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# COMMUNISM AND THE END OF THE WORLD

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A CONSERVATIVE READING OF THE TITLE to the present article might respond in the following way: Communism and the end of the world—are we not, here, speaking about the same phenomenon? There is a certain truth to this response. Both signal an “end” to the current state of things. In each case, we are dealing with the end of our current way of life, whether that is as a result of the transition in the mode of production, or that which results from the complete annihilation of all life on Earth. My argument in what follows is that popular representations of Communism and the end of the world (particularly in film and television) are the front and back of the same ideological fantasy that tries to reassert the utopianism of the present state of things. While the fantasy of the “end times” works by dissuading us from imagining life after capitalism, the fantasy of the communist threat does the opposite: it makes us even more fearful of that which can come after capitalism than the actual end of the world. The latter, though, comes with a catch: while “Communism” is named as the ultimate threat to the existing order, I argue in the end, mirroring arguments made by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, that “Communism” is also the name given by the ruling order, and appropriated by the forces of its destruction, to the real movement of its own historical demise. The point, then, is to move from the equation of Communism *and* the end of the world, towards a dichotomy of Communism *or* the end of the world, so that the former can be seen as the only actual salvation from the latter. Nevertheless, it is only by realistically confronting (rather than merely fantasizing about) the latter, that we can begin to take seriously the former.

## “Nostalgia for the Present”

There is something quite peculiar about the dominance of finance capital, particularly as it comes to stage the setting for the imaginary of postmodern subjectivity. At the level of immediate experience, finance has the apparent effect of “obliterating” the future—a feature that helps to explain the postmodern “spatialization” of time, and its overlap with the digital and the culture of “instant access.” Is it not the case that finance constantly forces us into an experience of a “perpetual present”?<sup>1</sup> One

in which we are required to continuously “borrow” from our own future in order to pay for our very present existence; so that, the future never seems to arrive because it has already been borrowed and not saved? Here, we witness the more than obvious correlation between postmodernism and consumer society encapsulated in credit—or, more precisely, the credit card. Ours is an experience of a “perpetual present” because we are constantly working towards catching up with our debts. This ethic of borrow and spend is in contrast with the modern ethic of save and produce. In a prior stage of capitalism (perhaps even during that post-war period of class compromise in the social welfare state)—a stage during which it was possible to “save for the future”—there still existed a vision of that which was yet to come as something distant, something better, utopian even. Was it not during this period that we could still imagine some better, more prosperous future? The 1960s, for instance, gave us the *Star Trek* (1966-1969) vision of universal humanity. Who, today, even considers what the future might look like? In fact, the most recent instalment of the *Star Trek* film franchise gives us an image of the future that almost mirrors our own present; that is, in a way that almost accomplishes the opposite of what Fredric Jameson refers to as “nostalgia for the present.”<sup>2</sup>

Nostalgia films, such as George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973), or Gary Ross’s *Pleasantville* (1998), exemplify the postmodern phenomenon of “nostalgia for the present” that Jameson describes. What we have here is a representation of the past, coloured (literally in the case of *Pleasantville*) by sensibilities from the present. The accomplishment, here, is to de-historicize the present—that is, in a way, to eternalize present sensibilities: to make them appear as always having been so. “Nostalgia for the present,” thus, creates the appearance of a present that is contained in the past, so that when we engage with texts such as these, the nostalgia that we experience is one for our own “presentness.”

