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Peter Trnka

Thinking, Acting; Unbinding

Two themes, two faces, two styles, two approaches, or one that is both *this and its other*, even its *opposite*? On one side/direction/face: political action, revolution. On the other, abstraction, abstract thinking. Both at the same time; an anomaly, an exception then becomes a rule. Monstrous normality, unimaginable difference. Patterns mutate, mutations become patterns.

The promise and challenge of life, hence of any inquiry, experience, investigation. The two orientations, Janus faces, moving now—becoming proper, maturing, or becoming *intensif*—political and abstract. In traditional Marxist terms, theory and practice, always together. In the skin and bones. Discursive and poetic figuration of spectral power. Consistent methodological insistence on the concrete and particular, the historical and situated, in relation to the necessity and challenge of abstraction, of thinking, given the ideological spectral falsification of reality, and necessity, and priority—to be short, how to live. “Learning to live finally,” as Jacques Derrida says in his last, Late Style interview:

I am at war with myself ... and I say contradictory things that are, we might say, in real tension; they are what construct me, make me live, and will make me die. I sometimes see this war as terrifying and difficult to bear, but at the same time I know that it is life. ... I thus cannot really say that I assume this contradiction, but I know that it is what keeps me alive, and makes me ask ..., ‘how does one learn to live?’. (2007, 46)

To the point: to the question *Janus Unbound* posed of the continuing contradiction, opposition, tension, and asymmetries between the colonizing and exploiting Global North and the multitudes of the Global South, we bring two concepts. And a case study. An answer: True Wealth and True Friend(s). And the case of Palestine, and Palestinian liberation from the ongoing 75-year Nakba, 75 years of ongoing disaster and catastrophe, “(post)-catastrophic” catastrophe (Hamdi 2023, 29), generations living in the same temporary, unlivable refugee camp. And a collaboration and transdisciplinary theory and practice that is aware that concepts are living paradoxes to be thought and thought

again, anew. The nature of true wealth: a question posed in Ionia in the 7th century BCE, for example, and again by Socrates in the 5th century BCE, for example, and again today, and in-between, in this form and that. And the nature of friend (and hence by implication enemy, note the difference between starting with one or the other). And the truth of who was here first, or longest, or more “properly”—or who is the indigenous and who the alien, and how to relate to the friend, the alien, and the unknown.

A life of found objects. Letters to the editor stream in with questions, ideas for work, conversations, helpful thoughts. Objections. Letters leading to work. As Stephen Spender writes in “One More New Botched Beginning” (1964) about himself and two undergraduate friends at college, both of whom died, whom he sees gathered still with him at college, sharing poems with each other:

Their lives are now those poems that were
Pointers to the poems to be their lives.

The issue at hand holds poetic objects, philosophic concepts, and subjective desires that travel at infinite speeds, globally and cosmically. Tahrir Hamdi’s *Imagining Palestine*, for example. The threads of conversation that crystallized into an article on true wealth, a translation of Abdelkébir Khatibi on true friendship, and the first formal letter(s) to the journal, on contradiction and Janus as a supra-proposition.

Janus is already unbound from facing only one direction. Facing past and future simultaneously generates something like the present. Unbinding Janus from identity and consistency regimes, and from assumptions concerning values, especially the trump, ultimate, or paramount values (such as life, deity, family), puts reality and time—not only time—outside of logical rule, beyond logical containment, generative that is of logic and everything else. Thanks to our Editorial Board member Jay Foster for bringing Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1967) into play, where, at III.59, one finds: “Why should [Bertrand] Russell’s contradiction not be conceived as something supra-propositional, something that towers above the propositions and looks in both directions like a Janus head?”

