

This World We Must Leave

AN IDEA OF REVOLUTION

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THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

Introduction by Will Bradley

In 1989 the ailing, US-dominated capitalist order received a hoped-for but still unexpected gift – the beginning of the startlingly swift collapse of the Soviet empire, and the promise of a festival of expansion and accumulation that would power a decade of growth and favourable political realignment. Considering this moment, and the proclamations of ‘the end of history’ that accompanied it, Frederic Jameson wrote:

“Even after the ‘end of history’ there has seemed to persist some historical curiosity of a generally systemic – rather than merely anecdotal – kind: not merely to know what will happen next, but as a more general anxiety about the larger fate or destiny of our system or mode of production. On this, individual experience (of a postmodern kind) tells us that it must be eternal, while our intelligence suggests this feeling to be most improbable indeed, without coming up with plausible scenarios as to its disintegration or replacement. It seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; and perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations.”

Tied to its particular historical moment, and surrounded by triumphalist rhetoric from all sides of the American political conversation, Jameson's measured defeatism and brief diagnosis – 'some weakness in our imaginations' – remain a viable rhetorical response, if radically incomplete. More recently, since 2003 at least, Slavoj Žižek has taken up Jameson's formulation and developed it into a signature position, a paradoxical rallying cry that seeks to generate hope out of the appearance of hopelessness. Addressing the protestors of Occupy Wall Street in 2011, he said:

"In mid-April 2011, the Chinese government prohibited on TV, films, and novels, all stories that contain alternate reality or time travel. This is a good sign for China. These people still dream about alternatives, so you have to prohibit this dreaming. Here, we don't need a prohibition because the ruling system has even oppressed our capacity to dream. Look at the movies that we see all the time. It's easy to imagine the end of the world. An asteroid destroying all life and so on. But you cannot imagine the end of capitalism."

And of course Žižek's speech also contained many precise and useful formulations – "Remember. The problem is not corruption or greed. The problem is the system. It forces you to be corrupt." And of course, like Jameson, he was talking in a US context, and about a US context. But, at least in this particular presentation, what is missing is the articulation of the two situations. Global capitalism

profoundly connects the social situation in the US to the social situation in China. The prohibited alternate realities in Chinese science fiction are censored because they are the dreams of the Chinese working class, whose oppression is no longer local but subject to the calculus of a global system, with its interconnected stock exchanges, money markets, trade treaties and supply chains. Even as Žižek laments what Jameson calls 'some weakness in our imaginations', he acknowledges that, outside the strict hegemony of Western ideology, that power of imagination remains strong and viable.

Jakob Jakobsen and Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen's film-installation *This World We Must Leave* can be seen as an attempt to superimpose this kind of dreaming onto the real conditions of life in Europe. Dreams which from the perspective of the alienated Danish middle class are fantasies, but which from the perspective of, for example, the Chinese working class are based in the critique of contemporary conditions. Since Jakobsen and Rasmussen's films were first presented, only five years ago, an unprecedented cycle of revolutions and defeats, uprisings and neo-imperial proxy wars has played out in states across North Africa and the Middle East. Of all the bleak disasters – the destruction of Libya, the military suppression of the uprising in Bahrain (home of the US Fifth Fleet), the mortal chaos of Syria – it is the failed revolution in Egypt that most clearly describes what this 'weakness in our imaginations' and its consequences might really mean. With no outside support, the Egyptian





people stepped back from demanding the end of the military's constitutional role, and so found themselves agents, not of revolution, but of the re-empowered, US-backed return of dictatorship.

So what does it mean to show these films again, now? To represent an idealistic exploration of European revolution in the light of the comprehensive defeat of the most recent real revolutions against the global order? The most optimistic answer is also, from another viewpoint, the most pessimistic. The current crisis is still unresolved. The reconstitution of the Egyptian state is a minor point of imperial stability in the ongoing convulsive remaking of the world order that is currently most visible in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Ukraine but whose faultlines run through the US, China, India, Venezuela, Israel/ Palestine, Brazil, Uzbekistan, China's interests in Africa and a coming US conflict with Mexico, and which is also already highly visible in the European Union's ongoing political and practical problems in deciding which of the refugees from the wars it is jointly responsible for starting should be left to drown in the Mediterranean sea.

