

Return of Politics^{1,2}

Retorno da Política

HAUKE BRUNKHORST

Sociólogo político alemão, professor de Sociologia e chefe do Instituto de Sociologia da
Universidade de Flensburg, Alemanha.
brunkhorst@uni-flensburg.de

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the material conditions involved in the “return” of problematization and political mobilization based on the assumptions of social justice and democratic socialism in the 21st century in relation to the evolutionary and self-regulatory character of markets. In the midst of these conditions, we highlight the 2008 world financial crisis, which was directly intervened by the US Federal Reserve, whose action can be interpreted as a learning of financial capitalism in relation to its own history, specifically in relation to the financial crisis. 1929. However, it is postulated that this learning can be understood as a reversal of the revolutionary march and not exactly a revolution. The core of this inversion is marked by the incompleteness of these remedial measures, which implies the reopening of the horizon for political action through movements such as Occupy Wall Street, the uprising of the left-wing government of Greece and even the discussion in the American press about taxation of billionaires.

Keywords: Politics. Marketplace. Justice. Story.

RESUMO:

O presente texto discute as condições materiais envolvidas no “retorno” da problematização e da mobilização política com base nos pressupostos da justiça social e do socialismo democrático no século XXI em relação ao caráter evolutivo e auto-regulatório dos mercados. Em meio a essas condições, destaca-se a crise financeira mundial de 2008, a qual sofreu intervenção direta do Federal Reserve americano, cuja ação pode ser interpretada como um aprendizado do capitalismo financeiro em relação à sua própria história, especificamente em relação à crise de 1929. Todavia, postula-se que esse aprendizado possa ser compreendido como uma inversão da marcha revolucionária e não propriamente uma revolução. O núcleo dessa inversão é marcado pela incompletude dessas medidas saneadoras, o que implica na reabertura de horizonte para a ação política através de movimentos como o Occupy Wall Street, o levante do governo de esquerda da Grécia e até mesmo a discussão na imprensa americana sobre a tributação dos bilionários.

Palavras-chave: Política. Mercado. Justiça. História.

When Margaret Thatcher came to power, Hal Ashby’s movie *Being There* came to the cinemas³. In the movie, Peter Sellers acts as Chance, a Rousseauian gardener, unspoiled by education and cultural Marxism. He becomes advisor to the American President, who still believes with Richard Nixon that “we are all Keynesians now.”⁴ *Progressive reformism* that endows capitalism with *ever more socialist characteristics* is

¹ Artigo submetido para avaliação em 01/09/2019 e aprovado em 10/09/2019.

² Texto enviado para a VI JINTERFIL-Jornada Interdisciplinar de Filosofia que foi realizada em Imperatriz-MA, no mês de dezembro de 2018, sob a coordenação do professor José Henrique Assai.

³ *Being There*, USA 1979, Regie Hal Ashby, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYeVQzTVyLk> (15.02.2019).

⁴ *Time-Magazine* 31,12.1965, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,842353,00.html>, 15.02.2019.

already in crisis. In a meeting with Chance and the old billionaire Ben, the President turns to Chance: „Do you think that we can stimulate growth through temporary incentives?“ – The reply comes slowly: „In the garden, growth has its season. First comes spring and summer, but then we have fall and winter. And then we get spring and summer again.“ The President is puzzled but Ben immediately gets the point that is so much in favor of his own class-interests: „I think, what our insightful young friend is saying is that we welcome the inevitable seasons of nature, but we are upset by the seasons of our economy.“ Chance delightedly agrees: Yes, there will be growth in the spring.” All applaud. The next day progressive is replaced by regressive reformism that is capitalism *with ever less socialist characteristics*⁵.

