



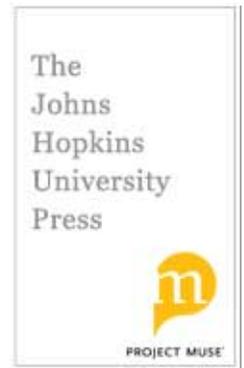
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21 Theses on the Politics of Forms of Life

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Abstract In this position paper, I take up Herbert Marcuse's notion of the 'great refusal' to describe several phenomena that can be subsumed under the concept of a 'politics of forms of life', especially in the context of the revolts of 1968: projects like communes, anti-authoritarian childcare centers, solidary sub-economies and many more. After naming some shared characteristics of politics of forms of life, I defend a politicization of forms of life against a liberal critique as well as hint at specific challenges. Finally, I suggest which insights of past politics of forms of life I find to be most relevant for a revitalization of critical theory today.

Preface: *Attempting Liberation*

In "Paralysis of Criticism," the preface to his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse offered an assessment of the world-political state of affairs that was rather skeptical of the possibility of societal liberation. The advanced industrialized society we live in, he argued, was the culmination of a historical dynamic in which the oppression of mankind increased concurrently with the technological progress that potentially would allow them more freedom. The final and emblematic expression of this dialectic of enlightenment is the atomic bomb, for the first time in the history of humanity threatening the sheer existence of the species. This condition, which is irrational "as a whole", owes its stability to the intensification of the ideological control over human subjectivity that goes hand-in-hand with an integration and recuperation of critique. "Technical progress," he writes, "extended to a whole system of domination and coordination, creates forms of life (and of power) which appear to reconcile the forces opposing the system and to defeat or refute all protest in the name of the historical prospects of freedom from toil and domination."¹ Unlike Marx and Engels, Marcuse can no longer identify an actual moment transcending the existing society; while the *Communist Manifesto* could still assume that capitalism produces its own grave diggers with the proletariat, Marcuse diagnoses a complete absence of any real desire for change, rendering every criticism to a powerless *ought*. However, Marcuse does not conclude that we should return to merely moral cri-

tique that would apply an abstract standard to society from the outside and thus ignore people's real subjectivity. For him, the emancipatory task lies rather in constructively producing a transgressive moment within society itself. According to Marcuse, people can acknowledge their true interests "only if they *live in need* of changing their way of life, of denying the positive, of refusing."² For the construction of this material need for change, Marcuse, on the last pages of the *One-Dimensional Man*, coins the term *great refusal*.

The idea of the great refusal is supposed to be both a political concept and a sociological assessment. This double significance became clear five years later, when the notion of the great refusal takes center stage in Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation* (1969). The pessimism of *One-Dimensional Man* is now replaced by an optimism, even euphoria, hardly imaginable to us today. In every line of this text it can be felt that for Marcuse an emancipatory change of the entire society is now within reach. "Now," the essay begins, "this threatening homogeneity [of the capitalist system] has been loosening up, and an alternative is beginning to break into the repressive continuum. [...] [I]t seems that even the United States cannot indefinitely deliver its goods – guns and butter, napalm and color TV. The ghetto populations may well become the first mass basis of revolt (though not of revolution). The student opposition is spreading in the old socialist as well as capitalist countries. In France, it has for the first time challenged the full force of the regime and recaptured, for a short moment, the libertarian power of the red and the black flags; moreover, it has demonstrated the prospects for an enlarged basis. The temporary suppression of the rebellion will not reverse the trend."³ What might explain this change of heart? Where does this new optimism come from? What happened between 1964 and 1969?

The answer is clear: 1968. Unlike his friend Adorno, Marcuse saw a true alternative to global barbarism appear in the events of 1968. Marcuse actually still assumes the domination of capitalism over human subjectivity to be greater than ever before – "the counterrevolution", he writes succinctly, "is anchored in the instinctual structure"⁴ – but with '68, new movements – the student movement, feminism, anti-racist struggles – emerged within advanced industrial societies that are capable of changing the 'biological' structure of human subjectivity not only theoretically but practically.