Of course, one urgent task is to organise to mitigate the impact of this disaster. But, since the terms of the disaster seem also to be the terms of the current world system, it seems worthwhile, if not essential, to speculate about the end of that system, however unlikely that might seem right now.

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An Idea of Revolution

The title of the exhibition is taken from the French left communist Jacques Camatte. In 1973 Camatte wrote a text entitled “Ce monde qu’il faut quitter”, in which he gives an account of how capitalism tends to subjugate not only society and the economy, but also culture, everyday life and the human imagination. Camatte’s critical analysis of the despotism of capital emphasizes the need for a radical transformation of humanity with a view to the development of a non-capitalist life in harmony with everything living and with an equally transformed and invigorated nature. This sharply coherent image of utopian plenitude places Camatte at odds with our present. It is partially from this dissonance that the exhibition attempts to sketch the rudiments of what might still be potential in such a revolt. This world is, unfortunately, still there to leave.

To elaborate, slightly, the transformation of humanity envisaged would, in Camatte’s terms, ‘be against domestication’. That is, rather than existing in the holding-pen of capitalist social relations as mere appendages to capital, as worker and consumer, humanity would





realize the protean human and non-human possibilities confined by this. The warped mirror of the community of capital, essentially a human zoo based around the economy, would then be broken. Camatte, at least at this point, envisages humanity as potential escapees from the processes of subjectification that bind the atomized collectivities of capitalist society to the deadly abstractions of value. An escape through revolt and revolution that seems to us as necessary now, if even more unlikely, as when Camatte imagined leaving this world of money, exchange, wage labor, environmental despoliation and the petty or not so petty travails of everyday alienation. With the exhibition *This World We Must Leave* we want to investigate and represent the desire for another world that is inherent in such a rebellious or revolutionary rupture with the prevailing order: the revolutionary event which both articulates criticism of the existent and presents a new perspective that reflects on how things could be organized in a different way. The exhibition consists of three short films. Together these thematize the process from alienation through rupture to a revolutionary situation. The three films constitute a kind of journey out of capitalist society through revolutionary rupture, the moment when there occurs a break and the (anti)social world of capitalism suddenly becomes the object of active, revolutionary transformation. Such a moment is when it all at once becomes possible to do things in an entirely different way. Encapsulated within such a break with capitalism is the possibility to share the sensual in other ways and modify the

circumstances of life towards other kinds of desire than those that the spectacular commodity society produces and satisfies.

Additionally, there are two vitrines with tableaux of objects related to the Situationist International, an archive of revolt that consists of paintings, posters and pamphlets. These two vitrines constitute an impossible archive of the Situationist movement, the post-surrealist, explicitly Marxist avant-garde group that in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to transcend art and politics with a view to creating revolutionary moments. But why an 'impossible' archive? Because the Situationist critique of prevailing conditions, both then and now, cannot be contained in objets d'art and the polite strictures of the archive. These material traces of past discontent always threaten to circulate and contaminate anew, even here, even now in the passivity and despair of the present. The archive we present is impossible, incomplete, denuded of its immediate and vital context but thus wrenched out of the past it confronts us with the unfinished business of revolt.

As such, the archive in conjunction with the three films is an attempt to begin over, to contribute to relaunching a revolutionary critique of present-day capitalist society. Or, put another way, to map an escape route through these revolutionary remnants and our own desperation, our own position as subjects within a disintegrating (and disintegrative) capitalism. The exhibition might best be viewed as a salvage





operation that extends into past, present and future. That is, not only does it pick through the rubble of past revolts but it also attempts to discover in the alienated detritus of the present something of use that might reopen a future foreclosed by the dreams of capital. A future that without such an attempt might be waste that cannot even be salvaged, however skillful our rag-picking and digging.

We tried to think of a witticism to finish with but words fail us, yet again. Let's instead conclude with quotidian simplicity: This shit is fucked up and we have to get out of here. We have to get away.

