The Future of Media

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Edited by Joanna Zylinska with Goldsmiths Media

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1

The Future and the 'Poetry of the Past'

Gholam Khiabany

> Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.
>
> (Bloch 1977, 22)

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I

Faith in progress remains strong and there is no shortage of images and imaginings about amazing futures that lie ahead, futures that are offered and made possible by technologies. As the timespan for introducing and marketing new products and the latest technological innovations decreases, the academic rush to identify, label and celebrate 'new phases' of progress and civilisation intensifies. The gap between the third industrial revolution (1980s) and the latest, fourth, industrial revolution was astonishingly short. And yet the path from the third to the fourth industrial revolution in the field of media and cultural studies has been marked with different stages, each of which are celebrated for their unique and hitherto novel impact: Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3.0, Web 4.0! Denis Smith points out that in the 1980s there was no shortage of analyses that were predicting or announcing the imminent end of an era: the end of history, of organised capitalism, of modernity, or even of Western civilisation (Smith 1990). Similar predictions were offered about the future of media: the demise of political and economic elites (Dyson 1998), the collapse of big media companies (Negroponte 1995), the death of distance (Cairncross 1997), the end of centralised media (Rheingold 1993).

The new wave of technological innovations and developments, from AI to big data, robotic, nano- and biotechnologies, to cloud computing and virtual realities, is not just about imagining technologies and technological futures, but

also about imagining socio-cultural systems which are shaping technologies and which are being consolidated. The future of media as an emerging field of inquiry follows the sociology of the future and, as such, can learn from the theories, methodologies, agendas and contradictory movements and moments that have been explored, examined and critiqued. However, as fascinating and haunting as speculation about *the future* is, it is undeniable that remnants of *the past* have been haunting the imagination in recent years. Hidden from many academic accounts of technologically driven bright futures is the re-emergence of a darker past that is most starkly witnessed in the revitalisation of far-right neo-fascist movements. It is the far right which has been making the biggest strides all over the world and, in particular, in the belly of the beast – the USA. The result of the 2020 presidential election in the USA simply will not stop this regressive march.

The march of the far right is of course not limited to established liberal democracies. Right-wing militarism has returned to East Asia and in particular in the Philippines; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has successfully dominated the political scene in India; the 'appeal' of Putin's brand of authoritarianism extends beyond the border of Russia; Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, once regarded as an ideal model and a template for Muslim-majority countries, has plunged the country into darkness; and millennial Islamism has spread like wildfire in the wake of the defeat of the Arab uprisings of 2011–2012. The nonsynchronism of capitalism's development has always been recognised in variants of theories of 'uneven development'.

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The darker side of Western modernity (Mignolo 2011) has been an essential factor for the production of surplus value, and the benefits of temporal differences between imperial powers and colonies have been immense for 'advanced' capitalism. For example, in his analysis of slavery, Marx argued that

> with the development of capitalist production during the period of manufacture, the public opinion of Europe lost its last remnant of shame and conscience … While the cotton industry introduced child-slavery into England, in the United States it gave the impulse for the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact the veiled slavery of the new wage-labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal.
>
> (1976, 924–925)

Rosa Luxemburg also highlighted the significance of colonies for accumulation of capital. She argued that it is precisely on this stage that accumulation

becomes more violent, and that aggression against colonies and rivals, not to mention war, genocide and looting, are committed without any attempt at concealment. 'Bourgeois liberal theory takes into account only the former aspect: the realm of "peaceful competition", the marvels of technology and pure commodity exchange; it separates it strictly from the other aspect: the realm of capital's blustering violence which is regarded as more or less incidental to foreign policy and quite independent of the economic sphere of capital' (1951, 452–453). For Marx the relationship between veiled and unqualified slavery, exploitation at national and international levels, was so intertwined that he wrote this memorable line about the dialectic of race and class: 'In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin' (1976, 414).

If the temporal differences of capitalist development between the centre and periphery, 'advanced' and 'backward', 'first' and 'third' world, can explain the uneven development of capitalism in what is now indiscriminately labelled 'the global South', or the co-existence of advanced technologies with past modes of production and social relations, and the explosion of the far right into the political scenes of many countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, then how can we explain the very visible (and in some cases triumphant) presence of capitalist prehistory in the USA and Europe?