The paradoxical knot of the real and its political untying and unbinding squiggles together the varied strands of imaginative thought gathered here, from the political situation in Tahrir Hamdi and Ilan Pappé’s constructing of a future Palestine to the abstract plenipotent well of contradiction. As Ilan Pappé argues, the concrete political situation necessarily involves abstraction and contradiction: “In *Imagining Palestine*, Hamdi follows the way Palestinians and pro-Palestinians involved in cultural resistance reconcile various contradictions or seeming dichotomies in a similar way” (71). A child puts it best, most quickly and graphically, in one of a series of lost or nonreproducible images related to this work, namely, the background for the first of the triptych of poems published here by our Poetry Editor, Andreae Callanan. “A ghost” carries a dedication to a drawing by her niece, Eleanor, age four. As Andreae Callanan informed me in an e-mail in May (accompanied by a photo of the drawing, but unfortunately the original may be lost): “the full title of Eleanor’s masterpiece

is, and I quote, ‘**A ghost who is looking at his own butt, and he turned his body around so he could see his butt, and his butt is allergic to his head.**’ Image attached. I take my inspiration where I can find it!” And there you have it: a person is also their own and others’ ghost, and persona and ghost contradict, sit allergically or in dynamic opposition. We are countervailing forces (semi-colon, not colon; concrete; abstract; the pretentious title, *mea culpa*).

Thank you friends for more friends, for giving more to read—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Alessandro Sarti, Ghassan Kanafani, only a start. Thank you Tahrir Hamdi for *Imagining Palestine*, discussed here and in our interview of Hamdi by her collaborator and our Book Review Editor, Louis Brehony, in “The Role of Revolutionary Intellectuals is of Utmost Importance.” And Hamdi’s work is taken up in a continuing conversation with Pappé in his review essay, “The Agency and Resilience of the Palestinians Shines.” Unbinding, liberating imagination—I trust and hope Tahrir (the liberator) Hamdi would agree—goes hand in hand with political resistance and social freedom. Political and imaginary regimes. Parallel lines. Psychic and social forces. Parallel lines. Semi-conscious and unconscious, as yet to be formed and figured desires overflow, resist containment in logical or political regimes.

Imagining Palestine

At the beginning: thank you Tahrir for this work. Hamdi offers thanks in her acknowledgments, and also prominently in her “Introduction: Imagining Palestine: Defining the Concept.” The concept of Palestine, and, as Pappé emphasizes in his reading of Hamdi’s work, “The Theory of Palestine”:

Hamdi allocates much space to this discussion on the relevance of theorization to an actual liberation struggle. She identifies closely with intellectuals who refer us to marginal and third spaces as an ideal position from which they could contribute to the almost paradoxical idea of a practical theorization (not dissimilar to liberation theologies which in their own way grapple with similar challenges).
(72)

Imagining, theorizing, and defining concepts. The power of naming, of symbolically regulating. To cut to the chase, the naming of one or two nations, one-state or two-state solution. Hamdi closes her book by affirming Pappé’s vision of a future Palestine as the “one democratic state solution,” a Palestinian nation, including what is now named and known as Israel, and its citizens (205). But I am ahead of myself. Hamdi begins by thanking her father, Khalil Hamdi, and styling her work as an ongoing conversation with him: “My father, Khalil Hamdi, never stopped talking about Palestine, to his last breath, and with this book, I am continuing this conversation” (x). The personal is here the political and intellectual. Khalil Hamdi is to Tahrir Hamdi a father, a teacher, and a political leader, then also political collaborator. Khalil Hamdi was a major figure in the Palestinian resistance and co-founder of the ANM (Arab Nationalist Movement). Tahrir’s brother, Hamdi, figures in the work as well, for his research on the medicinal properties of olives (see below).

Appropriately—given the attention Tahrir Hamdi gives in this work to Edward Said’s *Beginnings*, among many other of Said’s works, big and small, academic and political—the beginning of *Imagining Palestine* is precise in its acknowledgements and initial epigrams; that is, the bites from Mourid Barghouti’s *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* (2011) and from Mahmoud Darwish’s *The Butterfly’s Burden* (2007) go to the heart of the matter. Mourid Barghouti writes: “But, I tell myself, no reality cancels out imagination” (89). Imagination is real; imagination is the real power to transform what is real, and so to transform itself as an imaginative force, and transform the whole world. Here Hamdi joins in conversation with Khalil Hamdi Sr., with Barghouti, and others, multitudes.

