

Zeszyty

#47

Artystyczne

Rezonanse
emancypacji.
Feministyczny dialog
w polskiej sztuce



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Recenzje

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Post Brothers

Post Brothers is a critical enterprise that includes Matthew Post, an enthusiast, word processor, educator, and (co)dependent curator engaged in artist-oriented projects and critical fabulations.

From 2016-2019, Post Brothers was the curator at Kunstverein München, Munich, Germany, and from 2021-2023, they were an Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark.

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“Oderint dum metuant! – Let them hate so long as they fear!”
the favourite motto of Roman emperor Caligula

The Polish-Ukrainian writer Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky’s 1939 short story *Yellow Coal*¹ describes a world stricken with climate and energy crises and recounts the discovery of a new global energy source, cheaper and more plentiful than anything else: human spite, anxiety, hatred, aggression, and suffering, the immaterial residue of nasty interactions concentrated into limitless power. To tap into this energy, society redesigns private and public space and social interactions to induce bad feelings and proliferates ‘absorberators’ to channel these streams of animosity and anger on local and global scales. Given the reality that, at many different and enmeshed levels, the world today is in a state of continuous crisis, this prognosticating satire offers a unique solution to our own political and ecological emergencies. Tapping into the infinite, sustainable, and renewable resource of socio-psychic trauma, the story turns our excess of hardship into an optimistic one and imagines new socio-technical arrangements within an increasingly nervous world.

Instability permeates all levels of our lives. Where once modernity may have sought to establish a sense of security, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out that this state of continuous disturbance and transformation has become an integral part of our world, where ‘uncertainty (has become) the only

1 Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, *Yellow Coal* (1939), trans. Joanne Turnbull, published in: Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, *Autobiography of a Corpse* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2013).

certainty². Our time can be described as one of increasing precarity, producing subjects defined by their vulnerability, and threatening complex ecologies and systems. This vulnerability is unevenly distributed among and across different bodies and produced through overlapping conditions of power. With the unprecedented situation of environmental disaster, mass migrations, war, political strife, economic instability, the eruption of collective uprisings, and spontaneous events of destruction, it is clear that this constant turmoil and suffering will only increase. Extraordinary conditions have become the norm, and these events are regularly exploited by both state and capital to push through abhorrent policies and restructurings, which Naomi Klein refers to as neoliberalism's 'shock doctrine'³. There is no such thing as a 'natural' disaster today; every crisis is inextricably linked to the flows of global capitalism. Extraordinary circumstances like the Covid-19 pandemic and extreme weather events amplify the normalised disasters in society, intensifying and exacerbating all those sources of stress, strain, conflict, repression, dissatisfaction, hatred, destitution, and precarity in the everyday. Our world has long fed on the trauma of others and exploited cruelty across scales and species, concentrating wealth by making humans and non-humans into resources to be exploited. Contemporary globalised capitalism's fundamental threat to life and livelihood for the planet generates a nervous energy, a sense of doom, frustration, and anger at a global scale.

How can the constant bombardment of shock, emergency and suffering in our world be harnessed as a source of power and collective strength? How do we act and unite in a world that constantly isolates and shocks us, destroying the very ecological and social systems on which we survive? How can trauma and discomfort be understood as a commons and a systemic flow rather than simply as a personal or private experience?

By reframing bodily and ecological economics, Krzhizhanovsky suggests a link between the social, psychological, and ecological, where the mood and relations between entities are treated as objects with profound energetic agency. Yellow coal is the material residue of asymmetrical exchanges, those moments of exploitation and acrimonious survival that happen at every scale in our envi-

2 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

3 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2007).