In the case of J. J. Abrams’s *Star Trek* (2009), and films like it, we have the same operation, but in reverse. Instead of a projection of the present into the past, we get the present contained in the depiction of the future. Now, certainly, this is a feature that arises in the original *Star Trek* television series (and, perhaps, more so in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*TNG*) which ran from 1987-1994: during the dying days of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy could be professed as the victor of the Cold War), itself a reflection of its own historicity. But what we encounter in the new film is a future depicted as not so distant. This, as I have noted elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> is captured in a scene near the beginning of the film, when we see a young Captain Kirk driving a car (yes, a car—not a hovercraft, nor a *Jetsons*-like flying car), answering a Nokia brand car phone, and listening to the Beastie Boys’ “Sabotage.” It is wonderful to see that Abrams has included in his vision of the future the longevity of such an energetically fantastic song (one that competes with the recognition and reverence given to classical music and literature on *TNG*). However, these features still signal a closer resemblance between the now and the yet to come. As some might notice, our popular technologies, from tablet computers to smart phones have even begun to resemble the technology depicted in this series—a feature, perhaps, close to what Jameson also notices with regards to the shift from the sublime in nature to that of technology.<sup>4</sup> So it would appear that the future is not so distant, but is in fact starting to fold in on itself as—with the lived experience of the financial stage of capital—we begin to experience an overlap between the present and the future: “the future is now,” so to speak.

There is, however, another way to read Jameson’s phrase, “nostalgia for the present”—one that I will read by appropriating it for my own purposes. However, the way that I use this phrase gets its insights from another of Jameson’s well-known theses. At the beginning of *The Seeds of Time* (1994), Jameson claims that “it seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deteriora-

tion of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism.”<sup>5</sup> “Nostalgia for the present,” in this sense, rather than referring to the inscription of the present into depictions of the past, takes on a much more cynical characterization: one that signals a utopianism of the present. The cynicism contained in this kind of “nostalgia for the present” is one that puts a prohibition, almost, on the imaginary of the future—or, more appropriately, on a future that presents an alternative to the existing system. This is a cynicism that is contained in Margaret Thatcher’s TINA (there is no alternative) formula. “Nostalgia for the present” turns thinking about the future into a strictly *dystopian* endeavour. There *is* no alternative; or, as Francis Fukuyama famously put it in the title of his 1989 essay,<sup>6</sup> we have reached “the end of history”—not in the sense that nothing will now happen, but in the sense that, with the demise of the Soviet Union, the world has finally settled on liberal democracy and the market economy as *the* model for utopia.

### The Sadness of Cynical Reason

“Nostalgia for the present” as a mode of cynicism is representative of the kind of ideological blackmail that seeks to maintain and legitimize the existing state of things. Cynicism, as Todd McGowan puts it, is “a mode of keeping alive the dream of successfully attaining the lost object [of desire] while fetishistically denying one’s investment in this idea.”<sup>7</sup> And, as Slavoj Žižek explains, cynicism is the form that ideology takes in a supposedly post-ideological era.<sup>8</sup> Cynicism, as Peter Sloterdijk puts it, is a kind of “enlightened false consciousness”;<sup>9</sup> in psychoanalytic terms, the latter has the structure of “fetishism disavowal,” best explained using Octave Mannoni’s phrase, “*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*” (I know very well, but nevertheless...).<sup>10</sup> It is this attitude that, as McGowan explains, allows the subject to continue acting as if the conditions of the present will allow her access to the (impossible) object of desire, all the while acknowledging the futility of these actions. The danger of cynicism is that “it allows subjects to acknowledge the hopelessness of consumption while simultaneously consuming with as much hope as the most naïve consumer.”<sup>11</sup> This kind of cynical reason, or fetishist disavowal, is the form that ideology takes in a “post-ideological” era, when the problem is not one of ideological mystification. The postmodern subject is a realist, one who is not duped by fallacious representations of reality (i.e., “false consciousness”). But, perhaps there is something in the fantasy of the “end times” that helps to sustain the sublime object of desire for the realist, post-ideological subject.

Today, it is not the representation of false ideals that interpellates the subject. Rather, interpellation operates through real problems that do confront us, such as the very real threat of ecological disaster. As Žižek has noted, the disaster genre in cinema in the “Fukuyamaist” 1990s, as well as some more recent examples, indicate the kind of fantasmatic support that is necessary for the cynical reason that dominates at “the end of history.” The popularity of films such as Roland Emmerich’s *2012* (2009), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), and *Independence Day* (1996), or, Michael Bay’s *Armageddon* (1998) and Mimi Leder’s *Deep Impact* (1998), all seem to suggest the existence of some underlying structure of enjoyment connected to the fantasy of the “end times.” A close investigation of these films brings to the surface a recognition of the kind of underlying fantasy that helps to sustain late capitalist society. In *2012*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Armageddon*, and *Deep Impact*, we have the sublime of nature invading, taking over, overwhelming, and threatening all life on Earth.<sup>12</sup> Despite all of our modern technological advances, we must still submit to the irrationality of nature.