In what follows, I shall subsume such movements under the notion of a "politics of forms of life". If we ask ourselves what it would mean to ask Marcuse's question today – how it would be possible to come from a *Paralysis of Criticism* (that Marcuse expressed in 1965) to a new *Attempt at Liberation* (which he deemed possible in 1969) – I argue, we should not follow political liberalism in adopting a 'neutral' or 'agnostic' stance on forms of life.

I proceed in five steps. After (1) a short introduction on the concept of forms of life; (2) I defend a politicization of forms of life against a liberal critique; (3) in order to, first, name some shared characteristics of politics of forms of life; and then, (4) to hint at specific challenges of this particular form of politics; finally, (5) I briefly suggest which insights of past politics of forms of life I find to be most relevant for a revitalization of critical theory today. Due to the provisional character of my considerations, but also to pay respect to the comrades of '68, I present my text in the spirit of a *position paper*.⁵

1. What "Politics of Forms of Life" Are

1.1. *Forms of life encompass "attitudes and habitualized modes of behavior with normative implications concerning the collective conduct of life, even though they are neither strongly codified nor institutionally binding."*⁶

According to this definition by Rahel Jaeggi, the concept of the form of life has four essential characteristics: It refers not to single practices, but to *bundles of practices*; it refers not to individual, but to *collective* ways of life; it implies habits and thus a *passive moment*; and it has *normative* implications. Although forms of life are notoriously difficult to identify, it can roughly be said that they are "deeper", or more existential, than lifestyles, fashion, or habits, but not as strictly regulated as institutions or organizations. As Jaeggi has pointed out, forms of life do include a passive moment insofar as they constitute customs or traditions of which their members might not even be fully aware; nonetheless, these implicit modes of behavior can always potentially be made explicit and therefore they can be defended as well as criticized. While Jaeggi, following a Hegelian approach, has convincingly argued for the feasibility of a critique of forms of life regarding their capacity to solve historically emerging problems, she tends to neglect the eminently confrontational, polemical and therefore *political* aspect of forms of life.⁷

1.2. *Forms of life are always political, just as politics always encompass a certain form of life.*

However, life does not always reflect on its inherent politics, just as politics does not reflect on the way of life it is based. But, since the beginning of modernity, there have been collectives and projects that understood their practices explicitly as *politics of forms of life*, i.e. that claimed to reflect and consciously shape the connection between politics and form of life. These include early social utopias such as Charles Fourier's *Phalanstères* (which Marcuse refers to at a different occasion),

the anarchist communes evoked by Gustav Landauer, the Parisian bohemians and dandies Walter Benjamin sympathized with, and life-reforming approaches of the early Soviet Union with the infamous buzzword of the ‘New Man’ whose problematics Leon Trotsky reflected on, to name just a few. Thus, understanding forms of life politically is not specific to ‘68. However, these prequels notwithstanding, it can be said that there was a particular interest in the politics of forms of life on a theoretical, as well as a practical level, around 1968.

Examples of such politics in the tradition of ‘68, at least insofar as they implied a certain existential dimension (which was not always the case), are the urban and rural communes and housing cooperatives, self-governed schools, and anti-authoritarian children nurseries of the ‘60’s and ‘70’s, the squatted houses and factories as well as the ecological farming collectives of the ‘80’s, the queer-feminist experiments with polysexuality and polyamory, gay rights and AIDS activism of the ‘90’s, and, in the ‘00’s and ‘10’s, the autonomously organized sub-economies—like barter systems, peer production, commoning, and collaborative consumption—, the appropriation and reinterpretation of urban spaces, or the camping in public places, as happened, for example, during the Occupy-protests. The theoretical references of these practices range from theories of direct democracy to the ideal of mutual aid, ecological sustainability, and models of a solidarity economy.

1.3. Politics of forms of life renew the ancient connection between politics and the good life.

This list of examples already shows that politics of forms of life do not “just” conceive of everyday life as political. All these groups have demands and utopias that are generalizable, or can only be implemented if adopted on a larger scale. They nevertheless also include a dimension that transcends the conventional understanding of politics. That is to say, their politics are not limited to making demands of state or society through leaflets, demonstrations, or parliamentary interventions (although they usually do that, too). Nor can the “form of life” aspect of this form of politics be reduced to the fact that political engagement always already also implies a certain lifestyle or constitutes a subculture (although this is the case). Rather, politics of forms of life are about politicizing the question *how we want to live*—about politicizing “life” itself.

