

bodies opposition to reality and negation of the existing social situation. ‘The profound force of resistance’ that Adorno ascribes to certain artistic renditions lies in their particular ability to ‘negatively intimate an “imageless image of Utopia” as something beautiful’.

Much criticism of Adorno, much of it justified, is that his theory remains a mere theory without providing ways for action, and, moreover, that his theory thwarts the possibility of action. When asked in an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, three months before his death, ‘But how would one go about changing societal totality without individual action?’, he replied: ‘I do not know. I can only analyze relentlessly what is. In the process, I am reproached in the following manner: “If you criticize, you have to say how to do better”, but I consider this a bourgeois prejudice.’ Truskolaski is of course aware of this criticism, and cites Adorno’s words from ‘Marginalia on Theory and Praxis’ where he identifies the division between thought and action with the separation of subject and object. ‘Just as the division of subject and object cannot be revoked immediately by a decree of thought, so too an immediate unity of theory and praxis is hardly possible: it would imitate the false

identity of subject and object and would perpetuate the principle of domination that posits identity and that a true praxis must oppose.’

Truskolaski’s book offers, on behalf of Adorno, another answer to this critique, an answer that is a kind of compromise between passive theory and active action: active thinking. As opposed to Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in C Minor, Arnold Schoenberg’s music is given by Adorno as an example of a music that manages to dismantle the sense of cohesion and organicity in Western classical music, thus representing the continuing suffering. Adorno’s admiration for the composer stems from Schoenberg being able to shatter the familiar experience, the pleasant melody, and demand the listener’s active participation. It ‘requires the listener to spontaneously compose his inner movement and demands of him not contemplation but praxis.’ Adorno’s image ban, as the book shows, does exactly this: it requires from us an active way of approaching and thinking about nature, images, representations, and thus serves as a philosophical critique ‘which aims to hold open the possibility that things might yet be otherwise’.

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Witchcraft as praxis

Jack Z. Bratich, *On Microfascism: Gender, War, and Death* (Philadelphia: Common Notions, 2022). 240pp., \$20 pb., 978 1 94217 349 6

Unacquainted readers may think that ‘microfascism’ is perhaps analogous to contemporary terms such as ‘micro-aggression’: the prefix ‘micro’ implying a simple reduction in scale and scope for actions representing larger systems. But *microfascism is not just small fascism*. If fascism is a certain arrangement and organisation of material, political and social institutions, microfascism is relegated to the realm of subjectivity. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s exploration of the idea, Bratich gives three main characteristics of microfascism: ‘1) it takes place “before” but really *in excess* of the state; 2) it exists in minds but moreover in desires, bodies and practices; and 3) it is composed in culture to create individual and collective actions with their own specific fascist results’. Mi-

crofascism does nevertheless have common traits with its ideological namesake. The driving philosophical motor behind both fascism and microfascism is the same: palingenetic restoration/renewal – or, in other words, ‘the continuous revival and return of the “original”’ – and eliminationism.

In a fascist framework, these terms can be grasped with basic examples. One could equate palingenetic restoration/renewal to the obsession with enabling the ‘Aryan race’ to thrive through military power and geographical living space. Palingenetic eliminationism can be understood as the attitude Nazi Germany would have towards various groups that were deemed antagonistic toward Aryan flourishing: Jews, Roma, the disabled, com-

munists, homosexuals, etc. What becomes more difficult is understanding these terms in a microfascist framework, which is what most of the book aims to achieve. The object of restoration/renewal is much more elusive within microfascism because it is the individual subjectivity of each microfascist. The palingenetic restoration/renewal of individual subjectivity results in what Bratich calls the 'autogenetic sovereign', more commonly known as the 'self-made man'; or the 'subject [that] can create itself *ex nihilo*'.