Following Hayek and Chance, all political intervention to change the *seasons of our economy* is banned. Engineers and gardeners shall save the spontaneous (“*kósmic*”) evolution of markets from democratically created positive law and replace it with politically neutralized law of nature (“*Nomos*”)⁶. Hayek’s old dream comes true to “imbed” the state in the „comprehensive spontaneous order like a maintenance crew in a factory”⁷. A red line runs through the factory, where the words of the German finance minister are engraved in golden letters: “Elections cannot be allowed to change economic politics.”⁸

No one tried to mess with evolution⁹. Luhmann banned the subject from theory: „The subject is no object, what good is it in theory!”¹⁰ Francois Furet and Francis Fukujama declared the end of revolution, history and critical theory. The Amsterdam Rijksmuseum presented Rembrandt as a successful businessman, and a high-ranked functionary of *Labour* admitted in summer 2002: “We are all Thatcherites now.”¹¹ Three years later Tony Blair blocked the debate on globalization with the wisdom of Chance the gardener: „I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalization. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer.”¹²

⁵ On the distinction progressive vs. regressive reformism see Claus Offe, *Europe Entrapped*, Oxford: Polity 2016.

⁶ Friedrich A. von Hayek, *Recht, Gesetz und Freiheit*, Tübingen: Mohr 2003, 37ff, 97ff, 418ff.

⁷ Hayek, *Recht, Gesetz*, 49, see 411ff.

⁸ Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a decade of financial crises changed the world*, New York: Viking 2018, 525.

⁹ Not to mess with evolution is the credo of both, Hayek and Luhmann.

¹⁰ Luhmann, *Selbstthematization des Gesellschaftssystems*, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 1/ 1973, 21-46, at 21 (in German: „Das Subjekt ist kein Objekt, was soll es also in der Theorie!”).

¹¹ Kia Vahland, *Der Menschenfreund – In seiner Kunst zeigt Renbrandt sein ganzes Leben*, SZ 1.3.2019, 11; Peter Mandelson according to *The Guardian* 10 Jun 2002. Quoted from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/jun/10/labour.uk1> (16.02.2019).

¹² Tony Blair, *Conference Speech*, in: *The Gardiner* 27.09.2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/27/labourconference.speeches> (zugegriffen 31.12.2018).

A year before the climate-catastrophe of Thatcherism, Alan Greenspan stated: „We are fortunate that, thanks to globalization, policy decisions in the US have been largely replaced by global market forces. ... It hardly makes any difference who will be the next president. The world is governed by market forces.”¹³

At September 15, 2008, “by the break of day ... a flash” interrupted the *kósmic seasons of our economy*¹⁴. Lehmann Brothers collapsed. The global South payed the price¹⁵. In Philadelphia the always-full floodlights of the Stadium vis-à-vis our apartment went out and stayed dark until I left in November. The *Federal Reserve’s* president, Ben Bernanke, who is not given to understatement, called what happened „the worst financial crisis in global history, including the Great Depression.”¹⁶

The crisis was the Kierkegaardian moment of politics. The evolutionary theories of Chance the gardener, Friedrich August von Hayek and Niklas Luhmann failed, – just in the same way as Hegel’s Philosophy failed in spring 1843, during the existential crisis of Sören Kierkegaard’s life. Theory, Kierkegaard argues, is “true with regard to the past that we must *explain and understand life backward* – but it was forgotten that *we must live forward*.”¹⁷ Living forward gives us “no moment of rest to take the stance: backward”¹⁸. Backward

¹³ Alan Greenspan, Ich bin im falschen Jahrhundert geboren, in: Zürcher Tages-Anzeiger, 9.9.2007. Julien Kloeg rightly calls the entire period of regressive reformism the politically intended and enforced “self-withdrawl of poltics” (Kloeg, Europe’s Political Frontier. On Ethics and Depolitization Critique, Doctor-Thesis, Rotterdam: Erasmus University 2019, 21ff, 58f, 203f).

¹⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes, Hamburg: Meiner, 15f, quoted from English translation of Phenomenology: Terry Pinkard 2010 Updated Wednesday, October 30, 2013. The “flash“ refers to the French Revolution.

¹⁵ See Stefan Lessenich, Neben uns die Sintflut. Die Externalisierungsgesellschaft und ihr Preis, Berlin: Hanser 2016.

