

Oscar Pichardo Isaak

## An Algorithmic Socialism in Defense of the Lived Without Life: A Political Proposal through Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals by Katerina Kolozova

Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (London - New York: Bloomsbury, 2020)

**Bionote:** Oscar Pichardo Isaak is a writer, musician, filmmaker and self-taught philosopher from Mexico. His first full feature film, *Aimee*, has been shown at several international film festivals and is inspired in lacanian psychoanalysis and its discourse about psychosis. His current research is situated in the crossroad of non-standard philosophy, science, and political economy.

Independent Researcher  
oscarpichardoisaak@gmail.com

### 1. The Non-Marxist Defense of the Lived Without Life

One of the main cores of Katerina Kolozova's thought is to overcome the impasses left behind by post-structuralism through the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. That is why it should come as no surprise that *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* begins with Foucault's sentence regarding the death of man. It is an inescapable closure for philosophy, to such an extent that many postmodern thinkers also preferred to declare the end of philosophy alongside the "human" as a category. On the other hand, non-philosophy does not seek any form of annihilation, but rather, to think according to the One as the foreclosed Real, showing that most of the philosophical principles are only positions, thus finding a democracy of thought. Kolozova constructs a non-human epistemology, not yet present in Foucault's epistemological statement, in dialogue with those theorists who sought to think about how to transcend the borders of the human. The dialogue is particularly fertile when dealing with Donna Har-

away's post-humanist work, yet it remains a critical dialogue. Faced with the monstrosity of the cyborg, Kolozova seeks to establish the method of dualysis of Laruelle's non-philosophy. This means that she makes a distinction between the Real and language, putting them in a unilateral rather than dialectical relationship, in the sense that both coexist without being determined by each other. In the case of Kolozova's work, the Real includes the meaningless physicality of animality, and the signifying automaton includes technology.

Laruelle has always considered Marx as a fundamental ally of non-philosophy, since his materialism does away with philosophical illusions. Kolozova is faithful to this mode of thought, thinking according to a position that is as close as possible to the material question of the Real, including the defense of animality, because it is that which is excluded from philosophical discourse, also being exploited in the forgetting of matter in capitalism. The strategy that she maintains from her previous works is to interpret capitalism as non-philosophy reads philosophy, since both capitalism and philosophy are based on metaphysical fallacies. According to Marx and Laruelle, philosophy's existence is also predicated on abstractions that forget the material reality of existence. That is one of the core aspects of Marxism that Kolozova explores, due to the fact that Marx seeks to make a critique of Hegelian idealism, where material is forgotten, which is a symptom of philosophy itself that was practiced before Marx's critical method of thinking. Similarly to idealist philosophy, capitalism erases use value, that is, the labor and materials from which commodities are made. This reality is very present in the way in which the finance system exploit us today, to such an extent that the exchange structure M-C-M' (Money-Commodity-Money') is replaced by the formula M-M', the money for money trade from the mercantile world, which inevitably leads to the creation of financial bubbles and the exploitation of the material aspect of animal and human existence.

In the first chapter, Kolozova develops her vision of Saussure's structuralist linguistics in dialogue with Laruelle's work. For Kolozova, the signifying automaton works independently of material reality, as it also is for Marx, since the production of value has the same function. If post-structuralism is to realize philosophemes from this disjunction, Kolozova proposes to delimit it from philosophical dis-

course. Through Irigaray's work, she shows us that the signifying automaton is the same mechanism for the fetishization of the material, including the fetishization that patriarchy makes of women. This automaton also produces subjectivity in capitalist societies. Like subjectivity, following Lacan and Aristotle, capitalist production has its traumatic side when the Real produces a certain *tuché*, a form of chance that is not, nor can it be, calculated by the automaton, and whose expression manifests itself as a lack of housing, poverty and various phenomena linked to economic crises.

In "Formalism of materialist reason," the second chapter, Kolozova makes a critique of a detached vision of the material of computer science. Following Deleuze and Guattari, she makes us see that abstract machines actually have linguistic, logical and material layers, they are not abstractions of a pure rationalization, because, according to Kolozova, this conception would be a reunification of philosophy and theology. Although she only reflects briefly, but succinctly, on the discussions about artificial intelligence, her non-philosophical position makes her skeptical of its promises. Through her reading of Turing she concludes that machines lack metaphysical will and strategic thinking, they only perform mechanical work for which knowledge is not necessary. The latter puts machines at a disadvantage with living beings whose cognition is considered inferior, such as plants. This is why, for Kolozova, any reflection on artificial intelligence must be attentive to the prelinguistic side of the category of the physical, since it is this dimension, rather than the creation of emotions, that should be sought in the alliance between computer science and cognitive sciences.

