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### THE DEMONIC IS NOT PRIVILEGE OF THE NIGHT\* by PHILIPP KLEINMICHEL

"There is enough light, and yet the work on light continues, and perhaps one day our light bulbs will only resemble dim murky lights. Thus all continues without end, there is no limit, at which man could say: now all has been exhausted." *Kasimir Malevich, God Is Not Cast Down*

In the race of time various hopes and ideas have been associated with Aurora, the goddess of dawn. In the past, the metaphor of dawn was used particularly to give expression to the hope for and the will to bring about the future. However, after the totalitarian catastrophes of the twentieth century, dawn today seems to carry quite different connotations. The survivors of last century's midnight carnival stand relieved in the natural light of the coming day after a demonic night, much like the survivors of the Titty Twister in Robert Rodriguez' film "From Dusk Till Dawn". Yesterday's battles finally seem to have come to an end, gone are the dreams of a good and rational future. Retrospectively the promise of the future to reshape man and reality according to rational criterions appears like a presumptuous nightmare. Today only the surviving dead of the past whisper to us out of the future. The future has lost the eroticism of its auspicious temptation, which once motivated the locomotion, the striving onward movement of history and culture. This progress of humanity today only stands for a scaring bloodthirstiness, the result of enticement by the mirage of the future.

And yet, whether one submits to the seductive metaphor of the dawn or not, dawn is necessarily followed by day, night and be the subsequent dawn. Even though it lends itself to description of such different moments, as the seduction by the future or the already experienced salvation from history, it always already implies the promise of the past, as well as that of an uncertain future. Therefore contemporary discourse, translated into the imagery of dawn, also must be construed as a promise of salvation. Thus, paradoxically, the contemporary lure of the dawn seems to consist in the possibility to exclude itself, i.e. the possibility of seduction by the future, as a false and seductive illusion of the demonic night. Neither day nor night, but the difference of sunset extending between the two, shall become eternally present. This attempt at the stabilization of the differential is still apparent in the promise of happiness of 24-hour shopping malls, 24-hour diners and in the after-hour parties of the western metropolises. For a while now, day has been turned into night and night into day, the difference between the two canceled out. Each day resembles the next and the cycle of the sun is degrading to a meaningless spectacle of nature. While the totalitarian projects of the twentieth century were still subject to demonization by means of biographical anecdotes, which underlined of the fact that despots such as Stalin and Mao predominantly worked at night, nowadays-nocturnal activity seems to have been completely profaned and neutralized. If the future of the clearly defined day and the clearly defined night is to be thus deferred, there no longer

seems to be any telos either. Beyond all ludicrous idealistic goals, only factual issues are to be resolved. But as these did not appear out of nowhere, they refer back to that new war for domination of the sun, which is not simply "fun" – as Frederic Jameson labeled the aesthetization of reality in the aftermath of abysmal modernity. Because even (and especially) so-called factual or technical issues are always already constructed necessities. In their background stands a constructed and normative societal order. In its ideological inner, the erection and expansion of the existing order are ruled by the idea of the eternal deferral of the future, exactly like in the utopian projects of the early twentieth century. When the post-communist present is viewed from this perspective of a logic of dawn, all attempts to found a stable and perfect world order directly resemble into the fundamental experiments of the twentieth century. With the traumatic fear of impending death and the collapse of all existing circumstances behind one's back, the eternal present must be installed, and the sooner the better. For this reason, however, in contrast to the admittedly utopian projects of the twentieth century, neither the aim nor the act of construction itself must be voiced. The unstoppable transformation of society must appear as an unrulable force of nature, for which man no longer carries any responsibility: there must be no one, no identifiable subject, which might assume responsibility or be held responsible for the changes. No program, no manifest exists for the artificial-artistic creation of this order. It is supposed to appear as a mere consequence of unstoppable, disseminating decisions, of unrecognizable dispositives of power, which all equally refer to an unrulable new nature just as much as to an intransparent new god. The thought alone, that these new laws of nature and faith correspond to a constructed and changeable, that is to say, a politically as well as militarily enforced order of oikos and nomos, and that these laws are therefore more than relative, is so "ostracized" that it seems to completely fade from memory. The broad political hatred from all political camps, with which a neo-conservative defender of Western culture such as George W. Bush is met, is therefore less concerned with the active expansion of democratic capitalism - or a godly-economical truth – than with the exquisite provocation, to lend expression to the political as well as military conditions of this truth with all ideological apparentness and "proletaroid" rhetoric. It therefore does not seem too problematic either, that ethical wars are fought in the name of human rights, but that suddenly an authority, an instance of power and decision-making has become visible, which decides about war and peace, friend and enemy, good and bad. Because the provocation refers directly to the "ostracized" and repressed fact, that global human and environmental rights, corresponding executive and controlling authorities, as well as the ethical guidelines of a further and further developing bio-politics and technical control of life, are in the end constructed, too. And these constructions are not the result of a higher truth, but of human ideals, interpretations and practices, which – with equally utopian and vanguard purpose – aim at the expansion of a contemporary and peaceful eternity without future. This everyday circumscription and reconfiguration of life was thus already achieved prior to George W. Bush and his neo-conservative think-tanks, politically and militarily, ethically as well as morally.

Viewed up close, the attempt to stabilize the difference, the gap between day and night, must be viewed as another war for domination of the sun. In essence, just as in the heroic times of the political and artistic avant-garde, we are today still facing the utopian attempt to prevail over the sun, in order to exclude the future and the unchangeable cycle of day and night. Because if the advent of the seductive ideal of the future truly means the destruction and death of everything preexisting, then day and its dark reverse become unacceptable. With the disguised intention to score a victory over the sun, the present – far from being the enlightened and good Other – seamlessly fastens on to the history of the twentieth century, and to the entire cultural history of mankind.

But the history of the twentieth century was also the history of extreme tension between art and politics, because in its avant-gardist moments, art insisted on participating in the recreation and perfecting of man and the world. Contemporary art seeks to avoid such claims, which only bespeak a bad thirst for power. Thus today's political strategies of art consist either in the pointing up of certain grievances and social discrepancies or in pushing an inverted transformation of reality – i.e. translating the graveness of reality into art and play, recreating real competitions for recognition and real projects by means of symbolic fights. For if it were possible to turn a not insignificant part of humanity into artists, this would not only prevent the momentous interference of art with reality, but conversely, the tremendous graveness of reality itself would be transformed into artistic nonsense. Such a transformation of sense into nonsense, of seriousness into play seems possible and paradoxically sensible insofar as museums, galleries and academies of art are themselves always already part of reality. With Andy Warhol, the resolution, in tune with the Zeitgeist, still seems to consist in the transcription of supermarkets into art supermarkets. Jacques Rancière supplies this aesthetico-political transformation with a seemingly solid theoretical grounding in his theory of the aesthetic regime. Rancière, too, points to the indifference of art and reality, which, at least from the beginning of German Idealism onward, allows for retrospective identification of all objects and practices as aesthetic and thus as art. The experience of an absolute aesthetic regime, in which all is sensually given and all has thus always already potentially become art, seems to confirm the demands of the classical avant-garde once more, yet just as much points up its totalitarian madness. Because when, from the perspective of an absolute aesthetics, every element of the present always already appears as part of a holistic aesthetic and artistic reality, art does not even have to become active in terms of power, since in that sense, as part of this holistic interrelation, it is always already active. From Rancière's point of view, the only concrete politics of art therefore seems to be a politics of disinterest. In a state of pure aesthetic disinterest, art is to bring every political activity as well as its other side, the mourning and lamenting passivity, into an eternal state of tension. Art is to totally dedicate itself to the spirit of the times and to appear between day and night as the promise of an eternal dawn. However convincing and seductive this idealistic view may sound today, it misses the simple fact, that a difference between art and reality is the precondition to all appreciation of practices and objects – that are in fact always already sensual, or, as may be the case, aesthetic givens - as art in the first place. If such a difference exists, however, the differentiation between fun play beyond reality and this very grave and monstrous reality itself is necessarily preserved. Precisely this was the reason for the consequent insight of the classical avant-garde, consisting in its understanding of the fact, that the differentiation between reality of life and unreality, between the real and the fictitious, although in essence absurd, is nevertheless not inefficient. And correspondingly it was not enough for the classical avant-garde to view everything real as in equal degrees aesthetic. This insight should and could only become reality for the avant-garde through artistic work on the actual cancellation of the difference. The phenomenon of the classical avant-garde therefore does not bespeak a state of being turned to face the past in a fearful hex, desiring to avoid the onset of the future, but rather the attempt to bring about said future's manifestation. After all, from the movement's point of view, even the attempt of avoiding the future would have always already been result of the same eternally-unfathomable seductive impulse, which – deprived of the possibility of both reversal and realization of the future – leads to the "cosmic atomization" (Malevich) of mankind.

For this reason, the dawn will in fact always be subject to varying interpretation, but once installed, the artificial light of the avant-garde, revealing the insatiable beast of seduction, excitement and movement in the neon gleam, presents the unstoppable progress of day and night. Rodriguez' film from the 90s likewise does not end with the

view of the relieving and hopeful dawn, but with a tracking shot down into the chasms of vampirical horror. If today's present of medially conveyed terrorist attacks, prison camps and natural catastrophes – in accordance with Rodriguez' ominous prophecy of the 90s – is more and more often interpreted as a dawn or even as the night of an absolute state of exception, not even this interpretation should be the cause of much distress. For with Nietzsche, a masterly interpreter of the dawn, we can assure, that there will be many more.

**\* This text is a translation of Philipp Kleinmichel's contribution to the group show's catalogue 'Aurora – between day and night' at BWA Awangarda Gallery Wroclaw in Poland in April 2007.**

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