¹⁶ Tooze, Crashed, 168f (meine Übers.), s.a. 147ff. „Never before, not even in the 1930s, had such a large and interconnected system come so close to total implosion. (...) In the 1930s there was no moment of such massive synchronization, no moment in which so many of the world’s largest banks threatened to fail simultaneously. The speed and force of the avalanche was unprecedented. As Bernanke later admitted to the readers of his memoirs, ‘ It was overwhelming, even paralyzing, to think too much about the high stakes involved, so I focused as much as I could on the specific task at hand As events unfolded I repressed my fears and focused on solving problems.’ Only as he neared the end of his second term was he ready to unwind. Looking back, it was like being in a car wreck. ‘You’re mostly involved in trying to avoid going off the bridge; and then later on you say, oh my god!’“ (168).

¹⁷ Sören Kierkegaard, Die Tagebücher 1834-1855, Leipzig: Hegner 1941 (1923), 162 (my translation, my emphasis).

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, Tagebücher, 162. Kierkegaard writes here: „Es ist ganz wahr, was die Philosophie sagt, dass das Leben rückwärts verstanden werden muss. Aber darüber vergisst man den andern Satz, dass vorwärts gelebt werden muss. Welcher Satz (...) eben damit endet, dass das Leben in der Zeitlichkeit niemals recht verständlich wird, gerade weil ich in keinem Augenblick völlige Ruhe bekommen kann, um die Stellung einzunehmen: rückwärts.“ In Entweder/ Oder the corresponding quote reads: „Die Philosophie wendet sich an die vergangene Zeit, blickt auf die ganze Weltgeschichte mit allen ihren Erfahrungen zurück, sie weist nach, wie die diskursiven Momente in einer höhern Einheit zusammengehen, sie meditiert und meditiert. Dagegen scheint sie mir durchaus nicht auf das zu antworten, wonach ich frage; denn ich frage nach der zukünftigen Zeit. (...). Die Philosophie sagt: So ist es bisher gewesen; ich frage: Was habe ich zu tun, wenn ich kein Philosoph sein will?

everything is fixed, forward “free action might change everything”¹⁹. Marx said the same concurrently: “revolutionary”, “practical-critical activity” can “change the world”²⁰.

At September 15 the subject was back to politics. Ironically, *neoliberal* American leaders, Ben Bernanke, Hank Paulson and Georg Bush made a U-Turn in full speed. “Paulson confronted his staff with the prospect of an ‘economic 9/ 11.’ On the morning of September 20, the US Treasury secretary alerted Congress to the fact that unless they acted fast, \$ 5.5 trillion in wealth would disappear by two p.m. They might be facing the collapse of the world economy ‘within 24 hours.’ In private session with congressional leadership, Bernanke ... warned that unless they authorized immediate action, ‘we may not have an economy on Monday’ ”²¹.

Without the “heartbeat of the revolution” (Habermas) that (according to Marx) is *legislative power* that (according to Marx) once “produced the French revolution (and) all great, organic revolutions”²² without unprecedented legislative decisions for *unlimited bailout and growth programs*; without the *flooding of America and Europe* with the money of the *Federal Reserve* (and against the cowardice resistance of Merkel, Steinbrück and Sarkozy, who stuck to the their selfish genes); without these *revolutionary activities* no spontaneous evolution, no self-organized market, no neoliberal theory would have saved us from *the worst financial crisis in global history*.²³

This was, certainly, not pure voluntarism, as Adam Tooze insinuates in his path-breaking book on the crisis. Tooze himself shows that it is (according to Marx) the “flash of thought” that “inspires material might to political power.”²⁴ The neoliberal agencies drew

(...) Für die Philosophie ist die Weltgeschichte abgeschlossen. (...) Wie, wenn ich nun in ihrem Namen die Philosophie fragte, was ein Mensch im Leben zu tun habe? Du lächelst, und doch meine ich, es ist in Wahrheit eine furchtbare Anklage wider sie, wenn sie darauf nicht antworten kann.“ (Kierkegaard, Entweder/ Oder – Ein Lebensfragment, herausgegeben von Victor Eremita, Berlin: Holzinger 2013, 465f).

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, Entweder/ Oder, 346.

²⁰ Marx, Thesen über Feuerbach (Theses 1, 11), in: MEW 3, Berlin: Dietz 1973, 5-7, at 5, English translation quoted from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm> (2.6.2019)..