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The Archive

An archive is normally understood as a place where one stores and classifies the traces of the already said to make them available to the memory of the future. An archive is in other words a way of making history. This is also the case with the archive that forms part of *This World We Must Leave*. It contains documents, all of which relate to various revolutionary projects and movements that were never accomplished and suffered defeat. In particular, the archive presents our personal documents relating to the Situationist movement which from the 1950s until the 1970s struggled against the powers of the established world with a view to creating a different society of a communist type, in which everyone went from being passive spectators of the life that passed over the screens to active creators of a new, collective life. The Situationists are thus one point in a longer history of resistance and revolt, which the archive tells and stages. It is an archive about the failed but brave revolutions and revolts of the past, all of which challenged capitalist civilization and its financial and state power, and not least its ability to forget, and to create a

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kind of eternal present where all past and present victims vanish from the picture.

It is an archive, but a counter- or anti-archive, where the constantly circulated and repeated narrative of the 'naturalness' of capitalism is challenged and rejected. For there is rarely space in the archives for the revolts and revolutions of the past, and if there is, they are always relegated to 'history' and severed from any kind of contact with the present. "Nope, nothing wrong here...", as we are so often told. We can assure ourselves of this by looking in the official archives, which show that things always go wrong when anyone wants something different. This is the story the official archives always tell. As the Situationists pointed out, the archive's staging of historical memory is in other words an aspect of 'the spectacle's' reification of everyday life, where lived experiences are reduced to pixels on a screen.

In other words, the archive is an instrument of power, it is a place where history is made and staged with a view to legitimizing the prevailing state of affairs. That is why the archive is characterized by order, efficiency and completeness; and even pretends to be the neutral preservation of the objects. That is what history is. But in reality the archive is a way of reducing social relations to fixed images. As Walter Benjamin wrote on several occasions, the archive

has the function of perpetuating the ruling values and naturalizing the existing order. An archive is thus never neutral.

The anti-archive is an attempt to create a more fluid type of memory, where what is remembered is not reduced to a dead counterpart of the present, but is remembered in a new way, where it surfaces as an eruptive force today. It has therefore been necessary to burn down the archive. The archive has been set on fire as an echo of the communards who, during the Paris Commune, wanted to set fire to Notre-Dame during the bloody struggles against the advancing government forces in 1871, when the citizens of Paris had thrown the government out of the city and governed for themselves. During these struggles, according to the most determined revolutionaries, there was no reason to spare the monuments of the oppressive society, even if they possessed an aesthetic value. Everything was to be swept away. The important thing was to ensure the revolution and make sure that the old order and its monuments perished.

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Film script

Scene 1

"We were not able to chose the mess we have to live in – this collapse of a whole society – but we can choose our way out."

- C. L. R. James

There is nothing outside. There is nothing outside this world. Once, society said that this was as good as it can get. Now it just says that this is what there is. It can be good or bad, but there is nothing else. Capitalist society is what there is. It is endless. Capitalist society is endless. There is nothing else. Nothing but the huge body of capitalism, of which we are a tiny part. Which we reproduce every day. Again and again. Every day we recreate this enormous, indisputable, impenetrable body of control, oppression and dominance, from which it is impossible to distance ourselves. We are the body, it is us. Now and tomorrow. It is within us, we cannot get away from it, it has penetrated into us. There is no 'us' outside, there is no 'me' separate from capital. I am the image, the image is me.

Every day we recreate a totality that we cannot understand. We are all quite aware that the totality to which we are subjected only exists because we create it, and yet it appears to be beyond our reach, as if we were not helping to recreate it every single day. We have lost perspective.

I see myself lying flat on my belly, closing my eyes and falling asleep. And waking up and opening my mouth, and my tongue comes out. But I don't wake up. I can't wake up again. We all sleep the same sleep, from which we cannot wake up. We lie moving back and forth in the bed, but our bodies get more and more tired and slowly decompose, decay and wither. For sleep gives us no rest, we only become more afraid and completely desperate in order to

finally fall asleep properly; sleeping and on our way to somewhere else. But there is nothing outside. The bad dream of modernism has become reality. Any kind of outside has been swallowed up and folded into the flicker of the spectacle.

Scene 2

"Not only has universal anarchy broken out among the reformers, but also every individual must admit to himself that he has no precise idea about what ought to happen. However, this very defect turns to the advantage of the new movement, for it means that we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas, but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old."