ronment – those places where energy and matter are redistributed unequally, entities are harmed, bodies rub against each other, systems are agitated, and pain is metabolised into resentment and rage. The people in Krzhizhanovsky's tale decide as a global community to capitalise on their own alienation and disenfranchisement. This requires new thinking about how forces are exchanged in complex ecologies, how emotions always spill over from one domain to another, as well as an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of spaces that produce and are produced by emotional life. This also involves designing and instigating negative interactions within their environment and manipulating the flows of people and things in a machinic system to generate as much negative energy as possible. Doorways were narrowed, crowds were kettled in tight spaces, and furniture was redesigned to produce discomfort: 'The turnstiles on boulevards, the backs of theatre seats, worktables, and workbenches were all fitted with special porous devices to absorb emulsions of bile, turning drops into streams, streams into floods, and floods into boiling, bubbling seas'⁴. If we are to take Jean-Paul Sartre's proclamation that 'Hell is other people', then the cluttered yet alienating space of the metropole is ideal for such energy generation. Cities are, as Nigel Thrift has written, 'roiling maelstroms of affect':

Particular affects such as anger, fear, happiness and joy are continually on the boil, rising here, subsiding there, and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life. On the prosaic side we might think of the mundane emotional labour of the workplace, the frustrated shouts and gestures of road rage, the delighted laughter of children as they tour a theme park, or the tears of a suspected felon undergoing police interrogation.⁵

It is these affective events, flowing throughout the city, that yellow coal seeks to mobilise.

All relations among humans are vexed and difficult, and even relations of love are structured by ambivalence, disagreement, and conflict. In her book *On the Inconvenience of Other People* Lauren Berlant describes the 'overcloseness' of the world – the sense and many genres of friction that living with others (not

4 Krzhizhanovsky, *Yellow Coal*, 143.

5 Nigel Thrift, 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect,' *Geografiska Annaler: Series B Human Geography* no. 86/1 (2004): 57.

just people but ‘animals, things, and thoughts’ too) to whom we are and are not attached, unavoidably brings with it⁶. The book’s key concept of ‘inconvenience’ is Berlant’s other name for this, aimed at capturing the affective state – encompassing ‘everyday aversion, adjustment, minor resistance and exhaustion’ – ensuing from being in relation, and which we have no choice but to process. ‘Mostly, other people are not hell. Mostly, people are inconvenient’, she writes. Berlant focuses on the encounter with and the desire for the bother of other people and objects, showing that to be driven toward attachment is to desire to be inconvenienced, to be implicated in the pressures of coexistence.

Yellow coal can be seen as a countermeasure to the myth that all institutions endeavour to provide happiness and contentment, at least for some, and inverts the overwhelming positive orientation of religion, popular psychology, and therapeutic culture which chastises anyone who isn’t happy as abnormal or maladjusted. All these supposedly negative affects are just seen as something that one should get rid of or replace with something else. *Yellow Coal* acknowledges the destructions and darkneses that structure our lives, and rather than circumventing our traumas and finding imaginary solutions, it reinvents the problem, and channels angst and the reality of suffering into a shared experience. As the negative psychoanalyst Julie Reshe has asserted: ‘I’m not saying that we *need* to suffer. We *do* suffer, it is not simply in our imagination, and there are causes for this, even if they are not direct causes. Suffering, and anxiety in particular, is not just suffering, but a connection to a cause, a handle which can also be used as a way of shaking up this cause⁷’

In Krzhizhanovsky’s society, surges of annoyance, hatred, disagreement, rage, and fear drive pistons and gearwheels; everyone becomes both a battery and a charger, where the very inconvenience of being in a social world and the frictions and emotional reactions resulting from the world would become intertwined with production itself. It comes down to a new patterning of social forms, namely infrastructure, or rather, to the glitches and failures of infrastructure. *Yellow coal* ironically works the insufficiency of our systems into the system it-

⁶ Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

⁷ Julie Reshe, *Negative Psychoanalysis for the Living Dead: Philosophical Pessimism and the Death Drive* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 131.

self, capitalising on the violence of the social world to create a new anti-social social contract. Politics, as Berlant has noted, is all about redistributing insecurity, after all.