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II

In assessing factors contributing to the insurgence of right-wing parties and policies in particular, many commentators have rightly focused on issues of misogyny, racism and the devastating impact of austerity, the growing economic hardship and the staggering inequality that even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank appear to acknowledge. Another factor that is acknowledged is the role of social media, in particular its growing power as a political instrument and source of misinformation. And here we have another amazing paradox and a significant shift. We should not forget how the discussion about the role of digital technologies in the uprisings in Iran (2009) and the Arab world (2010–2011) was laden with optimism and the inevitability of change and progress. The fascination with the 'Facebook and Twitter revolution' was quickly replaced with fascination with the technologies of shock and awe of ISIS. Later

an Iraqi journalist reported that 'the mobilisation techniques used in the Arab Spring, which brought thousands of demonstrators to a given place, were now being used to organise the new waves of migration' (Abdul-Ahad 2015). Such transformation is a sober reminder that there is nothing inevitable about the use of these tools.

These factors are all important but, as Victor Pickard (2016) suggested in his analysis of Trump's victory, the role of mainstream media requires particular attention. News media on both sides of the Atlantic not only failed to capture the changing political mood but effectively normalised and legitimatised candidates and politics that should not have been. According to Pickard (2016), 'in 2015, Trump received 327 minutes of nightly broadcast network news coverage, compared with Hillary Clinton's 121 minutes and Bernie Sanders' 20 minutes. The *New York Times* reported that Trump garnered nearly $2 billion in free media coverage during his primary campaign. Other estimates place it closer to $3 billion.'

There was also money to be made. Global Market Intelligence estimated that the three major cable news networks were set to make nearly $2 billion in ad revenues, and the three main business networks were set to add another $458 million in ad revenue from just the 2016 calendar year. The 2016 presidential election was the most profitable presidential election for mainstream media in the USA (Pickard 2016).

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of Brexit. The analysis of the campaign by researchers at Loughborough University (Deacon et al. 2016) shows that overall there was a greater volume (60 to 40%) of articles supporting 'Leave' over 'Remain.' But when these figures are weighted by newspapers sales, the advantage is far larger: 80% versus 20% in favour of 'Leave' (Deacon et al. 2016). And such coverage was also profitable for the British press. 'Lurid immigration front pages,' as one *Daily Express* journalist put it, 'sell papers' (Donovan 2016).

The position of papers on the referendum or broadcasters (which have a duty of balance), however, camouflages the longevity of negative coverage of Europe and immigration in British media. Therefore, in assessing the role of British media it is crucial to go beyond the coverage of the EU campaign. For example, the surprise editorial line of *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Times* (both of which backed Remain) should not obscure the longstanding position of these papers on the EU or immigration. Another significant factor, clearly obvious during the referendum but a longstanding issue, is how newspapers set the agenda for broadcasters. The BBC in particular, mired in negotiations over its Charter review, tended to

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follow rather than lead during the campaign. The 'waning power of print media', in this particular case, indeed proved a false prophecy. We cannot begin to understand our sense of shock, disappointment and fear in recent years without understanding the historical routes and causes which have brought us here.

Recently the comparison between the 2008 financial crisis and the Great Depression of 1929–1939 has been extended to include a contrast between the contemporary forms of authoritarian politics and the emerging fascist movements in the 1920s and 1930s. The electoral breakthrough of far-right parties across Europe, Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump in 2016 are anything but a storm in a teacup. However, the problem with historical analogies is that they rob events of their distinct features in a historical mode of politics for the sake of 'simple repetition'. The alarmism which emerged in response to certain political developments and, in particular, to the election of Donald Trump for the most part ignores the fact that his victory was not an inevitable outcome of the current economic crisis. We should remember, after all, that the crisis in the USA between 1929 and 1939 led not to fascism but to the 'New Deal'. In addition, and at a time when established political norms are increasingly fragile, there are also huge opportunities for a renewal of politics and democracy. Witness the significant impact of the uprising in the USA in response to the murder of George Floyd.