- Karl Marx

A: There is no peaceful revolt. There is no reason to glorify the use of violence; but violence is necessarily an essential ingredient in the foundation of a new society. It is therefore stupid and naive to imagine politics without violence, and there is undoubtedly always a need to answer back, to defend oneself and ensure the new. As when the Black Panthers armed themselves, or the Communards in Paris refused to be disarmed by the Government soldiers who tried to seize the city guns. The power monopoly of the state must be broken, and that is that! The French writer Alfred Jarry, who was often armed when he walked around in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, understood this. It didn't mean that he fired his revolver, but he was armed and refused to accept the power of the police and the army. He understood that terror is the health of the state. When the conflicts only simmer under the surface, state annexation is less visible, but once the revolt comes and we are on the street together, then the army is brought in, and the state shows its terrorist nature.

B: But there's no longer any so-called revolutionary movement here. There was once a movement that called itself revolutionary, but it disappeared and collapsed when it turned out that it was only a capitalist movement that helped to reorganize capitalist society, to optimize it. The European proletariat existed as a class from 1848 until 1968, when it definitively emerged that it was unable to handle the social conflicts of the modern world. At no time has the proletariat acted to abolish the monetary and state order. Instead they voted in Social Democrat fashion for worker's consumption and are today hand-in-glove with the

national democracies. Today it is the huge human masses in China, South East Asia, Africa and South America who are most active. If there is any subversive world-subject that can exert pressure, rebel against the prevailing supremacy and abolish work, money and the state, it is the 'wretched of the earth'.

C: I don't know where to begin. Here? Now? Where now? When now? Call it now. It's now it's happening! But what if it turns out that it wasn't now after all, if we should have waited a little, were too quick off the mark? That we don't have the energy for anything. No more questions. Now it's happening. What will happen? What is to be done? No more analyses and deliberations. Time for action. Interpretation must be replaced by action. But is it conceivable that, after you've been active, after the action, when you have done something, you've just done the same, that nothing has happened. What if it turns out that I've just stayed where I was? Remained what I was. But nothing at all has happened. Maybe the only thing I have done is confirmed the way things are.

A: But the wretchedness is so comprehensive that the shit is falling apart. We are helping it on its way. Making it collapse. The goal is to make it all break down. To struggle against the existing order must mean to destroy it all and block communication, traffic and exchanges. The cybernetic network of the spectacle must be short-circuited. Its lines of communication must be smashed. That is where we begin.

B: But what is to be done? Do we actually know that? Is it clear? Vladimir Lenin's solution – the creation of a small avant-garde of aware men who seize power and control the revolution – is surely no longer a solution? The Russian Revolution has to be the proof of the failure of that model. That much must be clear. It makes no sense to claim that you are building up the party of the proletariat. But what do we do then? Can we at all ask the question 'What is to be done?'? Do we know what it means? And who is asking the question, or for that matter answering it? Isn't it just a short-circuit that ensures that nothing at all happens? Maybe it would be better not to ask the question at all, to retract it, to cancel it. Withdraw it, slide away, evaporate.

A: There's always a certain amount of passion in the revolutionary struggle for communism. Always. Killing is of course not the same as communizing, the communist revolution undermines more than it eliminates. But to reject the use of violence, that is to renounce revolution.

C: All these questions and all these answers – or are they all questions? What can I do in the situation I am in? How should I move forward? Where do I go from here? Is it me? Is there anyone at all? Any me? Are there more of us? Any ‘we’? It’s enough to drive you to despair. I don’t even know what ‘we’ means. At any rate I’m not sure. Not of ‘I’ either. The truth seems to be that I am talking about things I know nothing about, that I’m not sure of very much, but that I am ... No, I’m not sure of that either. Or else I’ve forgotten it. Yet I won’t stop talking, I won’t shut up. I can’t. Not now. Now.