Palingenetic eliminationism also receives an extra layer of complexity when moving into microfascism. Under fascism, enemies are eliminated through various means of total annihilation: extermination, euthanasia and castration. Under microfascism, however, simple annihilation is no longer possible. Bratich argues throughout the book that within microfascism, the primordial antagonism, the dialectical *sine qua non*, is gender. Autogenetic sovereign men are carrying out eliminationism against women. The problem, then, is simply logistical: men cannot annihilate all women because they are required for the perpetuation of humanity. But for Bratich, gendered eliminationism doesn't have to be an unequivocal death sentence. It can be a long term neutralisation, a 'slow death' or 'a reduction of capacities towards the null'. The microfascist is thus in a constant struggle to the death with women without having the option of adopting the large-scale, industrial eliminationism seen under twentieth-century fascism. From this tension comes a new form of eliminationism: microfascist *flight*. Following Julius Evola's teachings, the microfascist views the material realm as the 'domination of Mother Earth and the Mothers of life and fertility'. The trajectory of microfascism is that of a 'flight from materiality into abstractions, even spiritual forms'.

In addition to a philosophical analysis of microfascism, Bratich looks at various real-world expressions of it. These examples are not purely pedagogical. Indeed, there is a sense of urgency and responsibility to Bratich's project which is found within the first pages of the introduction. He argues that fascism is elusive and constantly undergoing transformations in order to survive, an idea which is at odds with how fascism is commonly seen historically: that is, as an event of the first half of the twentieth century, in the past, to be studied. For Bratich, fascism is much more resilient than conventional histor-

ical narratives would imply, and so, as with fascism, it is important to understand microfascism as it exists in the present. To do so, he explores the three main areas of microfascist expression: gender, war and death. He is careful to use contemporary examples in each section to reinforce the idea of an alive and present threat.



For gender, one of the most insightful examples Bratich looks at is that of the problem of female reproductivity. Indeed, the need for women to (ironically) produce self-made men is a barrier toward eliminationism. Due to this, microfascism seeks to take control of women's power of reproduction, to the point where 'females [are made] redundant in the very sphere where they are made indispensable – that of reproduction'. This is perhaps the primary goal of patriarchy as a whole: disempowering women to the point where they can no longer contest men over matters of reproduction. Because if women have any degree of autonomy over reproduction, then men are bound to the material world. In claiming the power of reproduction for themselves by eliminating women (either literally or effectively), men will vanquish materiality and enable a deeper dive into abstraction. One tactic is to culturally control women's sexuality, to

promote a kind of sexuality that is suitable to the microfascist, and to severely punish dissidents. Such a reaction was seen in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings which were carried out due to the killer's 'need to eliminate temptation by sex workers'. The shootings were also a retaliation against the women's autonomy over their bodies, which are inseparable from reproductive power for the microfascist. Bratich shows that when the slow (cultural) death is not sufficient, current-day microfascism can turn to the physical annihilation typical to twentieth-century fascism.

Despite never entering an all-out military war with its foes (unlike fascism), microfascists constantly define themselves through the language of warfare. This is because microfascism relies on a state of perpetual struggle; without struggle there is no space for the material man to renew himself through abstraction and become the autogenetic sovereign. Bratich will look at the different formations microfascists take in preparation for war: the decentralised, but not isolated, lone wolf; the mass shooter as influencer or 'inspo-shooter' for future shooters; the 'loosely auto-organized ... and quasi-independent' groupuscules; and the cultural unit of the squad. Each formation will come with its own empirical examples, from shooter manifestos to the 'Army for Trump'. But of all these formations, the most interesting is undoubtedly that of the *Männerbund*. Translated typically as "warrior societies", "warrior bands", "military confraternities", or "men's societies", the *Männerbund* combines at once the gender and war aspects of microfascism. While the other formations do not require a certain relationship with gender, the *Männerbund* is defined by it. Looking once again at Julius Evola, Bratich finds that 'entry into the *Männerbund* is thoroughly masculinized against the feminine, resulting in a "higher man" who functions via war as autogenetic sovereignty'. Bratich looks at contemporary forms of initiation into the *Männerbund*, most notably redpilling. What he finds is that these warlike initiation rituals revolve once again around a specific 'gender conversion', where men undergo a 'manospheric metamorphosis' upon seeing the 'truth' about 'feminism's pernicious effects, grounded in misandry'. The gendered aspect of microfascism is both fundamental and ubiquitous.