It is also difficult to refer to the insurgency of this new 'common sense' as a singular movement. Concepts such as 'nationalism' and 'populism' have emerged and been employed by corporate media, journalists and academics to explain this particular phenomenon. Populism, which at some points used to refer to something specific in Latin America, is now vaguely employed to explain contradictory movements and political leanings, in some cases even antagonistic to each other, from Jeremy Corbyn to Nigel Farage, Bernie Sanders to Donald Trump, Syriza to Golden Dawn etc. At the time in which the impotence of the 'centre' has been exposed while it tries to revive itself and win back the legitimacy that it seems to have lost, the very concept of populism characterises opposing movements as if they were equally *against* the established elite and *for* the people. What the fig-leaves of populism hide is precisely the racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia of 'right-wing populists'. In addition, that the results of an election and referendum on both sides of the Atlantic were presented as the 'will of the people', and that 'the people' are defined as a stylised entity devoid of all subjectivities, is not novel. In the case of Brexit such framing of the result in terms of 'the people have spoken' conveniently brushed aside the fact that 62.5% of the British electorate (those who voted 'Remain' and those who abstained from referendum)

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didn't speak at all or in the same way. One of the ironies of what has been labelled as 'populism' is that it does not have the popular vote, either in Britain or in the USA. The narrative of absoluteness of 'popular sovereignty' and insisting that 'the people have spoken' was so dominant that even the politicians and commentators on the other side of the divide began to repeat it. It was therefore no surprise that when the British High Court (the very court that Brexit promised to liberate from Brussels) was asked to pass judgement on the process of triggering Article 50, one establishment newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* (3 November 2016), framed it as 'The Judges vs. the People'. The next day another British newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, went even further and called the High Court judges 'Enemies of the people'. The Leave campaign, which had managed to list many foreign 'threats' undermining British independence and sovereignty, continued by adding more internal elites to the list of enemies of the people. In doing so the narrative of 'anti-establishment' was reinforced further by a different section of the elite. This top-down approach is bereft of any radical or popular transformative potential. The clash between two conceptions of democracy, on the one hand as a form of government and on the other as a form of social and political life (Rancière 2010), has led to what Fraser describes as a 'rejection of politics as usual' and a serious 'crisis of hegemony' (2019, 9).

The concept of 'nationalism' is no less troubling, for, as Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out,

> there really is no such a thing as nationalism, per se, with an identifiable, trans-historical essence, over and above particular historical practices and projects. At the deepest, most abstract level, nationalism is today the reflection, in thought, of the fact that nation-*states* either already exist in the world of material relations or are sought to be obtained in the future, as in the case of the Palestinians for example.
>
> (2018, 27)

Lumping together a wide range of developments, some very new and some decades old – such as xenophobic hysteria in British politics – is hardly helpful. What is novel is not racism but that it has been expanded and directed against Europe's own periphery. The integration of countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the global economy and the uneven severity with which they experienced the 2008 crisis not only have allowed for a degree of internalising their experience of xenophobia, but also for their attempts to outdo the European masters.

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Another novelty, and by far the most important one, is that in contrast to the 1930s, in which the anti-fascist left was visibly present and strong, the current crisis has benefited the far right. That we have seen a spectacular rise of the far right in countries which were not hit hardest by the crisis (Denmark, Switzerland and Austria) is also important. This is not just to caution against simplistic economic explanations, but also to highlight that the remnants of the past and the yearning for a lost 'heritage' actually appear to be more visible in the most developed countries.

Covid-19 has highlighted and exacerbated many factors which paved the way for the rise of far right: the essential frailty of capitalism, the staggering inequalities, the precarious state of liberal democracy and the elevation of the state into a god-like creature which can control the lives and deaths of not only unwanted refugees but also its citizens. Under the deadly pressure of 'the small state', the 'big society', if it can breathe, does so with great difficulty. That there is an extreme concentration of global wealth in the hands of the few is well known. According to Oxfam (2020), in 2019, 2,153 billionaires had more wealth than 4.6 billion people; the richest 22 men in the world own more wealth than all the women in Africa. Nearly half the world is trying to survive on $5.50 a day or less. An earlier report by International Labour Organization (ILO; 2011) had suggested that 1.53 billion workers (more than 50% of the global workforce) were in precarious employment. The picture is even bleaker post-pandemic. According to the latest report by the ILO, 80% of the global workforce of 3.3 billion have been affected by full or partial workplace closures. The ILO (2020) estimated the decline in global working hours in the second quarter of 2020 as equivalent to 495 million full-time jobs. In the USA alone, as over 200,000 people have died in one year (more than the US death tolls from World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War combined) and 50 million have lost their jobs, it was reported that '[t]he collective wealth of the billionaire class increased from $2.95tn to $3.8tn. That works out to gains of $141bn a month, or $4.7bn a day' (Neat 2020). By July 2020, Jeff Bezos' personal fortune had risen by $73.2 billion since the start of the crisis to a record $186.2 billion, a staggering increase of 65%. In the same period the estimated fortune of Bill Gates grew by 19% to $116 billion. While the tech giants presented themselves as the solution to the crisis, Covid-19 seems to have been a solution to their prayers. Microsoft and Amazon valuations have surpassed $1 trillion, Google (Alphabet) is close to the trillion-dollar figure, Facebook is valued in the region of $700 billion and Apple is now the first company to reach a $2-trillion valuation.