Always among others, including the no longer with us, the dead, especially, or more properly, *now inclusively all those working to live*, that is, the biopolitical multitudes, all who struggle to survive, dead labour. Ghosts, that is, including the ghosts that are those people-to-come, the future generations, including future Palestinians occupying a future Palestinian nation. Those conversing on the power of imagination, in this issue, include Margherita Pascucci, with Baruch Spinoza and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, among others; the conversation folds into Khatibi, and so also Jacques Derrida and Aristotle, on the imaginary, oppositional, solitudinous character of loving intellectual discourse, that is, friendship. Khatibi, in “True Friend,” addressing Jacques Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* (2005), speaks of the loving that is found among true friends, the “love in thinking,” which is “an art of living.” In that work, Derrida’s guiding utterance is taken from Aristotle: “O my friend, there is no friend.” For Khatibi,

The ‘good friendship’ is a strange law of sharing, a paradoxical pact and one which changes the terms of the alliance depending on the vicissitudes of life. A dissymmetrical alliance, certainly, demanding respect, a distant respect, which tolerates the friend in its singularity. Each one is separated and tied to the other by separation itself, by this indestructible tie of intimate solitude. (47)

Conversation, in the personal and political family, does not mean the absence of (the weapons of) criticism. So Pappé, for example, faults Hamdi for neglecting the Palestinian historians, and summarizes here (73-76) the re-conception of the indigenous population of Palestine following from that historical work. Friendship as caring, informed criticism.

Consider this fragment of the second starting epigram in *Imagining Palestine* (xi), from Mahmoud Darwish: “The ghost grows up and occupies the killer consciousness.” Hamdi then begins by invoking “The ghosts of Palestine” (1). She proceeds by way of transdisciplinary critical analysis of culture in the broad sense, including all forms of symbolic expression, and especially so-called “low art” cartoons and graffiti, etc. A broad sense of culture, in Said’s sense, which includes politics, action, and resistance. Culture is itself an abstract concept in need of and worth fighting for; as Ilan Pappé puts it, “[a]n abstraction that

cannot be taken for granted between two concepts: culture and cultural resistance” (68). Hamdi understands the resistance of intellectuals through the example, or paradigm, of her father, Khalil Hamdi, as well as Ghassan Kanafani, and Said himself, especially Said’s “Late Style.” Hamdi is a good intellectual friend to Said, that is, she does not uniformly accept and affirm, but inquires, questions, and criticizes in her reading of many of Said’s works, albeit in a highly selective manner. Most importantly, Hamdi updates Said concerning the demography of Late Style resistance. Late Style is similar to the honesty and cutting view of those near death in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari at the start of their last collaboration *What is Philosophy?* (1994), but it also resembles the disdain of youth in Plato and other state bureaucratic, royal thinkers. For Hamdi, contemporary resistance is found in force in the acts of Palestinian youth, such as the Gazan fire-kite flyers (53). The Late Style, of the elderly or just awake, is *hybrid*, complex, and real (40-41); it shows “the power of culture to create reality” (46). “As becomes clear in Said’s last interview with Charles Glass,” Pappé writes, Late Style is:

The maturation of his contrapuntal dialectical approach to harmonious and complementary affiliations and values. . . . As a Palestinian, exile, in the first instance, is traumatic; as a universalist intellectual, it is an asset. At the beginning of the 21st century, there was no need to apologize for or to reconcile this contradiction. . . . His Palestinianism, so to speak, had to coexist, uncomfortably, with his universalism . . . this in fact was his political legacy for the future: Jews and Palestinians would have to reconcile to a similar existence as does the national intellectual in exile. (73-74)

In closing this acknowledgment, let the olive, and not only the olive branch, stand for the kind of concrete particular at play from beginning to end, one whose knots resemble the symbolic, logical knots—contradictions, opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum* even—at play in imagining, thinking, and attempting to designate and express the truth and reality of a particular. The olive, as indigenous food staple, is also an emblem of colonial Israeli violence and Palestinian resistance (see the discussion of solidarity planting, for example, at 171). “Israel has uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive trees” (169), writes Hamdi; “in fact,” she continues, “the oldest olive tree in the world is located in the Palestinian village of Walaja, near Bethlehem—*Al Badawi* tree, which is looked after by Salah Abu Ali whose family owns the orchard near it” (170). The age of the tree may exceed the great septo-millennial span of history that Palestinian historians have shown is the length of Palestinian habitation, relatively uninterrupted throughout that period except, of course, for the recent, ongoing—but no more!—75-year Israeli settler displacement of indigenous Palestinians from Palestine. The tree has a name and a life so long in duration that it puts the generations of human populations in perspective. In some indigenous cultures, trees, rivers, mountains, and other natural forms are persons in kinship and expressive relation to them. What could we learn from the tree? What truths does the tree speak?

It is said that the *Al Badawi* tree was named after Ahmed al-Badawi, a 13th-century Sufi imam who is said to have spent many hours sitting in the shade of the tree.' Some refer to it as 'the tree of our master Ahmad al-Badawi' (Melhem 2018). Using the method of carbon dating, Italian and Japanese teams tested *Al Badawi* tree and estimated its age to be approximately 3,000-5,500 years old. If the older estimation holds true, this 'would make the Al Badawi tree the oldest olive tree in the world' (Ruffin 2020).

For Palestinians, their sustenance and very existence depend on the existence of the olive tree. ... [C]ontinuous destruction of olive groves represents a systematic plan by Israel to force Palestinians into exile, a kind of ethnic cleansing. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 80% of all the orchards in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip are made up of olive trees (Relief Web 2006). (170)

Contradicting

Thank you Tahrir Hamdi, Ilan Pappé, Margherita Pascucci, Jay Foster, and others for pointing to contradiction and continuing paradox. My Archimedean point on contradiction is Heraclitus, here presented with focus and precision by Samuel Sambursky (1976, 167):

Heraclitus ... like Empedocles after him, regarded the harmony prevailing in the universe as the result of a dynamic equilibrium of opposite forces. For Heraclitus this dynamics was built up around fire: 'There is an exchange: all things for Fire and Fire for all things, like goods for gold and gold for goods.'

Sambursky continues, in this excerpt from *The Physical World of the Greeks*, to distinguish a first and second position in Heraclitus:

This double motion, upwards and downwards, is characteristic of the harmony of opposites whereby there is a simultaneous process of coming into being and decay within the existing cosmos. This was Heraclitus' first theory, as confirmed by the extant fragments of his works. ... The notion of the eternal order of the cosmos as maintained by a simultaneous process of creation and decay, was, in the generations after Heraclitus, mixed up with the idea of creation and destruction occurring one after the other. ... But the Stoics incorporated it into their scientific doctrine as a model of Heraclitus' theory and set him up as the authority for their conception of a final conflagration of the cosmos. (167)¹

How is contradiction in—and out of—time? What is, really, out of time? Consider logic altogether, in its basic operation: consistency and identity are the logical fundamentals (agreeing with Cornelius Castoriadis (1975)). What are the limits of logical requirements and axiological directives/orientations, that is, matters of value: what counts and why, what is important and what is most important—at any one moment and in any situation—the paramount in the paradigm or trending pattern/tendency? Hence the wordy, pretentious “paramountcy-regimes” means: the politics of what matters most, the power that determines what has to be, what must be necessary, unthinkable otherwise.

Beginning and Ending

This journal/collective/institution is now in its third year. No surprise then perhaps that this one, this issue—collective outburst, institutional emission, capital product—happens to be particularly self-reflexive, abstract-concrete, and philosophically political and politically philosophical, given the broad trans-disciplinary streams. Hence an issue on imagining, thinking, and acting socially, critically, politically. An issue on friends: personal, political, critical, and paradoxical. An issue on intellectuals, that is, thinking people acting imaginatively, that is, acting intellectually and socially, making a difference.

Our cover and inside art show imaginary real hybrid objects of the South and North; found associations, tensions, liberations. *Merman/Sereno Cartonera* by Górgo Míchel Mílian Maura and Cory W. Thorne explores “the ways in which queer identities are often coded through anthropomorphic and post-human imaginaries,” and inquires into the paradox of “how masculinities are simultaneously exposed and hidden” (17)—not in serially differentiated time, but at one and the same time, *simul*. *Remittance* (oil on moose antler) looks at/shows Fernando Ortiz’s notion of “transculturation in Cuban and Newfoundland folklore” (18). The antler, found, remade, photographed, duplicated, named, signed, tells the story of how Thorne “created *Remittance* while in isolation in Newfoundland, and while receiving updates from several different friends who were attempting to cross from Cuba to the United States via central America and Mexico” (16).

Margerita Pascucci’s “True Wealth” gives a reading of value, surplus-value, and labour as value-generation that intensifies the *paradoxa* of capital’s zombification and vampyric exsanguination (or draining of the life blood) of capital’s subjects: “capital’s productive inadequacy lies in the continuous production of misery” (20); yet “poverty, if read not as misery but as an expression of capital’s mistake, is *potentia*” (23). The virtual “itself,” or virtuality, is a paradox; as Deleuze states in *Difference and Repetition* (1994, 208-9), “*The Virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual;*” it “must be defined as strictly a part of the real object—as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it is plunged.” Pascucci builds on Deleuze’s description of the crystallization of the virtual: “the evanescent quantity, the virtual (as ‘ratio’ of surplus value) by expressing the *saltum* of productivity (the *chiasmus* of the material-immaterial), by expressing the difference of the matter (production), *knows itself* and *knows itself as the index of productivity*” (32). Pascucci argues that the “quantum of the uncommon that capital produces” expresses the measure of the wealth or power of the multitude:

Paradoxically we can measure it, and we want to see with the *production coefficient of inequality*—like the carbon footprint of labour—how much capital produces misery, and to change this into the *potentia* of the dismeasure, into the elaboration of an adequate production whose engine would be an adequate labour, with adequate working relations (*the production co-efficient of equality*). (37)

Is Δe (the production coefficient of inequality ... also call[ed] Π , ‘true wealth coefficient’) = $f(V/S)$. Function (Variable capital/surplus value). The rate of exploitation in Marx is S/V , i.e., the relationship between surplus value and variable capital, which gives the measure of the exploitation of the labour-force. We want to develop the direct relation between living labour and surplus value. (39)

To enjoy a direct, positive relation may be on the way to something like the friendship of which Khatibi writes:

To not speak excessively of one’s friend, rather address oneself to him, and to the horizontality in him, bearer of promise. That is why good friendship is pure presence, pure virtuality, graduated, oriented toward the time of reincarnation and of inheritance. (47)

Aimance: to love in thinking. It is an act, an active affinity, between men, between men and women, between animals and their fellows, plants and every initiatory thing in existence. A relation of realized tolerance, a knowing how to live together, between genders, sensibilities, thoughts, religions, diverse cultures. It is the art of living correspondences. (47)

Enjoy, friends, and potential friends.

Biography

Peter Trnka is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Memorial University. He has taught at Karlova University, Prague as well as Toronto and York. He has published scholarly philosophical and transdisciplinary articles in various international journals, most recently the chapter “Disjoint and Multiply: Deleuze and Negri on Time” in the edited volume *Deleuze and Time*, as well as poetry and a cookbook. He also edits *Codgito: Student Journal of Philosophy and Theory* with Ulysse Sizov.

Notes

1. Consider the following from Antonio Negri’s penultimate paragraph from *Spinoza: The Savage Anomaly* (1991) (forgotten as an object in my recent “Disjoint and Multiply” (2022)): “Being is temporal tension. If difference founds the future, then here the future ontologically founds difference. ... A continuous transition toward always greater perfection. Being produces itself. ... Being is greater tension toward the future as its present density grows to a higher level. The future is not a procession of acts but a dislocation worked by the infinite mass of intensive being: a linear, spatial displacement. ‘Time is being’ (228). Compare with Cornelius Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975): “[T]ime that is not reduced to the necessities of bearings and of *legein*, true time, the time of otherness-alteration, is a time of bursting, emerging, creating. The *Present*, the *nun* is here explosion, split, rupture—the rupture of what is as such. This present exists as originating, as immanent transcendence, as source, as the surging forth of ontolog-

ical genesis” (201). Ontological genesis not contained or ruled over by laws of identity and consistency and other logical operators and fundamentals; productive of novel material and symbolic sensible situations. Fadi Abou-Rihan (2023) addresses the issue of sustained contradiction and paradoxical relations in his recent *Finding Winnicott*,² the anchor for which enterprise is a paradox, a curveball, not exactly contradiction (Heraclitus, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx) but *coincidentia oppositorum* (Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Gottfried W. Leibniz, Johann Hamann, Carl Jung, Henry Corbin, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin). *Finding Winnicott* affirms a radical, essential constructivism, one in some tension with hermeneutic traditions oriented to interpretation of meaning: “Part of an order higher than that of interpretation, construction mirrors the found object’s function as an in-between that crosses the divide between inner and outer realities” (45). A subject’s relation to itself, and to other objects and subjects, is a construction, a co-construction of reality. Reality is a relationship. Reality is transfinite sets of relationships constituting themselves and other relations constantly. Squiggle game. The signature of the squiggle: the found object is a confounded co-construction that unbinds the law of excluded middle and affirms real contradiction, if reality is understood in part as the product of desire. Construction is essential, “not merely a tool among the many at one’s disposal: it is the fundament of ... analytic experience” (60). The range of Abou-Rihan’s discussion, and its critical political focus on Freud and psychoanalysis, is seen clearly in his treatment of the *barẓakh*, introduced to “shed further light” on the idea that “to acknowledge in time a number of components—eternal, eruptive, developmental, decaying ...—is to echo Freud’s recognition of libido’s own constitution as polymorphous, incorporating diverse, seemingly chronologically progressive though structurally simultaneous perversions” (117). The *barẓakh* is a thinking of in-between, transformational, dynamic space-time. Telling the story of the *barẓakh* is significant (also) for what it shows of the history of interactions and self-forming-mutations between so-called Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and Islamic thought, on the other. Briefly, the notion of the imagination is shuttled like a football-found-object, from Aristotle on to various Sufi, Jewish, Christian, and other copyists, commentators, critics, and authors, over three millennia of punctuated intellectual criss-crossing and hybridization. The Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabi thinks of the *barẓakh* by way of a double-faced Janus-type figure. The *barẓakh* occurs thrice as an expression in the Qur’an. It signifies, in al-‘Arabi, a liminal space, such that *being is finding*: it “is a boundary that unites; it is an indivisible partition whose single-sidedness gathers the elements of a difference and insists on their co-incidence. The *barẓakh* is an *interregnum* of over-determination situated somewhere between the two sides of a polarity that it nevertheless incorporates” (120). Let me, please, cite al-‘Arabi at length (as cited by Abou-Rihan from William

Chittick): “So the reality of the *barzakb* is that within it there be no *barzakb*. It is that which meets what is between the two by its very essence. If it were to meet one of the two with a face that is other than the face with which it meets the other, then there would have to be within itself, between its two faces, a *barzakb* that differentiates between the two faces so that the two do not meet together. If there is no such *barzakb*, then the face with which it meets one of the two affairs between which it stands is identical with the face with which it meets the other. This is the true *barzakb*. It is, through its own essence, identical with everything that it meets. Hence the separation between the things and the separating factor become manifest as one in entity” (120).

2. Fadi Abou-Rihan’s essay “On the Micro-Colonial” from *Janus Unbound* 1.1 appears in part in the fourth chapter, “Solitudes,” of *Finding Winnicott*.

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