²¹ Tooze, Crashed, 165f.

²² Marx, Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts §§ 261–313, MEW 1 Berlin: Dietz 1976, 213-333, hier: 260. Therefore, Habermas calls the legislative power the “heartbeat of the revolution” (Ist der Herzschlag der Revolution zum Stillstand gekommen? In: Forum für Philosophie, Ed., Die Ideen von 1789, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1989, 7-36, at 7). The latently revolutionary character of the legislature enables a “permanent revolution that is legal” (Habermas, Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1999, 62; vgl. a. Habermas, Faktizität und Geltung. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1992, 228, 374, 612ff; Ingeborg Maus, Zur Aufklärung der Demokratietheorie, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1992) because it presupposes the permanence of the *pouvoir constituant* within parliamentary democracy (Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, Die verfassungsgebende Gewalt des Volkes – Ein Grenzbegriff des Verfassungsrechts, Frankfurt: Metner, 1986).

²³ See Tooze, Crashed, 166ff, 189ff, 236, 290f, 332ff.

²⁴ Marx, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung, in: MEW 1, Berlin 1976, 378–391, hier: 391, 389.

Keynesian *inferences* from neoliberal *failure*, and besides *technical* they had *normative* reasons.

Different from Europe's leaders, who converted late and followed neoliberal doctrines heteronomously, the American leaders grew up with them, and justified them autonomously (*Selbstdenken*)²⁵. Therefore, they were able to learn "lessons from history," and especially Ben Bernanke "turned out to be an unusual but highly significant case" of learning lessons from history.²⁶

How does learning lessons from history work? – We can assume with Marx that social agencies such as the working class or political leaders have "accepted (*anerkannt*) the spontaneous (*naturwüchsige*) product of a long and painful development (...) by education, tradition, habit (...) as self-evident laws of Nature."²⁷ However, *education, tradition, habit* are not only, as Kant wrote, a "second nature" of "self-imposed ... nonage" that (according to Marx) "weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."²⁸ *Education, tradition, habit* at a certain stage of historical development, also maintain the *counter-memory* (Jan Assmann) of (according to Kant) "progress for the better" that is empirically embodied in the great revolutions which are "too momentous, too intimately interwoven with the interests of humanity ... not to be reminded ... when favourable circumstances present themselves, and

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? Werkausgabe XI, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977, 51-61, hier: 55. English: <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> (3.6.2019). On the constitution of autonomy through internalizing authority see Habermas, Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns Bd. 2, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1981, 63f, 78, 93. The process of internalizing authority through (according to Schelling) "Submission unter das Höhere (submission under higher power)" finally forces the submissive subject to follow a normative imperative out of his or her own position and to take the initial duty to justify that norm from its own point of view (see Habermas, Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2019, 217, forthcoming), and this makes learning in a way impossible because the subject now is able to change her or his affirmation to the originally imposed norm not only arbitrarily but reasonably through thinking and talking (*Selbstdenken*) about the norm's value, validity etc. (Habermas, kommunikatives Handeln II, 93ff). Therefore, Habermas argues again and again that we "regain and regenerate our self only" dialectically "through self-surrender (*Selbstpreisgabe*)" (Habermas, Eine Hypothese zum gattungsgeschichtlichen Sinn des Ritus, in: Nachmetaphysisches Denken, II, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2012, 77-95, at 85).

²⁶ "Ben Bernakes placid and undersized persona would soon come to occupy an outsized space in global economic history. He would turn out to be an unusual but highly significant case of the possibility of 'learning lessons from history'." (Tooze, Crashed, 40). This resembles, by the way, Marx' description of true revolutionaries such as Cromwell, Napoleon (Marx Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte, in MEGA I/11, Berlin: Dietz 1985,96-189, at 173) and Lincoln (Marx, Zu den Ereignissen in Nordamerika, Die Presse Nr. 281, 12. Oktober 1862, in: Marx/ Engels, Studienausgabe IV: Geschichte und Politik II, Frankfurt: Fischer 1990, 185-187, at 186f) vis à vis pathetic and pompous populist leaders such as Louis Bonaparte or the false idealism that European monarchs used to justify their predatory wars, etc.). On learning from history see: Habermas, Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung, in: Zeit-Online 11. Juli 1986 (<https://www.zeit.de/1986/29/eine-art-schadensabwicklung> 9.5.2019).