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The fortune of digital companies has moved to the opposite of the state of democracy. In March 2020, research by openDemocracy revealed that parliaments in 13 countries were partially or fully suspended, leaving more than 500 million people unrepresented (Provost et al. 2020). Around the world, addressing the current crisis was managed not through investment in healthcare but through punishment. In Kenya the police were beating and killing people. In India migrant workers were beaten and sprayed with chemicals and thousands of workers – old, young and children – were forced to walk hundreds of miles to return home to self-isolate. In the Philippines, poor people who had violated the curfew were put in dog cages, and in Paraguay people were beaten and threatened with tasers. A new policy passed by Hungary's parliament is allowing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to rule by decree and in the Philippines and Thailand a state of emergency had been declared (Ratcliffe 2020). Governments are preparing for the protests that are sure to come when the devastating impact of job losses and poverty become even more visible. Such assaults on the democratic rights of citizens, carried out in the name of protecting them, is already part of the strategy of political establishments around the world for tackling the crisis. In the calmer political climate of Britain, the human rights organisation Liberty had labelled new emergency laws introduced as part of the government's response to Covid-19 as the 'biggest restriction of our freedom in a generation' (Liberty 2020). Liz Fekete has rightly warned us that history 'teaches us that inhumane police practices are quick to establish but hard to dismantle with long-term consequences for policing by consent within a democratic order' (2020). The angel of history (Benjamin 1968) is looking at the catastrophe that is piling wreckage upon wreckage. The shock we feel now only sounds unique if we assume that the authoritarian shifts in recent times are some kind of transgression of the 'law of history'.

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III

The epigraph from Ernst Bloch that opens this chapter firmly locates the debate about nonsynchronicity, the existence of the past in the present and the presence of something which appears out of time and out of sync with Now. The sense of shock and bewilderment resulting from Brexit and Trump's victory in 2016 and our grieving over the gradual death of liberal democracy (Brown 2005), and, we might add, shame and decency, more than anything else is an expression

of disbelief about the rise of the undead. How could these things happen in the twenty-first century? Bloch's work provides an intelligent description of a crucial period in European history, the rise of fascism. In examining the myths and aspirations that the Nazis appropriated and the classes that were most receptive to them, he highlights the historical context and issues that remain pertinent. Bloch's sober and highly critical assessment is a reminder that the history of capitalist Europe has not been a forward march of liberty, democracy and rationality; it has, in the form of fascism, generated and exercised systemic violence not only against non-Europeans but also against large sections of its own population. The sense of shock and bewilderment being expressed at extreme capitalism is not novel. What sets Bloch's assessment of fascism apart is his attempt at going beyond the simple economist interpretation of fascism to identify the deeper historical roots of fascism. That important part of Europe's modern past, in the absence of a revolutionary break, appears to be its possible future.

Significant in Bloch's theory of fascism was the ideological element or, as Oskar Negt (1976) calls it, the problem of propaganda. Bloch suggests that such ideologies, even though they are brought to the surface by socio-economic crises, are embedded in a much deeper and older source and heritage. It is not just the crisis itself, but the fact that the 'workers are no longer alone with themselves and the bosses. Many earlier forces, from quite a different Below, are beginning to slip between' (1977, 22); the peasants' old form of production relations, 'of their customs and of their calendar life in the cycle of an unchanged nature counteracts urbanization and binds them to reaction, a re-action which is founded on nonsynchronism. Even the sobriety of the peasants is old and sceptical, not enlightened, and their alert sense of property (for the soil, for a debt-free farm) is more rooted in things than the capitalist' (1977, 24); an 'immiserated middle class wants to return to prewar conditions when it was better off' (1977, 25). The crisis, the absence of a self-assured liberal state, the complicity of liberal intelligentsia, the desperation of a large section of the population bring the 'undisposed of the past' to the fore. Listen to angry, disillusioned and badly informed voters in capitalism's heartland and Bloch's observation still rings true: 'In spite of radio and newspapers, there are couples living in the village for whom Egypt is still the land where princes pulled the baby Moses from the river, not the land of the Suez Canal; it is still viewed from the Bible and the Children of Israel, rather than from the pharaoh' (1977, 25). One of course could change 'in spite of radio and newspapers' to 'because of radio and newspapers.'