Such politics of forms of life therefore renew the connection that for Aristotle was a characteristic of the political as such: The state, he says famously in his *Politics*, “comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence, for the sake of living well.”⁸ This constitutive connection of “politics” and the “good life”, however, has been lost

in modernity. The reason for this lies in the (practical and theoretical) dominance of political liberalism, claiming to be neutral regarding all questions of the good life.⁹ The liberal state offers its citizens a negative space of liberty in which individuals can decide for themselves the conduct of their lives without being bothered by state intervention. This practice represents an agnosticism regarding the question of forms of life: What counts as a good life is a matter of ethics or social philosophy, but not of political philosophy. The alleged reason for this reluctance is the danger of paternalism that arises where the state impedes the individuals' ability to autonomously realize their particular aims in life. Given this general condition of neutrality, every attempt at a counter-hegemonic politicization of life seems scandalous. However, three arguments can be made against this liberal principle of neutrality and in defense of a politics of forms of life.

2. Why Politics of Forms of Life Are Justified

2.1. *Liberalism is not neutral regarding forms of life.*

The first argument is that liberalism, too, is not at all neutral towards forms of life, but implicitly favors certain forms of life and excludes or devalues others.¹⁰ Already the universal uniformity of the forms of life available to us raises sufficient doubts about the alleged neutrality of liberalism. In fact, the field of permitted forms of life is being regulated on really every level of social life: through legislation (from tax law to adoption law and so on), through education, through cultural representation, through everyday life action and through the conventions of affectivity.¹¹ (Even the most daring biopolitical strategist of the early Soviet Union would not have expressed the desire to completely re-program the human psyche and physis as openly as some of the contemporary advertisements).

2.2. *Subaltern forms of life are political by necessity.*

While the political character of the dominant forms of life is usually covert, excluded, or discarded, forms of life are subject to a constant politicization. This is the second argument against liberalism's claim to neutrality. Queer love, for example, is immediately political love, it can never fully retire to the private standpoint of romanticism that is open to heterosexual relationships. All whose desire is not intelligible within the heterosexual matrix know quite well that the question of who you make out with, how and where you have sex, how you raise your kids and who is even allowed to raise kids, are no private matters. Liberalism's claim to neutrality demands these forms of life

abandon their concrete needs, desires, and interests and convert them into the hegemonic vocabulary. Besides the obvious ideological aspect, the liberal notion at this point also becomes self-contradictory, because the preconditions the members of society must fulfill to get access to the public sphere are unequal.

2.3. *A new society requires new passions.*

The third argument against liberal agnosticism regarding forms of life is derived from a social transformative perspective. Unlike the first two arguments, the third already presupposes that the existing society should be overcome as a whole (for example, because it rests, at a fundamental level, on exploitation and injustice that are not sustainable). Forms of life, then, are one terrain for transformative politics among others; since the existing society shapes human passions, the struggle for a new society must also include a struggle for new passions. “The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism”, Marcuse analyzes, “have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form.”¹² If oppression is interjected into man’s libidinal structure and thus become in an obscene way “voluntary”, then revolutionary practice not only needs better arguments or better promises of happiness, but also different drives, desires “which could precondition man for freedom”¹³. If ideology is not merely a matter of conscience, but of practice, ideology critique, too, has to become practical. Marcuse coins the phrase “new sensibility,” which is already anchored in the current—that is: in the former—social conditions, is highly infectious, and constitutes itself as a new type of human anticipating the psychic structure adequate to socialism: “an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life.”¹⁴ Further, he says: “Such a practice [of refusal] involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, non-exploitative world”¹⁵, or even “allergic to domination”. Marcuse probably had the hippies in mind as a subculture that already cultivates a new form of political affect, one that is not based on aggression but opposed to it.

