consequently, the image-space as the “world of universal and integral actuality” is to be thought of as the universal and integral actuality of creaturely life. This ‘higher’ stage of actuality is neither a higher ideal nor an intensified humanity, a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, but a de-potentialised actuality that paradoxically contains more actuality than the potentialities of everyday life. This reduced yet condensed “integral actuality” is only real within the body- and image-space and it is in this space where a loosened, “unworked” community can become reality – a reality fully charged with creaturely life; a reality that extinguishes all vitalist, humanist, and idealist forms of community; a reality in which *sur-* and *sous-*reality are ultimately short-circuited.
- 21 As mentioned in the introductory remarks, this community implicitly alludes to an “inoperative” or “unworked community.” Referring to the works of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy described this “unworking” as a withdrawal from work, as something that has no longer to do “either with production or with completion” but, rather, “encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension” (Nancy 1991: 31). Community, he continues, “is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are*. Community is not a work or even an operation of singular beings, for community is simply their being – their being suspended upon its limit” (ibid.). With Benjamin we might add that this singular being is creaturely the community of which only arises from an unworking space, a bodily image-space. In this space all singularities *are* suspension, a suspension of representation. The image-space is immediately incarnated by fragmented, torn apart bodies permeated by technology. The unworked community is ‘made’ of these fragmented bodies alluding to a post-humanist mode of existence once modernity has dismantled itself. Politics, hence, is the ‘inoperative operation’ that suspends all modes of political-economic (“value-formal”) and aesthetical (“phantasmagorical”) representation capitalism’s symbolic order hinges on. It is this suspension, caesura whereby “an action puts forth its own image” – and becomes an image-space.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Kant: "Wenn der Enthusiasm mit dem Wahnsinn, so ist die Schwärmerei mit dem Wahnwitz zu vergleichen, wovon der letztere sich unter allen am wenigsten mit dem Erhabenen verträgt, weil er grüblerisch lächerlich ist. Im Enthusiasmus, als Affekt, ist die Einbildungskraft zügellos; in der Schwärmerei, als eingewurzelter brütender Leidenschaft, regellos. Der erstere ist vorübergehender Zufall, der den gesunden Verstand bisweilen wohl betrifft; der zweite eine Krankheit, die ihn zerrüttet" (Kant 1908: 275).
2. Cf. Hegel: "This enthusiasm was Fanaticism, that is, an enthusiasm for something abstract – for an abstract thought which sustains a negative position towards the established order of things" (Hegel 1986, 12: 431; transl. taken from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/lectures4.htm>)
3. Transl. modified, cf. Benjamin 1977: 309.
4. Cf. Benjamin 1974: 1239.
5. Cf. Hamacher 1994.
6. Marx's *Grundrisse* were firstly published in 1939/40 in Moscow; however, the war and the 'Stalinist purges' prevented the text from reaching a wider audience. In 1953, the German text of the original *Rohentwurf*, draft version was published by the Institute for Marxism-Leninism of the GDR.
7. Cf. Haraway: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. [...] By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. This cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics--the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other - the relation between organism and machine has been a border war" (Haraway 1991: 149f.).
8. The term "bare life" was originally introduced by Benjamin's essay *Fate and Character* (1919) and further elaborated in *The Critique of Violence* (1921). Bare life or "das bloße Leben" (Benjamin 1977: 200; cf. *ibid.*: 175) is life deprived of all its super-natural, that is ethical and meta-ethical features. This reduced form of life is not to be conflated with natural, quasi biological life. Bare life is the product of a social reduction, a privation of super-naturalness to mere naturalness. Life as bare life thus does not designate a primal state *before* society but, on the contrary, the *product* of a society in which life is violently subjected to the law. Benjamin's technical term to account for the dual character of legal violence (law-establishing or law-constituting violence and law-preserving violence) is "mythic violence" – a violence that endlessly reproduces itself in the positing of law and its application to bare life. In the essay on *The Critique of Violence*, Benjamin opposes mythic violence by introducing the term "divine violence," which is a paradoxical non-violent or "pure" violence capable of undoing, abolishing, de-posing state-power, the law, and the latter's supplementing forms of violence: "For blood is the symbol of bare life [*bloßen Lebens*].

The dissolution of legal violence stems [...] from the guilt of more natural life, which consigns the living, innocent and unhappy, to a retribution that 'expiates' the guilt of bare life – and doubtless also purifies the guilty, not of guilt, however, but of law. For with bare life, the rule of law over the living [*den Lebendigen*] ceases. Mythic violence is bloody power over bare life for its own sake; divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living” (Benjamin 1996: 250; transl. modified). Drawing on Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben coined the term “bare life” in his *Homo Sacer* series, stressing its social, non-biological meaning: “There are not *first* life as a natural biological given and *anomie* as the state of nature, and *then* their implication in law through the state of exception. On the contrary, the very possibility of distinguishing life and law, *anomie* and *nomos*, coincides with their articulation in the biopolitical machine. Bare life is a product of the machine and not something that preexists it, just as law has no court in nature or in the divine mind” (Agamben 2005: 87f.).

9. Eric Santner’s term of “psychotheology” could provide a framework to grasp this “too muchness” of life: “Psychoanalysis differs from other approaches to human being by attending to the constitutive ‘too muchness’ that characterizes the psyche; the human mind is, we might say, defined by the fact that it includes more reality than it can contain, is the bearer of an excess, a too much of pressure that is not merely physiological. The various ways in which this ‘too much’, this surplus life of the human subject, seeks release or discharge in the ‘psychopathology of everyday life’ continues to form the central focus of Freudian theory and practice” (Santner: 2001: 8).

ABSTRACTS

This article discusses Walter Benjamin’s essay on *Surrealism* (1929) and focuses on three key elements any anthropological-materialist concept of politics has to address: (1) a profane illumination of the capitalist everyday life, (2) the problem of political representation, and (3) the interdependency of body politics and the (im)possible community of political acting. This article is a contribution to the ongoing debate on ‘what is anthropological materialism’ after Benjamin.

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