The summer of 2013 will also see the arrival of several apocalypse films, including Joseph Kosinski's *Oblivion*, M. Night Shyamalan's *After Earth*, *This is the End*, directed by comedians Evan Goldberg and Seth Rogen,<sup>13</sup> the zombie film *World War Z* directed by Marc Foster, and Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim*. Add to these the current vampire and zombie craze with youthful audiences; the end, it would seem, is something on the mind of many.

Writing on Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011),<sup>14</sup> Steven Shaviro notes:

The allure of disaster movies, in an age of capitalist realism, is that they seem to offer us a way out—indeed, the only conceivable way out. Over the past few decades, endless rounds of privatization and austerity, not to mention widespread environmental degradation, have already deprived us of a future. The world of our hopes and dreams has in fact already ended: our day-to-day existence just needs to catch up with this fact. And so our only chance for release from the continuing soft disaster of our lives is for this disaster to become truly universal. If the world ends, then at least we will be freed from the rapacity of financial institutions, and from our ever-increasing burdens of debt. The cinematic spectacle of disaster is in itself intensely gratifying, as well: we see destroyed, before our very eyes, that “immense collection of commodities” after which we have always striven, upon which we have focused all our desires, and which has always ended up disappointing us.<sup>15</sup>

The “capitalist realism” to which he refers is the one defined by Mark Fisher, which denotes “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.”<sup>16</sup> Fisher's comments here, as Shaviro notes, echo those claims by Jameson and Žižek regarding the end-of-times cynicism of the reigning ideology.

Shaviro, however, argues that *Melancholia* represents the inverse side of the kind of capitalist realism depicted by Fisher, Jameson, and Žižek. Not only is capitalism just the only game in town, but also now we truly are only waiting for the end. The film, according to Shaviro, refuses the sublimity of nature and deprives the spectator of the spectacle of disaster. Instead, what we get is a “disillusioned account” of the existing world and its destruction, framed from the perspective of the affluent one percent (to use the language of the Occupy movement). As Žižek puts it in his recent opus, *Less Than Nothing* (2012), the attitude of the characters in the film to their impending destruction shifts from one of suicide to one of utter cynicism.<sup>17</sup> The disaster in *Melancholia*, Shaviro claims, deprives the spectator of a feeling of release and climax. He goes further, even, in stating that, “these well-to-do people would rather see the whole world come to an end, than give up even the tiniest fraction of their wealth, power, and privilege.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike with previous disaster films, von Trier, according to Shaviro, “literalizes” the Earth's destruction. Usually, disaster is presented as a metaphor for our inability to imagine an alternative future (or system, economic or political). But in *Melancholia*, the disaster is to be taken literally: this is all that truly awaits us.

Žižek, though, while essentially agreeing with this perspective adds an important caveat: this attitude, of literally accepting the end of the world, is the only possible way to save the world.<sup>19</sup> Accepting the end of the world means that we, ultimately, have traversed the fantasy that *stages* the end of the world only as an excuse for our continued cynical relation to our desire. This is not unlike his controversial remarks about ecology as a conservative ideology.<sup>20</sup> Here, he does not dis-



Kirsten Dunst as Justine in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011).

agree with environmentalism, *per se*. Rather, Žižek's point is that there is an underlying fantasy in some ecological discourse that disavows the chaotic aspect of nature, that tries to idealize nature, without including in the picture the truly terrible, even "disgusting" elements of nature. A true ecologist, according to Žižek, must not idealize nature—she must accept nature in all of its disgusting excess. Here, the point not to be missed is that accepting, *literally*, the end of the world, and not simply fantasizing about the end, is the only hope that we have for moving beyond the current deadlock of the capitalist system. Accepting the end might be the only thing that gives us enough strength to forcefully enjoin us towards real action... but what, if anything, awaits us?