Globalised late capitalism often envisages that a universal 'frictionless' economy would lead to social harmony, eradicating difference and contingency by replacing the local with the global. In her book *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has proposed instead that the big, abstract, universalizing forces at work in the world are more motivated by moments where divergent interests and perspectives collide⁸. She points out that cultures are continually co-produced in such zones of friction, the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference. Thus, friction refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine. By mobilizing such frictions, yellow coal takes advantage of those contradictions between situated reality and global systems, the needs of the population and the needs of the individual, by keeping negative affects and conflicts activated at their most virulent and confusing state.

In many ways, Krzhizhanovsky's story is a satire of biopower, the management of life and death through power and discipline, and all sorts of techniques that intervene in and control populations. While Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics focuses primarily on discourses and practices that have the stated intention of improving the well-being of populations, violence and suffering are inherently embedded in any biopolitical regime. He defined bio-power as 'the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power'⁹. This incorporation of life and insertion of bodies into the machinery of production is an indispensable element in the development of capitalism and the state, synthesising biology and economy. *Yellow Coal* turns the world, any and all social worlds, into a plantation for the control and subjugation of bodies, extending the state of exception into all spheres of existence. Yet here, biopolitical technologies serve not simply to regulate life and to dole out death, but

8 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

9 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 1.

instead, as Achille Mbembe has described in the plantation system, ‘The slave is ... kept alive but in a state of injury, in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity ... his/her labor is essential to the plantation’s survival. Therefore, s/he needs to be kept alive, but not to flourish so much that s/he can escape or demand freedom. If the camp illustrates the biopolitics of death, the plantation illustrates the biopolitics of injury, i.e., of keeping a population wounded but alive as long as they serve the owner¹⁰.’ Today, we often hear of biopower as a solution to our energy crisis, by converting organic material, biomass, into a renewable source of power. Yet yellow coal dispatches with the need for raw material and instead converts the permanent state of injury of the populace into a source of power itself.

Krzysztof Krzizhanovsky’s proposal to use adverse somatic affects is a parodic conflation of ancient humoral theories and the pernicious logic of extractivism integral to the development of capitalism. It proceeds from the preposterous yet normalised premise that everything and anything should have value and feed into the system. Most coal reserves were formed around 300 million years ago, at a time when plants ruled the earth, and before fungi and bacteria fully evolved the ability to break down the fibrous lignin that gives plants structure. With nothing to help them decay, their remains were free to pile up and yield thick coal deposits. Thus, we can understand coal as a build-up of unmetabolized matter, pressed and repressed energies sublimated underground without any cathartic release. ‘Yellow bile’ was one of the humours in the doctrine of the four temperaments conceived by Hippocrates and formalised by Galen about 2,000 years ago. Humourism proposed that there are four essential chemicals in the body – blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm – and that an imbalance in the mixture of these fluids produces behavioural patterns. Yellow bile or ‘choler’ was associated with the qualities of hot and dry, and with summer and fire, a notion that is also shared in Ayurvedic medicine. Bile was thought to inflame the passions and the energies of leaders and fighters, politicians, and generals. A surfeit of yellow bile, however, led to irrationality, bitterness, anger, and spite. The doctrine of the humours has long been discredited, although it continues to grip our imagination and colour our language: choleric men with jaundiced views still have the gall to unleash their bilious rage against the populace. Humourism implied

10 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 75.

a view of the body as permeable and characterised by a constant exchange between inside and outside, by fluxes and flow. The proposal in Krzhizhanovsky's tale was to harness this resource of rage concentrated in our livers, to release this stockpile of negative energy not only to heal the individual body, but also to fix the body politic itself through this inherent permeability.

No longer were stress and emotional trauma limited to the personal experience of the individual subject but were considered collective assets. The singular body, comprised of shifting relations and subject to affective forces, was treated as part of a decentralised assemblage of collective angst. By identifying emotions and trauma as an endless resource, the psychic experience of the populace is regarded as the shared responsibility of the community, therefore rechannelling the negative effects of the state to counter-intuitively support sustainability. One's seemingly individual, sovereign, and personal emotional world is thus framed as not one's own but instead is regarded as a reflexive, intersubjective, and common resource generated through social and embodied encounters. Such a view is in line with the 19th century philosopher and sociologist Jean-Marie Guyau's assertion that emotions and affects do not 'belong' to any singular body but rather emerge in the interaction of bodies within a social milieu. Guyau saw emotions as a 'force of attraction' between and among living and non-living entities. This force is not located in the environment nor in individuals but is co-produced through a reciprocal transmission in their contact. Curiously, Guyau believed that the most volatile type of interaction was not found in direct bodily contact but instead emerged through the 'consistent transmission of nervous vibrations and mental states'¹¹. It is these 'sympathetic vibrations' that *Yellow Coal* seeks to harness, exploiting the ways that emotional states feedback and build in the interaction between internal and external worlds to form a shared, co-constitutive economic system.

Emotions are after all *moving*, even if they do not simply move between us. We should note that the word 'emotion' comes from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to 'to move, to move out'. The scholar Sara Ahmed has proposed the term 'affective economies' to describe how emotions are effects of social and material circu-

11 Jean-Marie Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, 1887, 2nd edn. Paris: Felix Alcan, pg. 2. Translated and quoted in Robert Seyfert, „Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Toward a Theory of Social Affect,” *Theory Culture Society* (2012): 38.

lations that bind individuals with communities while separating others. Rather than seeing emotions as personal psychological dispositions, emotions 'work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective'¹². For Ahmed, the fact that emotions are not the property of any particular individual is what makes them binding and effective. The more hate builds up against this collective object of hate, the more love builds up for the 'we' that is the object of love. Emotions work by aligning 'individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments.' Her work aims to show how emotions stick figures together (adherence), and so create the effect of a collective (coherence). Analysing the ways that emotions are used to construct psychic and political borders, she ventriloquises racist and nationalist rhetoric: 'Together we hate, and this hate is what makes us together'¹³.

At one point in Krzhizhanovsky's story, the factory owners realise that the workers' hatred of their exploitation could itself be exploited for industrial purposes, and by laying the workers off, they could generate even more power from the waves of strikes and protests. This use of the workers' precarity as a resource in and of itself is reminiscent of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's astute observation that 'Capitalism is based on the exploitation of physical energy, and semiocapitalism is grounded in the subjugation of the nervous energy of society'¹⁴. By shifting to the production of immaterial and fragmented labour in a network, capitalism no longer needed workers, instead it just 'needs cellular fractals of labour, underpaid, precarious, depersonalized'¹⁵. This anxiety of the worker is not only an effect of the changing modes of production but is indeed the very material in which capitalist production thrives on, putting our psychic energies to work. Even our feeling of 'burnout' and stress, our individual and collective 'energy crisis', is fodder for exploitation. Having to enact a false self that placidly absorbs the indignities of precarity means we live out the system's contradictions and transmute them internally, taking on all the stress and cognitive dissonance this

12 Sara Ahmed, „Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 79 Vol. 22, No. 2 (2004): 119.

13 Ahmed, „Affective Economies...”: 118.

14 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London: Verso, 2015).

15 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future*, edited Gary Genosko & Nicholas Thoburn (Oakland: AK Press, 2011).

entails. Just as social media capitalises on the surplus anxious energy of society by translating dissociated social interactions into value, Yellow Coal meta-mines the unequal dynamics of a system in crisis and channels emotions as a form of power.

In 1983, the sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the term 'emotional labour' to describe the ways that certain professions require the worker to evoke or suppress certain feelings, whether they must wear a smile or behave more harshly than usual¹⁶. This alienation of the worker from their own feelings, and the gendered expectation of proper etiquette, has developed simultaneously with the progressive erasure of the spatial and temporal boundaries between work and life. Transformations in production have not only fundamentally changed the emotional and psychic register of our activities but have scripted and incorporated our social behaviours as a reserve of energy. Now that the totality of life has become a form of labour and we are always 'on the job', our emotions and feelings have increasingly become the object of value production, and we are constantly micromanaging our feelings to maintain our potential value within the system. Capitalism's power and reach is so extensive and intensive that it has infiltrated all aspects of existence, contaminating and degrading our networks of kinship, and reducing all relations to their meanest expression.

In Krzhizhanovsky's story, the bad vibes left over from abusive production processes and the trauma lingering in materials accrue as energetic detritus, a leftover force collecting in the background. Such a concept calls attention to the visible and invisible evidence of events within any environment and accentuates how objects get loaded by human and non-human interactions and disturbances. We've all come across spaces and objects that feel charged with trauma. Some vegetarians abstain from meat primarily because the negative energy from an accursed life and vicious death is seen to be left over in the animal's flesh. Yellow Coal can be regarded as the crystallisation of these intensities, materialising the abuse accumulated across the entire supply chain, from molecular, biological, and geological processes, to acts of extraction, exploitation, distillation, exchange, and disposal. By charting these micro- and macro- power dynamics, one can see complex multispecies entanglements and can start to reconsider how society organises production.

16 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

This influence of turbulence and discord across scales is reminiscent of Alexander Chizhevsky's proposal that negatively charged ions are intertwined with mass human events¹⁷. The Russian cosmobiologist argued that solar phenomena were intimately tied to the activities of living organisms. Not only do geomagnetic storms resulting from sunspot-related solar flares affect electricity, mass insect infestations, and the functioning of local and global systems, but these forces also have profound impacts on the human neuropsychological apparatus. Chizhevsky suggested that human history runs parallel to the eleven-year cycles of sunspot activity, where periods of dormancy and individualisation alternate with moments of maximal activity and mass unification. Increased negative ionisation in the atmosphere increases human excitability, therefore triggering humans en masse to act upon existing grievances and complaints through revolts, revolutions, and wars. Such forces can lead both to progressive uprisings and reactionary and irrational movements. Solar events produce monumental effects on an atomic level, charging electrons and vibrating all the bodies on Earth, which combine and accumulate to catalyse a shared anxiety, a spirit of the masses. This theory suggests not only an intimate interchange at various magnitudes, but also gives counter-intuitive insights into how spontaneous uprisings emerge, spread, agglomerate, and develop into large-scale collective movements. Considering the staggering rapidity with which revolt spreads in periods of mass excitability, Chizhevsky agreed with the Roman historian Titus Livius that social conflicts are an 'infectious plague.'

Over the last few years, we have been especially reminded of the volatility of the masses in shared spaces. It is no coincidence that acts of anger and political rebellion bubbled up during the Covid-19 pandemic. The rise of such an epidemiological crisis was the result of a corrupted agro-economic system and was spread through the movement of people and goods across the world, contaminating sites where bodies come into contact and amplifying the already precarious conditions of the populace. The unequal effects of the virus, from social distancing, border closures, and surveillance regimes, to mass death, illness, and unemployment, intensified collective and individual grievances, while suppressing the social commons. The tedium and monotony of restricted movement, as well as the urgent political and biological threats to life, generated a fiery ten-

17 Alexander Chizhevsky, *The Earth in the Sun's Embrace*, 1931, in *Russian Cosmism*, edited Boris Groys (New York: e-Flux, 2018).