3. Why Politics of Forms of Life are Politically Interesting

3.1. *Politics of forms of life are not economic.*

Politics of forms of life rest on social theoretic premises that are incompatible with economic and reductive notions of societal totality. Mostly due to the pressure of feminism, politics of forms of life have abandoned the orthodox Marxist base-superstructure paradigm. In September 1968, at the annual conference of the *German Socialist Student Association* (SDS), members of the *Action Committee on the Liberation of Women* famously threw tomatoes at their male comrades, which is widely seen as the beginning of the second women's movement in Germany. In her speech justifying this intervention, Berlin-based activist and feminist filmmaker Helke Sanders argues the following: "The separation between private life and societal life keeps hurling woman back into the conflict of her isolation, which she is forced to settle on her own. She is still raised for private life, for the family, which, in turn, is dependent upon the production conditions that we are fighting against. The role she is raised into, the acquired inferiority, the contradiction between her own expectations and the demands of society, create a perpetually guilty conscience for not being able to meet the demands placed upon her or for having to decide between alternatives that mean neglecting vital needs in any case. [...] We cannot resolve the social oppression of women in an individual way. We cannot wait for some time after the revolution, since a strictly political, economic revolution does not eliminate repression in the private sphere, as has been proven in all socialist countries."¹⁶ The fact that, as the feminist critique of conventional left politics has forcefully pointed out, even anti-capitalist groups remain the mirror of existing society and that the situation of women has also not improved in the so called real socialist countries, shows: There is no "main contradiction", no "real subsumption", no determination by, no reflection of, no reduction to or deduction from the economy and also not "in the last instance".

With the critique of the traditional economism of the Left came a wide pluralization of political attention. Suddenly issues were recognized that even left groups previously considered to be private matters: questions of child rearing, care work, sexuality. The positive insight gained by the fundamental reinterpretation, if not abandonment of Marx' assumption that capital would successively encroach on all areas of life and that there can be alternative forms of life only as feudal relicts (if at all) is that non- or post-capitalist spaces or "heterotopias" are already possible within capitalism. If not everything is automatically great in socialism, not everything in capitalism is condemned to be bad. Marcuse himself adjusted his social theory accordingly: If, in 1964, he saw the world as "one-dimensional," in 1969 the "Great Refusal" had become a real moment within the actually existing society.

3.2. *Politics of forms of life make it possible to maintain a general political agency.*

The critique by feminist women of their male comrades was partly about enabling equal participation in the political struggle. Reproductive and care work was to be made visible and to be distributed more justly. Thematizing forms of life, however, is not only for women, but for all members of a political group the precondition for maintaining political agency. The Commune 2, a Berlin-based housing collective between 1967 and 68 that attempted to connect political work with communal life, retrospectively reflects why at a certain point it had become impossible for them to separate politics and private life: One could not go to a political rally but then deal with the experiences made there in isolation and in the context of the bourgeois family structures.¹⁷ Only the establishment of institutions for collective reflection and deliberation allowed for the development of the ‘ego-strength’ necessary for the continuation of an emotionally exhausting struggle. The Commune 2 already acknowledged that the experience of collectivity was a precondition for political agency and cannot be a merely discursive, but must be a material practice. This is a matter of effectivity, but also of affectivity: a collective organization of living, eating, and caring allows for a more rational use of the available resources, and at the same time the compassionate solidarity of comrades produces a safe space for retreat in which the revolutionary energy can be regenerated.

3.3. *Politics of forms of life end the ban on images.*

In terms of the theory of utopias, by overcoming the concept of societal totality, a rejection of negativistic critique strategies follows. The latter had placed a ban on envisioning an alternative society. The widely-shared skepticism about all attempts at outlining the institutional structure of a societal alternative within the here and now, originally and distinctively articulated by Adorno, resulted from a certain understanding of materialism.¹⁸ Since being determines consciousness, all freestanding utopias would unknowingly also remain marked by the flaws of the old society. However, in the light of the politics of forms of life, such reservations rather appear as flimsy excuses. The supporters of these practices, in contrast, argue that alternative forms of community can be discussed, experimented with, and reversed right away, without having to first wait for a great rupture. They follow here classical anarchist models of transformation which have turned the orthodox Marxist theories of revolution upside down: the revolution is not the precondition for a change of life but, the other way around, it is changing life—and thus preparing and practicing emancipatory ways of relating to others—that is the precondition for revolution.¹⁹ At the same time, these practices offer a very strong motivational basis for political engagement, because they do not require a revolutionary heroism by postponing the payout for political action to the day “after