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The central argument in Bloch's analysis is the persistence of a problematic character of a past, the '*declining remnants* and, above all, uncompleted *past*, which has not yet been "sublated" by capitalism' (1977, 31). The less radical economic and political transformation of Germany, compared to England or even France, had allowed the survival of older social forces and relations alongside a weak bourgeoisie. This, for Bloch, had turned Germany into a 'classic land of nonsynchronism'. 'Nonsynchronism' became manifest in the attitudes of large sections of the population, who, in the moment of crisis, seized upon the myths and 'heritage' that were exploited by the Nazis. It is through this concept which Bloch explores the appeal of Nazi mystification and propaganda to youth, peasantry and immiserated middle classes. 'As an existing remnant of earlier times in the present it is objectively nonsynchronous. The subjectively nonsynchronous, having been for a long time merely embittered, appears today as pent-up anger' (1977, 31). Fascism for Bloch is a 'swindle of fulfilment'. The past is beautified when the last inkling of fulfilment has vanished. But capital also uses 'that which is nonsynchronously contrary, if not indeed disparate, as a distraction from its own strictly present-day contradictions; it uses the antagonism of a still living past as a means of separation and struggle against the future that is dialectically giving birth to itself in the capitalist antagonisms' (1977, 32). Anson Rabinbach rightly notes that:

> The contradiction between these temporal dimensions demands what Bloch calls 'the obligation to its dialectic', a recognition of complexity which not only focuses on the synchronous, but on the non-synchronous, the multi-temporal and multi-layered contradictions within a single present. For Bloch it is precisely this sedimentation of social experience that creates the intense desire for a resurrection of the past among those groups most susceptible to fascist propaganda. For Marxism the problem is that fascist ideology is not simply an instrument of deception but 'a fragment of an old and romantic antagonism to capitalism, derived from deprivations in contemporary life, with a longing for a vague "other"'.
>
> (1977, 7)

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IV

According to Rabinach (1977, 5), Bloch's take on fascism as an incomplete past and a swindle of fulfilment represented his double exile – from fascism and from

Stalinism, which was unable to comprehend fascism for what it was. Bloch's analysis of the power of fascism as cultural synthesis came to be seen as a transgression from Marxism and as such was not embraced in the Moscow camp. However, Bloch takes his cue from Marx and indeed borrows heavily from Marx's writing on the weight of the dead on present generations. In the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx pays attention to what a few decades later Bloch called nonsynchronism.

> [W]e suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development. Alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. *Le mort saisit le vif*!
>
> (1976, 91)

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write that workers at the time were not fighting their enemies, but enemies of their enemies, 'the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeois' (Marx and Engels 1955, 18). The burden of the past on capitalist Now is also stressed by comparing capitalism with communism; whereas 'in bourgeois society … the past dominates the present,' under communism 'the present dominates the past (Marx 2000, 257). Marx repeats the same point in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

> The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.
>
> (Marx 2000, 331)

Given the shifting temporality of capitalism, the weight of the dead on the present generation is a recurrent theme in Marx. The struggle for today and for the future is conditioned by the past. If people make their own history but not under the condition of their own choosing, it is likely that circumstances in which they have found themselves will be inherited from the dead.

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Synchronous contradictions and the presence of a still-living past under capitalism were also noted by Rosa Luxemburg. In her 1912 speech 'Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle' she argues that in 'advanced capitalist, highly industrialized, twentieth-century Germany, in the age of electricity and airplanes, the absence of women's political rights is as much a reactionary remnant of the dead past as the reign by Divine Right on the throne' (2004, 239). These phenomena, she suggests, have become the most important tools in the hands of the capitalist ruling class. It was the defeat of the German Revolution of 1918 and the triumph of the remnants of the dead past in the Now which paved the way for fascism.

Marx's allusion to the nonsynchronous development of capitalism is also investigated by Leon Trotsky. His concept of the 'uneven and combined development' of capitalism not only captures the essence of Marx's concern over the burden of the dead against the living, but also offers a fruitful and sophisticated analysis of the unity of the world economy and the interdependence of what Luxemburg sees as the two aspects of capital accumulation: the realm of 'peaceful' competition and the violence of war and the lootings of colonies. In the first volume of *The History of the Russian Revolution*, he writes: 'From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for want of a better name, we may call the law of combined development – by which we mean a drawing together of different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary form' (Trotsky 2008, 4).

Even though the concept has been used to focus on the unit of the nation state, the relationship between the imperial powers and developing nations and studying the dynamics of the presence of older modes of productions elsewhere, it is highly relevant in understanding not only the combination of advancement and backwardness in China or India, but also the persistence of archaic forms of social relations in advanced economies that are characterised by complex interdependencies at the global level on the one hand and exercising hegemony over the oppressed on the other. This is what Trotsky had to say about the USA: 'It is considered unquestionable that technology and science undermine superstition. But the class character of society sets substantial limits here too. Take America. There, church sermons are broadcast by radio, which means that the radio is serving as a means of spreading prejudices' (1973, 257). The uneven and combined development approach allows us to move beyond the binary of social versus geographical.

The undeniable unevenness of not only the life chances but also the systemic unevenness in production and social reproduction at the heart of advanced

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capitalism urges us to take Marx's concerns over the deadly weight of the past, and Bloch's intelligent and critical take on that, very seriously. As we mourn over the gradual death of liberal democracy (Fenton and Titley 2015) and wonder about the *future*, it is essential to delve into the fervour and anger which drive millions of people into 'democratically' voting against their own interests and future, the root causes of such anger and energy and the heritage which they call upon. At the heart of the recent developments lies an emotional, and partly hysterical, upheaval of moral indignation, revulsion and fury, which has been ignored for decades and generations. Nonsynchronous development can produce nonsynchronous revolt. The evolutionist and mechanical understanding of historical development, as ever, is unlikely to comprehend the contradictions that have engulfed modern societies. It is no wonder that academics, mesmerised by technological progress and armed with meticulously put together facts, tables and figures, have failed to see the revolutionary and regressive movements and moments even when they were right in the middle of them. The rise and regeneration of the archaic meanings that were assumed to have been fully repressed or assigned to the dustbin of history is indeed a significant cause for concern, not least for media studies. At a time in which what Habermas has called the public sphere seems in total disarray, a realm of our social life in which citizens are guaranteed access and can achieve public opinion through rational and critical debate, it is crucial to repeat Eberhard Knödler-Bunte and Russell Berman's pertinent and penetrating question: 'Why did he [Habermas] exclude a discussion of the institutions and phenomena of the fascist public sphere, and what are the implications for an analysis of late capitalist and proletarian public?' (1977, 42).

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To this we might add and ask: How is it that the far right is able to exploit the sentiments arising from contradictions between older and more modern forms of living and production? And how can we explain the coexistence of the paralysis of political imaginations and the imaginative fantasies about technological futures? What Bloch's theory of nonsynchronism does wonderfully is issue an invitation to not only explore 'the fertile and productive soil' from which fascism emerged, but also to be concerned with 'them as an unclaimed radical heritage passed by the Left in its abstract critique of the illusory and "false consciousness" ' (Rabinbach 1977, 11). It is precisely on this latter point that Bloch's analysis differs from Marx's. We have to take the spirit of the past seriously. One cannot dream about the future without 'poetry from the past'. The far right only directs the anger 'against symptoms, not against the exploitation' (Bloch 1977, 35). Walter Benjamin articulates this succinctly in his essay on the work of art.

> Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values.
>
> (1968, 241)

Throughout modern history various social movements and revolts have appeared which tried to go beyond the existing limit. Their history has been denied, repressed, marginalised and not taught. Their history is part of what Benjamin referred to as the tradition of the oppressed. The weight of history in that sense is what should and can drive us forward, for there will be no redemption if we do not take seriously the claims and sufferings of the victims of history.

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