sion. The real need to prevent contamination was instrumentalised by governments as a means of quashing collective assembly. But conditions got so out of hand that nothing could stop the multitude from expressing their rage. Across the world, mass protests and acts of civil disobedience are rising and becoming more radical, fuelled as much by specific political aims as by frustration with the feeling of hopelessness amidst threats to life itself. Whether they are shouting online, from their balconies, or coming together in public demonstrations, the multitudes are demanding their right to life, dignity, justice, and self-determination, and beginning to understand their own emotional and physical states as intimately connected to the violence experienced elsewhere. Indeed, most movements today define the present not just as unjust, but as a scene shaped by the breakdown and failure of our political arrangements, of the violence and trauma and rage that has become, or maybe always was, integral to the system itself. The question remains: How do we act and be in common in a world that is constantly isolating and shocking us and destroying the very ecological and social systems in which we survive? Protest today is a collective response to an ever-increasing exposure to precarity, a channelling of anxiety into furious fulfilment. The crowd is both a means and an end, as Elias Canetti has observed, 'all demands for justice and all theories of equality ultimately derive their energy from the actual experience of equality familiar to anyone who has been part of a crowd¹⁸'.

It is no coincidence that scholars across many disciplines regard emotions as a contagion that spreads across populations and exponentially grows. On a personal and collective level, emotions are treated as something that must be controlled, tamed, and rationalized. It is important to recognise that 'emotionality' is often a gendered and racialised description, where certain bodies and communities are silenced for being 'too emotional', too attached to their 'irrational' passions. Sudden gatherings have always been treated as dangerous, contagious, unpredictable, and violent, which must be subdued or imprisoned. The unexpected and uncontrollable crowd, the mob, the riot, the rabble, is feared because it is passionate, subject to continual change, and constantly composing and recomposing itself and remaining in motion. At times, the nervous excitability of individual bodies synchronises to produce a collective political subject

18 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (1960), trans. Carol Stewart (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 29.

that asserts its power through its presence in public space. The induced forms of economic, social, political, and ecological vulnerability are combatted by embracing instability as both an engine for coming together and a tool for disturbing the normative order of things. Acts of collective dissent are regularly condemned for their purportedly thoughtless character; they are seen to lack reason and are too incoherent and emotional in their demands. Often, political movements have emphasised the need for unity and clarity since only coherent, univocal demands are recognised as legitimate by dominant structures of power. Yet it is precisely this cacophonous plurality of the crowd, this murmur and roar that brings in differences and dissensus and threatens chaos, that gives the crowd its strength. Rather than speaking as a singular and controllable voice, a collective rumble from below shakes foundations. Where the states and their sympathisers seek to produce order through authoritative speech, the noisy crowd voices what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten refer to as ‘the call for and from disorder’¹⁹.

Always moving and mutating, collective dissent is powered through the confluence of emotions and the mutual positions of being at risk. Those who have been denied a voice speak out from their gut in rage, responding to the abject vulgarity of a system that has harmed them by shouting uninhibited profanities and emancipatory epithets. In *Rage and Time* (2006), Peter Sloterdijk described revolution as a rage bank, where rage is stored up as capital²⁰. He argues that our age is doomed because of our inability to understand and address our rage. When anger and resentment are not given political expression, they turn into spite, that is, a willingness to harm oneself in order to be able to harm one’s ‘enemy’. In contemporary society, there are a lot of good reasons to be angry, and thus, anger can be, must be conceived of as an asset for social critique. The problem of anger emerges only when it cannot articulate itself in terms of conflict, that is, when it cannot be translated into politics and thus turns to nihilistic destruction and scapegoating hatred. Spite is in this sense the disarticulation of anger. Anger always has a chance (though not a guarantee) to become a social relation, to communicate while disagreeing. Spite, on the other hand, does not

19 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

20 Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A psychopolitical investigation* (2006), Trans. Mario Wenning, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

care about anything. Spite is anger that cannot find, does not want to find, political expression, and precisely therefore it is the transgression, and ultimately the disintegration, of the social.

We see today a disturbing hostility in all aspects of our society, and it is indeed the fascists, white-supremacists, and other rage traders who have found ways of channelling this feeling of *ressentiment*, this sense of wounded pride and entitlement, the best. But today, more than ever, liberatory movements across the world are converting social and ecological vulnerability and their lived proximity to death, suffering, and mourning, as vehicles for collectivity. Such acts of grievance-oriented resistance do not seek to fetishise suffering and historical or present violence. This anger instead is channelled as a form of ‘world making’ in that it is an ongoing critique of the worlds we differentially inhabit and brings into existence a different conceptual circumstance, demanding the possibility for something new.