the revolution." Gustav Landauer already at the beginning of the 20th century, wrote in a leaflet: "What we call socialism is a joyful life in a just economy. People today do not know, do not experience it with the true knowledge of partaking and engaging, with the knowledge that inspires envy and the lust for imitation, what that is: *joyful, beautiful life*. We have to show them."²⁰

3.4. *Politics of forms of life accept a burden of proof.*

As Herbert Marcuse summarizes, aiming at *demonstrating and anticipating* a coming community²¹, politics of forms of life consciously accept a moral, as well as an institutional burden of proof. They want to show that alternative forms of life even before a radical societal transformation, first, actually make a difference and, second, actually work and are stable. This amounts to a rehabilitation of the category of *credibility*, since social totality can no longer serve to exonerate individuals from following moral imperatives. This is at least a partial revision of Adorno's famous verdict that there is no right life within the wrong.²²

3.5. *Politics of forms of life connect political engagement with the experience of happiness.*

Ethically, politics of forms of life thereby renew Aristotle's attempt to tie morally right actions to the experience of happiness. Contrary to the figure of the "sad militant", already discredited by Foucault²³, politics of forms of life are not based on an ascetic notion of social transformation but also try to offer a way of life that is attractive to individuals. This is already present in the perspective of critique. Politics of forms of life imply an ethical perfectionism: the existing society is not only criticized for being unjust or dysfunctional and crisis ridden, but also for being boring, depressing, narrow-minded or banal. Already Trotsky in his *Problems of Everyday Life* announces that socialist life will be "richer, broader, more full of color and harmony"²⁴ — none of these categories could play any part in the vocabulary of an ethically abstinent political program that wants to be neutral regarding forms of life. Marcuse, too, did not plan on simply inserting moral demands into the libidinal structure of his "new man," rather his idea of a "new sensibility" from the outset forms an alliance with the pleasure principle. Although hardly any of Marcuse's examples would have gained Trotsky's approval, the new sensibility for Marcuse is expressed in "the erotic belligerency in the songs of protest; the sensuousness of long hair, of the body unsoiled by plastic cleanliness"²⁵ or in "psychedelic search"²⁶. He even goes so far as to stylize the miniskirt as a protest against "apparatchiks"²⁷. However, both instances of a politics of forms of life, the one from 1923 as well as the one from 1969, are similar in that they do not separate politics from the promise of happiness.

3.6. *Politics of forms of life represent an alternative to revolution and reform.*

Politics of forms of life avoid the question of taking over power by performatively denying the relevance of pre-established power relations. Unlike conventional forms of politics that address the state or other political institutions and thereby constantly ratify their significance, politics of forms of life independently open up new terrains for political action. Therefore, they are not a specification or subcategory of the traditional concepts of revolution or reform, but compete with them and thereby expand the political imaginary. Their stance on social transformation can best be described with the concept of “anthropological exodus”, revitalized by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri in *Empire*. Like Marcuse, Hardt and Negri speak of the necessity to construct new forms of life that are “incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth.”²⁸ The notion of exodus indicates a movement of escape, of ex- and distraction, which is intentionally executed and has significant consequences both for the collective of the escapees as well as the society they departed from. An exodus does not have to take place as a physical migration from one location to another (as with the Israelites fleeing from Egypt) but, as in Hardt and Negri, it can also mean a metaphorical movement like an “escape to the inside”. The concept of the exodus thereby offers interesting answers to some of the classical problems of radical social transformation like the question of violence or the friend-enemy distinction: since exodus neither requires taking over state power nor winning over the majority of the population, and also does not reckon with a clear event of rupture, it can allow for more gradual positionings, instead of demanding a decision about which side of the barricade one is on.²⁹ The creativity of the exodus is disorienting, because it foregoes all forms of blackmail and leaves everyone the choice: to either stay or to come along, and also keeps open the possibility of staying without becoming an enemy.

4. Specific Challenges to Politics of Forms of Life

4.1. *Politics of forms of life run a risk of underestimating capitalism’s capacity for integration.*

Despite the advantages of politics of forms of life outlined above, just like every other form of politics, they, too, face specific challenges. For example, it is an almost classical objection to politics of forms of life that they underestimate capitalism’s capacity to integrate and domesticate critique and thus are ineffective at best, ideological at worst, since they distract from the necessity of a transformation of society as a whole. They can thus be seen as the prototype of a form of critique that Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their *New Spirit of Capitalism* have called

“artistic critique”: a form of critique which did thematize the existential or expressive dimension of engagement, but in the end just gave way to a perfidious new strategy of capitalist exploitation.³⁰ In fact, it is easy to assemble evidence today, 50 years later – the Che-Guevara-T-Shirts, the Karl-Marx-credit card issued by the Sparkasse Chemnitz, and the May ‘68 thong designed by Marlies Dekker – to prove that ideals such as individualism, creativity, sexual freedom, authenticity and self-fulfillment have now turned into neoliberal catchphrases completely bereft of their original meaning. However, one must give credit to the 68 comrades for already acknowledging and reflecting on precisely this danger of integration and recuperation. Marcuse coined the term “repressive tolerance” already in 1965: the system is capable of using even the forces that battle against it for the cementation of its own dominance. As long as the capitalist framework is accepted, he then writes in his *Essay on Liberation*, “liberalization strengthens the cohesion of the whole”³¹.

4.2. *Politics of forms of life run at risk of losing sight of the concern of the common (res publica).*

By detracting attention from the state and other political institutions, and thereby relativizing the significance of public discourse, the politics of forms of life reveals a particular democratic deficiency and depoliticizing tendency. On the one the hand, this does empower individual citizens by giving them the possibility of directly influencing their living conditions, but on the other hand this can also accelerate social disintegration by no longer providing a shared stage for collective deliberation on common matters.³² This tendency of privatization and individualization can occur for two main reasons, which conflict with each other: either because the form of life is so successful that it loses its general political character (this is the case when, for example, squatted buildings are transformed into rented lofts), or, on the contrary, because the form of life are so strenuous that they are no longer attractive to their members, so they retire from politics altogether. Thus, the absolutization as well as the elimination of the claim to happiness leads to a loss of the political aspect of a form of life. It then arrives at the liberal mistake: to consider forms of life to be something private.

4.3. *Politics of forms of life can overburden their members.*

Liberalism’s critique of politicizing life was an allegation of paternalism. The biopolitical program of the early Soviet Union proved this suspicion to be historically justified. The transformation of passions that in Marcuse and Landauer was motivated by the experience of

happiness here was pursued as an authoritarian program. Trotsky, one of the most distinguished theorists of the transformation of the everyday life of the workers, rightly saw the necessity of a construction of new forms of life. Taking over state power, he argues, is the easiest part of a revolution – if communism were to be successful, however, it also had to offer alternatives to the Tzarist rituals of everyday life and to the efficacy of the ideological practices of “Vodka, Cinema and Church”. The Soviet politics of forms of life, however, already becomes problematic when Trotsky calls the propaganda of the new forms of communal life an “education”. For education presupposes the existence of educators who would not have to be educated themselves, thus ascribing to the politics of forms of life a basic asymmetry. But, as many of the past experiments with alternative forms of life have shown, the problem of excessive demands in interpersonal relationships begins at a much earlier stage; they can include an overburdening or excluding component which runs the risk of turning into an informal, but quasi-institutional normative pressure.

4.4. Politics of forms of life tend to an overinvestment into intimate relationships.

Finally, politics of forms of life regularly seem to implode because of an overinvestment into personal relationships. The Commune 2, which used psycho-analytical tools to diagnose and cure one’s own subjectivity, reflected on the problem of a “repressive” politicization of the psyche shortly after the defeat of the project. “The use of psycho-analytical elements in our discussions”, it says in their book *Attempt at Revolutionizing the Bourgeois Individual*, “only contributed to an inquisitory atmosphere in which nobody was willing to reveal any of their personal problems. The investigative ingenuity some used to track potential individual rationalizations was already back then ironically called ‘psycho-terror’.”³³ On a different occasion, the communards mention the persistence of a “bourgeois atmosphere of gossip and intrigue”³⁴. Other symptoms of an erosion of politics of forms of life by an over-investment in close relationships are overburdening and emotional overload, personalization and moralization of conflicts, and the suppression of existing desires and dependencies.

5. In Defense of a Politics of Forms of Life

5.1 We need an archive of politics of forms of life.

All forms of politics face specific challenges, dangers or temptations: corruption for reformism, Stalinism for revolution, spectacle for subversion. The fact alone that politics of forms of life also encounter such

dangers therefore does not suffice to discredit them. Rather, the reflection on these dangers—as it has been performed by the protagonists of these forms of politics themselves, mind you—offers the prerequisite to learn from past experience. To do so, however, it is essential to take notice of already existing reflections and to defend the theoretical and practical achievements of past politics of forms of life—against the social status quo and the political philosophy adequate to it, political liberalism, but also against current tendencies of re-dogmatization and re-totalization within the global Left. Three lessons, in particular, can be learnt from politics of forms of life for the ongoing debate about emancipatory politics today.

5.2. *We should not be afraid of our own success.*

If it is true that the several relations of power and domination that pervade our society are relatively independent from each other, then progress that is made in the struggle against one form of domination is not devalued by the fact that it wasn't accompanied by a success in the struggle against all forms of domination. The feminist revolution of 1968 is no less revolutionary because it didn't yet also abolish capitalism. Of course, achievements can be integrated and domesticated, liberation can end up taking ambivalent or ironic forms. Who, however, claims that the emancipation of 1968 has not 'really' changed anything or reduces it to a mere herald of post-Fordist and postmodern working conditions, continues the prioritization and privilege of changing the so called 'base' (and thereby trivializes the suffering of the victims of pre-68 racism and sexism). Whoever is only committed to changing 'the whole' is committed to changing just a part, usually the economy (only a particular economy, at that). And whoever uses the necessity of *class politics* to discredit the achievements of *identity politics* should be confronted with the same feminist criticism the male comrades of the SDS had to face in the 1960s.

5.3. *Revolution is not an event.*

From the fact that we are dealing with a multiplicity of relatively autonomous forms of domination which are not synchronous with each other further follows that the image of one single event-like rupture after which everything will be completely different is unrealistic and misleading. Furthermore, the anarchist critique of the Marxist concept of revolution has shown that it is politically problematic, too, because it fabricates heroic and structurally masculine notions of ascetic militancy and ignores the necessity of practice and preparation for an alternative way of life. The concept of revolution, therefore, has either to be abandoned or to be reformulated in such a way that it can acknowl-

edge and endorse the heterogeneous temporalities of autonomous efforts of emancipation.

5.5. *There are no more barricades.*

We must not take capitalism as the paradigm of all forms of domination. Some power relations shape antagonistic outer antipodes (like capitalism), some are intimate and go through our own bodies (like the heterosexual matrix); there are militant fighters within bourgeois institutions and there is the enemy in my bed. Some demands can be converted into rights, some require changing attitudes and attention, some struggles are about the transformation of a material regime and some are about a cultural or symbolic regime. The relationship between parents and their children, for example, can be considered a power relation—but it can neither be solved through tax reform nor through the guillotine—but only by recognizing the highly specific needs and interests of the subordinate party, i.e. in this case the children, that cannot be fully converted into the patterns of state or economy.

5.5. *Let's attempt liberation – once again.*

If critique is an attitude that is continuously confronted with new boundaries, then it is clear that critical practice cannot always stay the same if it is to remain critical. It must constantly readjust to actual social developments. This is also true for the politics of forms of life. In this sense, by critical reflection on past attempts and past defeats, we have learned that today is no longer the time for a “new sensibility.” But, for precisely this reason, now might be a good time for a new “new sensibility.”

Notes

1. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), xlii.

2. *Ibid.*, xliv, emphasis added.

3. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (New York: Beacon Press, 1971), vi f.

4. *Ibid.*, 11.

5. Another version of this paper—different in style, but similar in content—will appear as „On the Politics of Forms of Life“, in Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendiata (eds.): *From Alienation to Forms of Life. The Critical Theory of Rahel Jaeggi* (University Park 2017: Penn State University Press).

6. Rahel Jaeggi, *Kritik von Lebensformen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 77, my translation.

7. Understanding forms of life as attempts to solve problems provides Jaeggi with a normative standard to evaluate and criticize them. A form of life is “good”, if it reacts adequately to a prior situation of crisis. The patriarchal marriage,

for example, is no longer an adequate form of life, because it is incapable to organize intimacy and social reproduction in such a way that is compatible with the freedom of the woman. It therefore necessarily erodes under changed social circumstances. The problem with this Hegelian approach, however, is that it fails to recognize the inherently transgressive force behind the politics of forms of life. The same is true for Maeve Cooke's otherwise insightful considerations on the politics of forms of life, which she interprets as 'postuniversalist' claims to recognition. Cooke correctly observes that movements such as the Slow-Food-movement, initiatives to save the Welsh language or to protect the Hijab cannot be understood as making moral demands in the deontological sense, but as 'invitations'. However, Cooke, too, disregards the polemical aspect of most forms of a politics of forms of life. See, Maeve Cooke, "Beyond Dignity and Difference. Revisiting the Politics of Recognition", in: *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 8 (2009), Nr. 1, 76–95.

8. Aristotle, *Politics* (Cambridge/Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 3 [1252b28].

9. For this argument, directed against Habermas, Rawls, and Dworkin, see already Jaeggi, *Kritik*, 30–51.

10. For a further elaboration of this point, see Wendy Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values", in *States of Injury. Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

11. Precisely because, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner point out in their text with the fitting title *Sex in Public* – sex is never a private matter –, the imagination of a hygienically clean citizenship is an expression of a form of life itself: that of national heterosexuality. See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 24 (1998), No 2.

12. Marcuse, *Liberation*, 11.

13. *Ibid.*, 10.

14. *Ibid.*, 5.

15. *Ibid.*, 6.

16. Helke Sander (1968), "The SDS – An Overblown, Counterrevolutionary Ball of Yeast Dough", online: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/print_document.cfm?document_id=1097

17. Cf. Kommune 2, *Versuch der Revolutionierung des bürgerlichen Individuums* (Berlin: Oberbaum, 1969), ch. 1 & 2.

18. Adorno expresses this thought most clearly in his *Minima Moralia*, where he describes the aporia that "the more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world" Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 247.

19. In her brilliant recent dissertation, Eva von Redecker coined the term "metaleptic revolution" to describe this rotation, see Eva von Redecker, *Metalepsis und Revolution. Eine performative Praxistheorie sozialen Wandels* (HU Berlin, unpublished dissertation, 2015).

20. Gustav Landauer, "Sozialistisches Beginnen," *Antipolitik* (Lich: Edition AV, 2010), 143, my translation.

21. Cf. Marcuse, *Liberation*, 88.

22. Edmund Jephcott translates Adorno's famous verdict *Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen* as "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 39). This translation is misleading, since it does not capture the spati-

ality of Adorno's expression. Adorno believes that good life is impossible, because we live "within" a society that is wrong as a whole. If, however, society is not a container but a set of practices, it might be possible to establish a better practice even if not all other practices are changed simultaneously.

23. Cf. Michel Foucault, "Preface", in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xv.

24. Leon Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life: And Other Writings on Culture and Science* (New York: Monad Press, 1973), 47.

25. Marcuse, *Liberation*, 36.

26. *Ibid.*, 37.

27. *Ibid.*, 26.

28. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire. The New World Order* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), 22.

29. Cf. Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus", online: <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcmultitude2.html>, 2000.

30. Cf. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2005).

31. Marcuse, *Liberation*, 9.

32. See for example, Chantal Mouffe, *Exodus und Stellungskrieg: die Zukunft radikaler Politik* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2005).

33. *Kommune 2, Versuch*, 18, my translation.

34. *Kommune 2, Versuch*, 21, my translation.