B: The thing is, there’s no revolutionary identity. In the society of biopolitical control it is the active renunciation of identity that is revolutionary. We throw out the predicates and stay well away from the so-called revolutionary subjects that only have a function in relation to power as the mirror-image of the police. It’s exactly what biopolitical power wants – to tie any resistance to so-called society, to paste the revolutionaries into the insane scrapbook of the ‘one society’ that power is always busy creating. It is absolutely necessary not to affirm any new identity; we are neither one thing nor the other, neither anarchists nor reactionaries, ‘Black Bloc’ nor hooligans. We can justifiably proclaim “We do not exist”. And you’ll never catch us. The bombs are already in place, and they blew everything up five minutes ago.

Scene 3

“2nd August 1914. Germany declares war on Russia.
In the afternoon, to the swimming baths.”

– Franz Kafka

People stand talking together, discussing, gesticulating, many are laughing, some stand bowed over the groceries they have dragged from the supermarket out on to the road, while others try to set fire to a cash register that has been put in a supermarket trolley. A couple of dead policemen are floating around in the city lake. Yet another stretch of motorway has been ploughed up and planted with bushes and trees. Others have been filled with landmines. More and more soldiers are deserting. The director of Jyske Bank has changed sides and has blown up his bank. The banknotes are burning. The city streets are full of chaos and orgies.

THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

Credits

Kunsthall Oslo

25.11.2016 – 29.1.2017

Concept · Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen

Director · Jakob Jakobsen

Script · Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen

Actors · Misja Thirslund Krenchel, Greta Jiménez, Bendt Ulrich Sørensen, Ellen Nyman, Jan Stricker

Cinematographer · Fredrik Sundbye

B-Cinematographer · Mads Hoppe Sound · Kjetil Mørk

Music · Snöleoparden

Production · Maria Kristensen

Graphic design · Tina Helen and Jakob Jakobsen

Stage design · Øyvind Mellbye

Assistance · Thomas Bo Østergaard, Henriette Heise, Andreas Johansen, Valdemar Silverstein Markussen

Snöleoparden musicians · Snö (hanhao), Henning Frimann (percussion, saw), Tais (guitar), Elisabetta (shakers, windpipe), Natacha (guitar), Hjalte (sound recording)

Thanks to · John Cunningham, The Camel Collective (Anthony Graves, Robert M. Ochshorn, Carla Herrera-Prats, Lasse Lau), Louis F. Jensen, Kim Borch, Nis Rømer, Solvej Heise, Dansk El-Forbund København, and Red Rental

More info at thisworldwemustleave.dk and kunsthall oslo.no

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MIKKEL BOLT RASMUSSEN is an art historian and writer. He teaches at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Copenhagen University. He has published a number of books, most recently *Samtidskunstens metamorfose* (2016), and has published numerous articles on activism, the avant-garde, contemporary philosophy, the revolutionary tradition and totalitarianism in books and journals like *Multitudes*, *Rethinking Marxism* and *Third Text*. He is an editor of *K&K* and *Mr Antipyrine* and has edited several books including *Kapitalisme som religion* (2015). Together with Jakob Jakobsen he has organised a series of seminars about Situationism, militancy and image politics in the People's House in Copenhagen.

JAKOB JAKOBSEN is a politically-engaged artist, educator and activist. He ran Copenhagen Free University from 2001 to 2007 (copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk), cofounded the artist run TV station tv-tv in 2004, and has participated in exhibitions all over the world, including at Wattis Institute, San Francisco; Stedhalle, Zürich; Insa Art Space, Seoul; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; München Kunstverein, Munich; Wiener Secession, Vienna; Louisiana, Humlebæk, Documenta, Bienal de São Paulo, et al. He is currently setting up the Hospital Prison University Archive in Copenhagen.

This guide is published by
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THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

An Idea of Revolution

This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution investigates the desire for a different world inherent in the rebellious or revolutionary rupture with the prevailing order. The revolutionary event in which both criticism of the established and new perspectives for a different world are articulated. The exhibition is a total installation and presents three short films that describe stages on the path from alienation to the chaotic collapse of the prevailing order and a burning archive on the Situationist movement. The three films thus constitute a kind of journey out of the oppressive capitalist society into the revolutionary rupture and the moment when a shift takes place and the situation suddenly opens up and becomes the object of active transformation. In the revolutionary rupture the senses and the sensory are organized in new ways and the circumstances of life are redirected towards other forms of desire than those produced and satisfied by the society of the spectacle.

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen