

The automaton of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on History* has no opponent. You have to imagine yourself across the chess board from the Turkish puppet, water-pipe in its mouth. Better yet, imagine two automatons playing each other. One is the historical materialist, and the other, capitalism's telos. Now sit back, and watch the struggle take on a life of its own; watch your dream's blue horizon fade into history's tragicomedy. Here's a game we can only observe as spectators, a game we cannot touch with our own hands.

This is the bad dream of History's repetition. A seedy conjuration which intrudes on the mind, unbidden and unwanted, and turns waking reality inside out. No catastrophe or genocide is safe from its ensuing claim; no revolution or revolutionary can hold centre stage for long before the legion of charlatans, waiting in the wings, appear to exclaim en masse and without irony, the cheap slogan of capitalist modernity: 'History repeats itself.'

In the profane shadow of this pronouncement, nothing is sacred. Even Marx's famous adage—first as tragedy, second as farce—intended as a slight to naive celebrants of History's inertia, has fallen prey to it. Comedy, it is said, is tragedy plus timing. But there is a point at which the bit bursts into pure horror, moving from punchline to relentless violence. The ancien régime of clowns, as Marx put it, lives today in the nightmare circus of the present.

Repetition, renewal, redemption—put them out of your mind. No original unity or final act here. History's telos is oblivion, as abortive as the telos of an apple which falls to the ground. Its metabolism is that of a pathological mutation or cancerous entity. It does not repeat, it metastasizes. It produces obscene and monstrous forms which, in their very proliferation, obliterate their host. Every reference to it marks its effacement. It does not repeat, because it never really happened, anymore than did the Gulf War.

Image after image will tell you otherwise. The pillars of smoke. The Highway of Death.

The charred Iraqi's lean / like someone made of plasticine.

But look a little closer, and observe the joke behind the sombre montage. A real turkey shoot.ⁱ A triumphant oligarch freshly recovered from its Vietnam Syndrome and bristling to teach the world a lesson in History.ⁱⁱ

And the lesson is this: your time to choose, either socialism or barbarism, is up. The only clash of civilizations is the one brought to your screens by McJihad.ⁱⁱⁱ A conglomerate of fundamentalists and zealots, dedicated like cults of old to a buried terrestrial sun which must be exhumed.

a rotting sun oozing black flame / the black corpse of a sun.^{iv}

Enemies of the sun.^v Butchers of the sun. They wear its skin and fashion from its corpse tethers to shackle the world in chains of dead matter.^{vi} From its refuse they shape moulds wherein History finds a fitting image: a one-size-fits-all.^{vii} From the burnt sacrifice of this terrestrial capital, bequeathed to mankind by other living beings, they brought forth an other-worldly capital, dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.^{viii}

In the wake of this sacrilege, let them have what they've always desired: the end of History, an end for which only vengeance can be the means. For this task, there can be no redeemer or savior, driven by the image of their liberated grandchildren. Only an avenger, nourished by its hatred and its memory of enslaved ancestors, is adequate to the task.^{ix}

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i. The words of a US air force pilot, describing the ruthless and criminal bombardment of Iraqi forces as they retreated from Kuwait.

ii. George Bush Sr. celebrated the show of one-sided military force as a formative moment for the US, in which it ostensibly regained its militaristic fervour and its status as imperialist superpower after its historic defeat in Vietnam.

iii. Political theorist Timothy Mitchell (2011) famously coined the phrase as a corrective to the 'McWorld vs Jihad' thesis, arguing that instead of there being a clash between the forces of global capitalism and Islamic fundamentalism, there is in fact a curious convergence of interests between capitalist oligarchs and reactionary movements, both of whom derive their power from the politics of oil and the highly spectacularized conflict over it in the Middle East.

iv. With lyrical terms, philosopher Reza Negarestani describes the metaphysics of Middle East oil politics in his book, *Cyclonopedia* (2008)

v. Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim authored the famous poem, which acquired recognition in the West due to the work of Black revolutionary George Jackson.

vi. Ecologist and environmental philosopher Andreas Malm (2018) examines the mobilisation of energy under capitalism as a relation of social power. Referring to the infrastructures of the fossil fuel industry and its global production and supply chains, he highlights their importance for channeling a set of 'spectral beings' forged from degraded nature in the service of capital's global domination and hegemony.

vii. Anthropologist Alf Hornborg (2016) has made a compelling case for theorising abstract signs, from digital imagery to money itself, as a means of appropriating and domesticating the solar commons and collective energies, channeling these flows in the service of capital. It is worth noting that the plasticity of these signs has a material basis, not least in the actual plastics derived from fossil fuels.

viii. Capitalism's historical peculiarity, as well as depravity, has been such that it has ever strained the conceptual reserves of philosophy, evoking lyrical and macabre descriptions by its theorists, from Marx to Sartre.

ix. Benjamin's famous exaltation in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1942) remains more pertinent and potent than ever.

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