### A Spectre is (Still) Haunting...

Communism is already acknowledged by all [global] powers to be itself a Power.

—Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

We might also interpret these depictions of the end of the world as, not signalling the end of times, but rather as signalling the end of *capitalism*. As we continue to experience the ever spiralling crises of capitalism, since the big financial meltdown of 2007-2008, we might come to recognize that the cultural perception of the end might be one, rather, of capitalism itself. The current onslaught of disaster movies might, then, be symptomatic of the system itself coming to terms with its own demise. If the fantasy of the "end times" is the underlying "spectral" dimension to the reigning ideology, what, then, is its overt articulation of the "end"?

The fantasy of the end times is being met by a much more conspicuous ideological response to the crisis of capitalism—that is, the resurfacing of hysteria over the "Communist threat." The last

couple of years have seen a rise in political resistance to capitalism, from the so-called “Arab Spring” to the Occupy Wall Street movement. But, at the same time, popular culture has also provided us with reminders of anti-Communism. This has come in various guises, in which I include the release of sympathetic biographic films about anti-Communist figures such as J. Edgar Hoover and Margaret Thatcher. Clint Eastwood’s *J. Edgar* (2011), starring Leonardo DiCaprio, exemplifies perfectly the kind of ideological mystification that is typical of mainstream popular culture after the arrival of cultural studies. Here, attention is drawn away from the role that Hoover played in spying on suspected Communist radicals in the United States through a pseudo-progressive representation of his ambiguous homosexuality. The film is sympathetic to Hoover, very similar to the way that Phyllida Lloyd’s *The Iron Lady* (2011) presents Margaret Thatcher (played by Meryl Streep)—well-known for her union-busting and leadership in bringing neoliberalism and market fundamentalism to the United Kingdom—as a kind of pseudo-feminist hero (one, perhaps, that sets an ill-formed precedent for calling someone like Sarah Palin a “feminist”). My claim is that this trend of re-popularizing, or re-familiarizing the public with figures such as Hoover and Thatcher—controversial figures who (like Ronald Reagan in the United States) helped to plant the foundations of twentieth century conservatism—comes at a moment when the capitalist system is itself in crisis. And perhaps the images of figures such as these exemplify another form of Jameson’s “nostalgia for the present”: a representation of present conservative sensibilities, during the moment of capitalism in crisis, into images of past conservative leaders.

It is odd to think that mainstream popular culture is reverting back to anti-Communism, since the current crisis of capitalism can be blamed on nothing other than its own internal contradictions. The crisis occurred at a moment when organized labour has been severely weakened and at a moment when there is no other significant global power onto which the crisis can be blamed. Here, then, we need to view the current reversion to anti-Communism in popular culture with suspicion. A case in point is the re-make of the 1980s teen action-drama *Red Dawn* (John Milius, 1984), with its “all-star” 80s cast that included Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Gray (pre-*Dirty Dancing*), C. Thomas Howell, Lea Thompson, and Charlie Sheen. This film tells the story of a group of teenagers who defend their small mid-Western town from an invasion from the Soviet Union. In the re-make (Dan Bradley, 2012), North Korea is the invader. The original film has sustained very little popularity and was, itself, not really received with tremendous critical acclaim. Why, then, the need to release a re-make of a film that has slipped below the radar of popular recognition, especially at this particular historical moment?

The new FX television series *The Americans* (2013–present) also seems to offer up an American version of post-Soviet *ostalgie* (a term referring to the particular nostalgia for the former socialist republics). [Fig. 4] German films, such as Wolfgang Becker’s *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s *The Lives of Others* (2006), both, according to Žižek,<sup>21</sup> present a kind of sentimental *ostalgie*/nostalgia for the past of the Communist German Democratic Republic (GDR). In a similar way, *The Americans* presents a sentimental attachment to the past hysteria of the Communist threat inside the U.S. during the Cold War (a hysteria that had been provoked, even, by figures like Hoover).

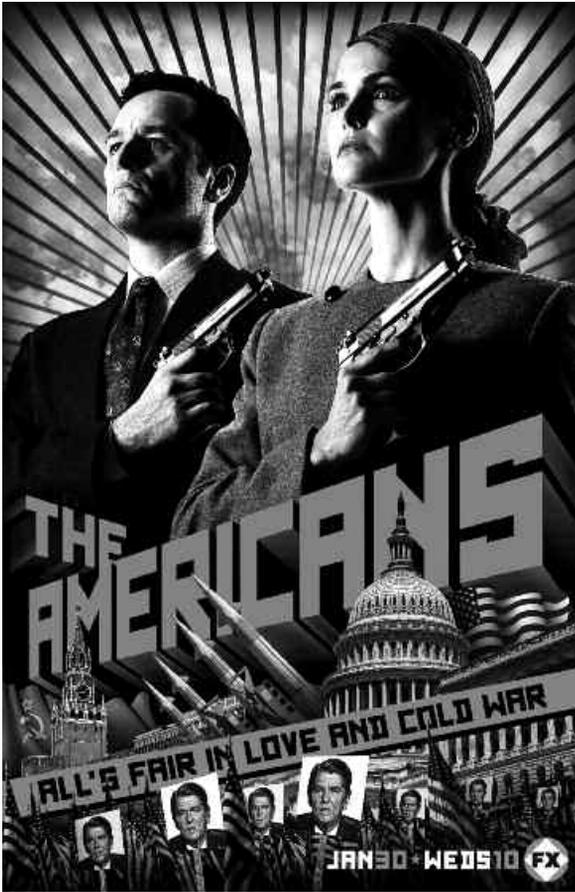
*The Americans* is a series about a pair of KGB spies living as a married couple, Philip and Elizabeth Jennings, with two children (who do not know the true identities of their parents) in Washington D.C. in the early 1980s. In the series premiere, an FBI counter-intelligence agent, Stan



Leonardo DiCaprio as J. Edgar Hoover in Clint Eastwood's *J. Edgar* (2011).



Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher in Phyllida Lloyd's *The Iron Lady* (2011).



Promotional poster for the FX television series, *The Americans* (2013-).

Beeman, and his family move in to a home across the street from the Jennings family. Beeman is part of an FBI operation to go after Soviet agents operating inside the U.S. The Beemans become friends with the Jennings, not knowing that they are, in fact, the very spies that they are looking for. The series mirrors, in a way, the plot of the Showtime series, *Homeland* (2011–present), about an American soldier turned terrorist, who helps to plan an attack inside the US. What is interesting about *The Americans* is that, here, we see a turn away from the decade-long emphasis on the post-September 11 “terrorist threat,” towards one that returns a nostalgic (“*ostalgic*”) gaze to fighting the Communist threat—a kind of “nostalgia for the present” that inscribes the post-crisis political sentiments of the past few years onto a resurfacing image of the Communist infiltration.

What these various returns to images and figures of anti-Communism signal is that, in the current moment of capitalism in crisis, all the powers of the world *are* acknowledging Communism as a present force—or at least something like it. The threat of a democratic

anti-capitalism is, with movements like Occupy Wall Street, perhaps worrying to the reigning order. The resurgence of anti-Communism (or, at least, *ostalgic* for anti-Communism), in this light, should be seen as an attempt to nip revolutionary action—or at least sentiments sympathetic to the latter—in the bud.

### The “Communist Horizon”

It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies.

—Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

There is a wonderful feature in Ernest Mandel’s introduction to the third volume of Marx’s *Capital*. Mandel provides a diagram that details a (reductive) outline of Marx’s arguments throughout his analyses of capital. This diagram demonstrates all of the various possibilities that Marx observes, notes, and predicts regarding the ways that capitalists can and tend to resolve contradictions within the system, ultimately leading towards a collapse of the capitalist system itself. What is intriguing about Mandel’s diagram is the way that it ends up bringing together two possible outcomes at the

end, at the point at which the system begins to collapse: “socialism,” or “the decay of civilization.”<sup>22</sup> That is to say, that even in Mandel’s outline of Marx’s critique of capital, we find the two outcomes that are the topic of the present investigation: Communism *or* the end of the world.

As I have argued, the cynical response to these two potential outcomes, from the perspective of the reigning ideology, amounts basically to the claim that they are (essentially) the same thing. And this perspective merits attention because both Communism and the end of the world *do* amount to the same thing for the capitalist mode of production. Each signals the end of capitalism in one way or another: either the end of all life on Earth, or the transition to a new mode of production, political system, etc. For those, though, who see our salvation from “the end” in the transition to some new political and economic system, the word “Communism” again has been given importance. But we should read, as well, the significance of the word for the reigning order.

In the preamble to *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels note how all parties in opposition to the reigning power have been accused of being “communistic.” It is in this sense—that of being accused by the reigning power of being “communistic”—that it is those in power who start by naming the forces in opposition. We see this again, today, with the resurgence of anti-Communist ideology in popular culture. It is therefore the reigning capitalist order that has given, on the one hand, the name to its historical opponent. On the other hand, as Jodi Dean notes, “Communism is reemerging [*sic*] as a magnet of political energy because it is and has been the alternative to capitalism.”<sup>23</sup> The Right, she observes, “positions Communism as a threat because it names the defeat of and alternative to capitalism.”<sup>24</sup> Just as, today, the word “capitalism,” in the wake of the emergence of the current crisis, is being used in popular discourse (a sign of the influence of its critique is when the word itself comes back into popular use), the word “Communism” is being articulated as *the* signifier for radical oppositional forces *against* capitalism. Dean also notes that, “In light of the planetary climate disaster and ever-intensifying global class war as states redistribute wealth to the rich in the name of austerity, the absence of a common goal is the absence of a future.”<sup>25</sup> “Communism” is re-emerging as the name for the common goals of radical emancipatory projects. The future will be “communistic” or it won’t be.

Communism is, again, two decades after the fall of European Communism, a topic of thought for Leftist intellectuals. The “Communist hypothesis,” as Alain Badiou puts it,

remains the right hypothesis....If this hypothesis should have to be abandoned, then it is not worth doing anything in the order of collective action....[H]olding on to the Idea [of Communism]...does not mean that its first form of presentation, focussed on property and the state, must be maintained just as it is, in fact, what we are ascribed as a philosophical task...is to help a new modality of existence of the hypothesis to come into being.<sup>26</sup>

Žižek, though, in contrast to Badiou, argues that Communism *must* be historicized in relation to actual historical problems and antagonisms. For Žižek, the actuality of Communism requires making reference to the crises and antagonisms within global capitalism that *prevent* indefinite production. These antagonisms are, according to Žižek, crises of “the commons.” He describes the latter as “the shared substance of our being”<sup>27</sup>—that is, the actual material and intellectual resources upon which humanity as a whole is dependent. For Žižek, it is the *privatization* of the commons that justifies the resuscitation of “Communism.”

Žižek, along with Dean and Bruno Bosteels,<sup>28</sup> argues, as well, for the necessity of some kind of organizational form, like the Party, without which, as Dean puts it, Leftist politics will remain as a “politics without politics.”<sup>29</sup> The Party, according to Dean, “provides a vehicle through which [the exploited] can understand their actions and express their collective will.”<sup>30</sup> In contrast to twentieth century Communism, according to Bosteels, the new Party formation “would no longer be the incarnation of the iron laws of historical necessity running things behind our backs while we applaud in unison the apparatchiks. Instead, it would simply name the flexible organization of a fidelity to events in the midst of unforeseeable circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> Or, as Žižek puts it, the Party does not provide the answers: “It is the people who have the answers, they just do not know the questions to which they have (or, rather, are) the answer.”<sup>32</sup> It is the role of the Party to articulate the questions to which the people provide, themselves, the answers. All of this is to say that, although we are seeing symptomatic signs of the collapse of capitalism in popular culture—signs that indicate that the system is hitting a wall—there is absolutely nothing here that suggests that the system itself can evolve beyond its own deadlocks. Worse, even, is that in the midst of the current crisis we are seeing the resurgence of authoritarian governments and the rise of ultra-Right state forces, as well as fascistic subcultures that are expressing problems in the current crisis in new forms of violent racism and ethnic chauvinism. The system will not dissolve on its own internal contradictions. The Event of the current crisis of capitalism (to use Badiou’s term) calls forth a new historical Subject.