The last element of microfascism that Bratich studies is necrotics or, more simply, death. Death is central to the

microfascist dialectic. Bratich relates various elements of socio-political life to death through contemporary terms and some neologisms: 'necropolitics' and 'necropolitical sovereignty'; microfascism as a 'deathstyle' rather than a lifestyle; 'necrocapitalism' and 'necro-economics'; the 'Necrocene' instead of the Anthropocene; and, finally, the heavily gendered 'necrophilia'. The picture that Bratich paints is clear – under microfascism, everything is made to die and death is what gives the microfascist his *élan vital*. The creation of the autogenetic sovereign relies on the death of all things surrounding it, such as women, the economy, civil society, even the planet itself. With this penultimate chapter, Bratich shows that the implications of microfascism are anything but microscopic.

Having given his account of microfascism as a relevant force in today's world, Bratich can begin his discussion of micro-antifascist/anti-microfascist praxis, which is perhaps the most important part of the book. For Bratich, there is no sense in offering a philosophical analysis of microfascism. Given how prevalent microfascism is in today's world and the destructive effects it has, Bratich argues that it is necessary to discuss forms of micro-antifascist praxis in addition to any analysis.

While the idea will be attractive to the politically-oriented reader, the actual content of this chapter proves to be disappointing. Instead of offering real avenues for political praxis, Bratich simply presents more philosophical analysis under the guise of praxis. What the chapter provides is an exploration of what is the inverse of microfascism in today's world. Bratich does not guide the reader in ways to combat microfascism; he is content with outlining the philosophical counters or 'doublings' to it. This analysis culminates with Bratich's discussion of witchcraft. He argues that the witch is the ultimate inversion of the microfascist: where he seeks the abstract, she seeks the concrete; where he venerates death, she venerates life; where he flees mimesis and materiality, she flees hyperindividualisation and exclusion. This may be philosophically powerful, but where is the praxis? What is Bratich's practical advice to readers? To become witches? Or to integrate witchcraft into culture to compete with microfascist culture? If so, then how must this be done? What are the avenues to pursue for the anti-microfascist? Are they social? Institutional? Political? The closest Bratich gets to suggesting any practical approach is to 'reappropriate humour, play, and platforms

to preempt forms of microfascism from crystallizing'. But again, this form of praxis is much closer to analysis than a practical handbook.

Outside of the substance of Bratich's book, there is another problem that arises when evaluating its practical ambitions. *On Microfascism* has a distinct formal issue. For a book that repeatedly reminds us of the importance of praxis, it is surprisingly inaccessible to the reader. This is not because the substantive ideas are exceedingly complex, but because the form in which they are presented is unnecessarily abstract and inaccessible, to the point where accessing the substance becomes its own challenge while reading. Despite Bratich's attempt to separate the book into three sections (gender, war and death), gender is always at the forefront. When discussing war, Bratich is in fact discussing the war against women. When discussing death, it is a death fuelled by gendered conceptions of the material, spiritual and social world. Because of this constant return to gender, the internal organisation of chapters three and four, on war and

necrotics, becomes elusive and ambiguous. There is no argumentative line to follow; instead, Bratich gives more detailed and niche examples of the different gendered aspects of microfascism.

This movement toward the niche brings with it its own set of problems. Bratich indulges too heavily in philosophical neologisms and jargon in an endless effort to connect the different aspects of microfascism to gender in a novel manner. Many of these neologisms will appear a single time in the book and will never be referenced or used again. In more egregious cases, Bratich will make use of very specific jargon but will not explain the meaning of the terms he uses until twenty, thirty, or even forty pages later, if at all. There is a tragic irony behind the idea that one must be experienced in philosophy to even be able to read a book that so fervently preaches the importance of real-world praxis and practicality. And this is, ultimately, the biggest disappointment of *On Microfascism*.

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