²⁷ Marx, Kapital I, 94, 765, English <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> (3.6.2019).

²⁸ Kant, Aufklärung, 53f; Marx, 18. Brumaire, 97. Kant's „beinahe zur Natur gewordene Unmündigkeit" has been translated with the Hegelian term "second nature" – and rightly so.

to rise up and make renewed attempts of the same kind as before” – during the French revolution.²⁹

Kant, certainly, was not a liberal reformist in revolutionary times³⁰. He knew that our “mindset” (*Denkungsart*) is in deep need of a “reform” according to principles³¹. Nevertheless, social relations that allow ruling classes (as Kant says with a quote from Job 15:16) “to drink injustice like water” have to be “revolutionized” beforehand – if not peaceably, then by force.³²

As all learning, learning from history is problem-solving, and the French revolution solved problems of *egalitarian self-government*, of *overcoming structural social conflicts* by regime-change, of generating power by *constitutional patriotism*, that is for Kant the “true enthusiasm” of “revolutionaries” who take “arms for the *rights* of the people.” Such constitutional enthusiasm proved to be stronger than the armies of Kings and Kaisers who invaded France in 1792 with their “monetary rewarded” soldiers, and the false “martial honour” of their noble leaders³³. Thus, a cultural counter-memory emerged that (according to Thornhill) gave the „democratic ideals promoted in the revolutionary period a certain enduring reality.”³⁴

Revolutionary learning processes have a long history. Paradigmatic is the internal (*entwicklungsglogische*) relation between the biblical stories of *Job* and *Exodus*. Job’s dire fate testifies that human *individuals* are capable of acting autonomously in accordance with

²⁹ Kant, *Streit der Fakultäten*, Werkausgabe XI, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977, 263-393, at 357f, 361. English Kant’s *Political Writings*, Ed. Hans Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1970, 185. On counter-memory: Jan Assmann, *Politische Theologie zwischen Ägypten und Israel*, München: Siemens-Stiftung 1992, 103.

³⁰ This is a German pre-democratic and liberal myth. Pathbreaking: Lea Ypi, *On Revolution in Kant and Marx*, in: *Political Theory* 32, 3/ 2014, 262-287.

³¹ And so is the institutionally embodied *Denkungsart*, see Kant, *Aufklärung*, 55; Claudia Langer, *Reform nach Prinzipien*, Stuttgart: Klett 1986.

³² Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, in: *Werke* Bd. 11, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977, 191-251, at 216 (meine Übers.); Kant, *Fakultäten*, 359, English 183. Kant (publishing under strong pressure of censorship) argued already before the French revolution that a “revolution” may be necessary, and not for a “true reform of *Denkungsart*” but to “bring about the end of a personal despotism or of avaricious tyrannical oppression” (*Aufklärung*, 55) Education, the most important medium of a reform of *Denkungsart*, is necessary for autonomy but makes no sense in a state “that uses all the money for war.” (Kant, *Fakultäten*, 366).

³³ Kant, *Fakultäten*, 359, English 183. Also Arendt’s concept of power is not just pacifistic but includes the use of military power under certain conditions, see Brunkhorst, *Reluctant democratic egalitarianism: Hannah Arendt’s idea of a revolutionary foundation of the modern nation state and international law*, in: *Ethical Perspectives* 15, 2/2008, 149-168, at 158f. On constitutional patriotism see Habermas, *Staatsbürgerschaft und nationale Identität*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1991.

³⁴ Christopher Thornhill, *Sociology of Law and Global Transformation of Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018, 41f.

universal moral truth³⁵. Job's supererogatory action raises *hope* of "progress for the better" but, as Kant says, it is "only hope" ("*allein hoffen läßt*")³⁶. To get from Job's desperate hope into a real and historical "tendency" of *progress* ("*selbst schon ein solcher ist*") it needs the prophetic turn of *Exodus* toward *collective* agencies who strive for *emancipation on the basis of unconditioned morality*.^[36] Therefore, the prophetic imperative is: Justice must not submit to evolutionary adaptation but adaptation to justice. *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus* is, according to Kant's translation, a revolutionary idea: "Let justice rule on earth, although all the rogues in the world should go to the bottom" – such as the *monetary rewarded* soldiers and the *martial nobles* of 1792 – or the *rogues in the neoliberal world* of 2008.³⁷

In fall 2008 Bernanke, Bush, Paulson, the democratic majority of Congress and Gordon Brown from the Thatcherite labor party proved that they had learned the lessons from 1929. They did not make a great revolution, but a revolutionary U-Turn in full speed, and realized the *interest of all of us* by transforming the *Federal Reserve* into a „liquidity provider of last resort for the global banking system"³⁸. "Quantitative easing, liquidity swap lines, or "whatever it takes" – *although all the rogues in the neoliberal world should go to the bottom*³⁹. Conservative social media activists urged their followers to tweet "Bernanke has

³⁵ Kant, Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Menschheit in weltbürgerlicher Absicht, in: Werkausgabe XI, 31-50, at 34f. Kant still refers to "natural capabilities" (Naturanlage), even a "plan of nature" instead of historically acquired evolutionary capabilities (see above). But once "mere hope" has been replaced by revolutionary "progress toward the better" (Kant, Fakultäten, 358), there is no longer need for ominous natural capacities or plans. Progress exists already as cultural counter-memory that enables the progressive continuation of revolutionary praxis, and hope's basis becomes historical.

³⁶ Kant, Fakultäten, 358.

³⁷ Kant, Frieden, 241. English: Kant, Perpetual Peace, London: Allen 1917, 179. Forward living, agencies learn to destroy the existing mundus, and to replace it by a new world that enables all people to "make their own history ... under self-selected circumstances" (Marx, Brumaire, 96), and the legal text-book of that self-selection is the democratic constitution. This meaning of "constitution" is in accordance with Kant (Metaphysik der Sitten, § 46, Werke Bd. VIII, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977, 432ff), Marx (Staatsrecht, 229f), Hannah Arendt (Über die Revolution, München: Piper 1974, 41f, 193, 199f), Wolfgang Abendroth (Zum Begriff des demokratischen und sozialen Rechtsstaats im Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in: Ernst Forsthoff, Ed., Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Sozialstaatlichkeit, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1968 [1954], 114-144), Maus (Aufklärung), Habermas (Faktizität) etc..

³⁸ Tooze, Crashed, 9, see 218f. "The US Federal Reserve engaged in a truly spectacular innovation. It established itself as liquidity provider of last resort to the global banking system. It provided dollars to all comers in New York, whether banks were American or not. Through so-called liquidity swap lines, the Fed licensed a hand-picked group of core central banks to issue dollar credits on demand. In a huge burst of transatlantic activity, with the European Central Bank (ECB) in the lead, they pumped trillions of dollars into the European banking system." (Tooze, Crashed, 9).

³⁹ Tooze, Crashed, 11. As Marx Tooze goes back to metaphors of the theaters to describe the world-historically new: „The political theater being played in Washington, DC, was new and strange. A conservative, free-market administration led by businessmen was proposing unlimited state spending to nationalize a large part of the housing finance system. The Republican electorate was outraged (...). And President Bush stood behind him. 'It was a tremendous act of political courage,' Paulson gushed, 'It was as if, in the last days of his administration, the president were suddenly switching sides, supporting Democrats and opposing Republicans on matters that went against the basic principles of his administration.' Paulson recognized that the authorization he was asking

blood on his hands.”⁴⁰ How incomplete all these measures to change the neoliberal world finally stayed, they *opened the horizon for political action*.

So far the good news for the future of democracy. The bad news comes from Europe.

When Europe faced a “monetary Stalingrad,” Steinbrück appealed to national self-interest: „Not our problem.“ „No talk of joint bailouts.“⁴¹ Merkel added a poem line from Goethe: „Ein jeder kehre vor seiner Tür, und rein ist jedes Stadtquartier” (*Everyone should sweep in front of his door and every city quarter will be clean*).⁴² Self-righteously Steinbrück explained the crisis by „America’s laissez-faire ideology,” and predicted “the end of Anglo-American capitalism.”⁴³ Even in 2009, Sarkozy and Steinbrück dreamed of the Euro as the new reserve currency.⁴⁴ „It is hard to see how either Steinbrück or Sarkozy could have been more out of touch with reality.”⁴⁵ Self-deception became the European mindset.⁴⁶

However, since 2008 *politics is back*.⁴⁷ Occupy Wall Street replied to Merkel’s poetic line with a prosaic line from Goethe: “None are more hopelessly enslaved than those

for was unprecedented. ‘I don’t know if any executive branch agency had ever before been given the authority to lend to or invest in an enterprise in an unlimited amount’.” (Tooze, *Crashed*, 177f).

⁴⁰ “Blood on Bernanke’s Hands,” in: Mish’s Global Economic Trend Analysis, January 27, 2011, <https://www.google.com/search?q=http%3A%2F%2Fglobaleconomicanalysis.blogspot.com%2F+2011%2F+01%2F+blood-on-bernankes-hands-riots-in-egypt.html&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-e> (12.06.2019). quoted from Tooze, *Crashed*, 376.

⁴¹ *Economist*, Feb. 19, 2009, quoted from Tooze, *Crashed*, 236; Steinbrück quoted from Tooze, *Crashed*, 190.

⁴² So she represented it to the press, according to a British official she said: „Chacun sa merde!” (To each his own shit!), Tooze, *Crashed*, 289ff. Short time later Merkel promised as if she were the Queen of Europe: “There will be no collectivization of debt in the European Union for as long as I live.” (439).

⁴³ Tooze, *Crashed*, 96, 196. A few days after September 15 Jean Claude Juncker appeased his fellow citizens: „I see no reason why we should mount a US-style programme in Europe.” (191). Steinbrück’s self-righteous was trumped only by Barroso who snapped back to a Canadian journalist critical of European austerity: „Frankly, we are not here to receive lessons in terms of democracy or in terms of how to handle the economy (...). This crisis (...) originated in North-America, and much of our financial sector was contaminated by (...) unorthodox practices, from some sectors of the financial markets,” and he added pompously offensive: “Europe is a community of democracies.” (437). At the same time (and short time before the final end of his presidency) he had already a contract with a leading American investment bank in his pockets.

⁴⁴ Tooze, *Crashed*, 221.

⁴⁵ Tooze, *Crashed*, 223.

⁴⁶ Vgl. Habermas, *Journalistenpreis* (Berlin 4. Juli 2018). Habermas writes in this paper: „Nach meiner Beobachtung hat der seit Kohl einsetzende Mentalitätswandel zur gefeierten Normalität eines endlich wieder vereinten Nationalstaates dieses Selbstverständnis mit anderen Akzenten versehen und verstetigt. Schließlich hat sich dieses Bild im Zuge der Banken- und Staatsschuldenkrise und der widerstreitenden nationalen Krisennarrative immer selbstbezogener verhärtet und zunehmend Züge einer mauvaise fois angenommen. Der faule Fleck in dieser gutgläubigen Selbsttäuschung verrät sich im dissonanten Moment unseres Misstrauens gegenüber der Kooperationsbereitschaft anderer Nationen, insbesondere gegenüber dem europäischen Süden.“

⁴⁷ And it had become clear that politics never was back but always was present, and that it needs as much if not more political interventionism to keep market-radicalism running as it needed to keep a socialist planned economy running, see Offe, *Europe Entrapped*, 7ff.

who falsely believe they are free”⁴⁸. The uprising of the left government of Greece was a first manifestation of radical counter-memory. Even *revolution is back* – on the reading lists and the theater stages. The Amsterdam Rijksmuseum this year dropped the businessman, and presented Rembrandt proudly as – “rebel”⁴⁹. These days, the *New York Times* seriously discusses democratic socialism, and the abolishment of billionaires.

⁴⁸ See

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street#/media/Datei:Day_12_Occupy_Wall_Street_September_28_2011_Shankbone_33.JPG (12.06.2019). The quote is from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*.

⁴⁹ Vahland, *Der Menschenfreund*.