We tend, according to David McNally,

to think of history as a record of past events, of things that are over and done with. We find it difficult to view our current moment as profoundly historical. Yet, the present is invariably saturated with elements of the future, with possibilities that have not yet come to fruition, and may not do so—as the road to the future is always contested.<sup>33</sup>

The paradox is that the two popular images of post-capitalist society—one of the disaster/end times, the other of the Communist alternative—work together to mutually reassure the legitimacy of the existing system. That is, they are attempts to put a fix on the present. Their message: don’t bother thinking of alternatives (i.e., TINA), they are either too grim, or non-existent/impossible. The fantasy is, here, an instance of internalized prohibition that sustains the subject’s desire within the existing co-ordinates of financial and neoliberal capital. The fantasy of the end times and the fantasy of Communism are two sides of the same underlying spectral support for the continued reign of the capitalist system. What is significant, however, is that the return of anti-Communist ideology signals an awareness on the part of the capitalist class that radical change *is* possible, and as Dean notes, it is for this reason that mainstream discourse incites us to be fearful of it: “The Right, even the center, regularly invokes the possibility of radical change, and it associates that change with Communism.”<sup>34</sup> In the face of the cynical reason of the reigning order—a reasoning that equates Communism with the end of the world—the point, as Žižek puts it, is the following: “our message today should be: do not be afraid, join us, come back! You’ve had your anti-communist fun, and you are pardoned for it—time to get serious once again!”<sup>35</sup> Our choice, today, is Communism *or* (else) the end of the world.

## NOTES

- 1 Fredric Jameson uses this phrase in his essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998), 137.
- 2 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 279-296.
- 3 Matthew Flisfeder, *The Symbolic, The Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 137-138.
- 4 See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1.146 (1984): 53-92; 76-90.
- 5 Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), ii.
- 6 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18.
- 7 Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 29.
- 8 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 28-30.
- 9 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5.
- 10 See Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire: ou, L'autre scène* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).
- 11 McGowan, 29.
- 12 We could even compare this kind of overwhelming character of the sublime in nature to Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) or M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* (2008)—films in which nature inexplicably bites back in full force, without purpose. It is the finite aspect of life on Earth, however, that is much more pronounced in films like *2012* and *The Day After Tomorrow*.
- 13 The apocalypse is even a topic for comedy. Another example is Lorene Scafaria's *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (2012), starring Steve Carell and Keira Knightly, which tells the story of a man who is abandoned by his wife in a panic as an asteroid is on its way to collide with Earth.
- 14 It is worth comparing *Melancholia* to Don McKellar's *Last Night* (1998), using Shaviro's own conception of the "anti-sublime." This film is similar to *Melancholia* in the way that it depicts the end of the world, deprived of spectacle and disaster, unlike *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*. See Steven Shaviro, *MELANCHOLIA, or, The Romantic Anti-Sublime*, Sequence 1.1, 2012, PDF e-book published by REFRAME, University of Sussex.
- 15 Shaviro, 8.
- 16 Fisher, cited in Shaviro, 8.
- 17 Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 801.
- 18 Shaviro, 8.
- 19 Slavoj Žižek, "The Optimism of Melancholia," video, from Big Think website, <http://bigthink.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=zizek+optimism>.
- 20 See *Examined Life*, directed by Astra Taylor (2008; Toronto: National Film Board), Film.
- 21 Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 61-64.
- 22 See Ernest Mandel, introduction to *Capital: Volume III*, by Karl Marx, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1991), 14-15.
- 23 Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (New York: Verso, 2012), 10.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 26 Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2008), 115.
- 27 Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009), 91.
- 28 See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (New York: Verso, 2011).
- 29 Dean, 19.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 31 Bosteels, 243.
- 32 Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (New York: Verso, 2012), 89.
- 33 David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 1.
- 34 Dean, 46.
- 35 Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 157.

THE END