Anger has a bad reputation. Many people think that it is counterproductive, distracting, and destructive. It is a negative emotion, many believe, because it can lead so quickly to violence or an overwhelming fury. And coming from people of colour, it takes on connotations that are even more sinister, stirring up stereotypes, making white people fear what an angry *other* might be capable of doing when angry, and leading them to turn to hatred or violence in turn, to quash an anger that might upset the racial status quo. According to philosopher Myisha Cherry, anger is not only something we don’t have to discourage, it’s something we ought to cultivate actively²¹. People fear anger because they paint it in broad strokes, but we can’t dismiss all anger, especially not now. There is a form of anger that, in fact, is crucial in the anti-racist struggle today. This anti-racist anger, what Cherry calls ‘Lordean rage’, after Audre Lorde’s observation that anger transformed into action ‘is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification.’ This rage aims for change, motivates productive action, builds resistance, and is informed by an inclusive and liberating perspective. People can, and should, harness Lordean rage and tap into its unique potential. We should not suppress it or seek to replace it with friendly emotions. If we want to effect change, and take down racist and other oppressive structures and systems, we must manage

21 Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

it in the sense of cultivating it, and keeping it focused and strong. It is these very negative emotions that can power action. In anarchist circles, a similar thought was recently expressed by Cindy Milstein. In *Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief* (2017), she suggests that despair, sadness, trauma, and grief can be seen as the true instance of the collective. Milstein stresses the need of collective pain 'transformed into a weapon, wielded by caring communities in the fierce battle for a slightly less painful world²².'

At some point in Krzhizhanovsky's *Yellow Coal*, the surplus of energy leads to universal luxury, which inevitably counteracts and cancels out the spite and anger that the system depended on. The result is that all of society grinds to a standstill, numbed from pain to the point of total indifference and emotional withdrawal. Sure, we can imagine this as a warning about depending on singular reserves or as an argument for temperance, for an even-keeled disposition that mediates between the ideology of life, happiness, and the pursuit of liberty and the needs for a system that harms us and therefore motivates us. I would still like to ruminate on the possibility that the radical negativity of *Yellow Coal* still has much to offer us. That no matter what we do, our tears will continue to spill and we should turn this trauma into a flood rather than simply damming it up. I'd like to still imagine this rage as a tool for the commons, for a collective power.

In a society fuelled by yellow coal, the existential bile of emotional pain from the experience of subjugation and shock across scales, species, and systems, is redirected to stimulate solidarity. In a time of scarcities and susceptibilities, the surplus of nervous energy generated by a sick and destructive system is metabolised into pure power. The embodied energies built up from intersecting traumas resonate and interact to generate a heterogeneous revolutionary vibration. This murmur modulates masses of disparate bodies and creates a charged atmosphere of potentiality. Together, this force interrupts the order of things by introducing noise and multiplicity. For too long, this irate energy has been exploited to maintain the very systems that keep us in shock and subjugation. Can we reimagine and rechannel this shared emotional fury, like the society in *Yellow Coal*, to inaugurate new relations and ways of living and being together? We can't be good in a bad world. To end, a quote from Ray Brassier:

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105.

Cindy Milstein, *Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief* (Chico: AK Press, 2017),

Despair is revolutionary: it grinds the knife-edge of the intolerable against the whetstone of actuality, sparking the will to change.

Whoever tolerates the present will never risk everything to change it.

Only those who realize they have no future left to lose will be willing to stake everything on the total transformation of the present; a transformation in which every envisageable future is abolished, the better to invite the facelessness of what will come.

The only appropriate mode of thinking for a culture on the edge of extinction is the thinking that stimulates pain.²³

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