In what are perhaps the densest pages of the book, Kolozova outlines a methodology of one of the most important points of Laruelle's Non-Marxism: the cloning of identity in the last instance. This is a concept that Laruelle uses to think according to the vision-in-the-Real. For Laruelle, the Real is inevitably foreclosed from thought, so that identity in the last instance is already a cloning of the Real. Identity ultimately deactivates the self-sufficient tautologies of philosophy's principles of sufficiency, but at the same time uses them democratically, positioning them as an outside or as a *khôra*: it puts a border between the hallucinations of philosophy and the mode of thinking of non-philosophy. By means of this procedure, Kolozova

conceptualizes a syntax of the Real, a way in which it can find its expression. Kolozova does not rule out that the syntax of the Real could be formalized by means of an algorithm, and that eventually a semantics could be produced from this syntax, but she indicates that it is something that still remains to be demonstrated. If this were the case, it would have to be based on a "radical concept," since a concept is never immanence itself but can be affected by immanence.

The procedure of the syntax of the Real has important consequences for Kolozova's conception of gender, since identity in the last instance is not relational, while gender is a performance that clones this identity, but only as a social function. Through Marx's criticism of Hegel, she traces an itinerary of a radical subjectivity where the world is not an extension of the subject, but rather a material objectivity is sought. Admitting the foreclosure of the Real, what the subject can do is then surrender to its structure and syntax and try to "encode" it by means of the recreation of its signs. This codification, according to Simondon, is fundamental for the individuation of life, since it is through information that it takes shape. According to Kolozova, the morphology of living beings must also be thought according to the Real, regardless of the technologies that may intervene in it, but without falling into a naive naturalism that does not understand that the concept of nature is already a concept of reason.

Kolozova is not satisfied with just denouncing forms of exploitation, she also shows us that Laruelle's thought expands Spinoza's idea of *conatus*, the life that, by seeking to perpetuate itself, pursues its own well-being. In non-philosophy, the *conatus* takes the form of what is lived without life, that is, what is lived without the need to give life a philosophical meaning, and therefore freed from alienation, since it makes us see that it contains a joy beyond the signifying automaton, and therefore also independent of Truth. It is what Laruelle sees as a radical subjectivity or the Stranger, when he approaches psychoanalysis without his determinations, turning the *jouissance* and its sinister side into *joui* (joy), producing an undulatory effect in the understanding of the unconscious.

## 2. How can an Algorithmic Socialism be Conceptualized?

Faced with the need to defend the material reality of what has been lived without life, Kolozova invites us to think about a social *tekhne* that respects use value. The following is an outline of my proposal to achieve it.

We live in an economic situation where it is possible to generate forms of exchange without the need for centralized institutions, as is the case with cryptocurrencies. These, however, have not been used for the purpose of economic emancipation, but only as one more instrument of economic speculation. Cryptocurrencies make the deterritorialization of capital possible, since, today, systems based on 'blockchains' allow forms of international economic exchange without the need of state regulation. This creates new infrastructural possibilities, but by themselves cryptocurrencies do not change anything at all, since their deterritorialization possibilities are automatically reterritorialized through the dynamics of financial speculation. For currencies to have an emancipatory effect, a forcing towards an immanent form of exchange is necessary. In economic terms, this means that a reciprocal currency must be generated whose form of exchange, instead of being designed to generate the greatest amount of surplus value possible, on the contrary, has the most radical respect possible towards the material reality of use value. Therefore, we postulate as a theorem, that by means of a new currency whose valuation is reciprocal, by means of algorithms built from the immanence that category theory allows, it is possible to generate an economic exchange designed for the defense of the lived without life.

Let's remember what use value is according to Karl Marx's *Capital*:

The usefulness of a thing makes it a use value. But that utility does not float through the air. It is conditioned by the properties of the body of the merchandise, and there is no margin for them. The very body of the merchandise, such as iron, wheat, diamond, etc., is thus a use value or a good. This character of his does not depend on whether the appropriation of his useful properties costs man much or little work. When considering use values, their quantitative determinate character is always assumed, such as a dozen

clocks, a rod of linen, a ton of iron, etc. The use values of commodities provide the material for a special discipline, merceology. The use value is effective only in the use and consumption. Use values constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its social form.<sup>1</sup>

What we see with this notion of use value is that it is of the utmost importance for the policies of caring for the environment, as well as the defense of the lived without life, as Kolozova indicates. The crime of capitalism is that it is a metaphysics that forgets material existence, abusing it to generate a surplus value, that is, a profit from the exchange between capital and merchandise. That is why if we invent a reciprocal and fair valuation of use value, then we can think about how to heal an economy where the exchange of goods generates an excessive accumulation of capital:

In contradiction with the sensory gross objectivity of the body of merchandise, not a single atom of natural substance is part of its objectivity as values. Hence, no matter how much a commodity is turned and manipulated, they only possess objectivity as values, therefore, it is of a purely social nature, of human work; that their objectivity as values can only be shown in the social relationship between various commodities. We had actually started from the exchange value or the exchange relation between the commodities, to discover the value of the same, hidden in that relation.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see in *Capital*, use value is converted into exchange value, and matter loses objectivity through the metaphysical abstraction of capital. For Marx, the only way to counteract this error is by changing the modes of production and their ownership, but today it is possible to change the modes of exchange thanks to the fact that in the coming years we will see that currencies will work based on algorithms. A reciprocal currency that seeks to reduce surplus value and therefore regulate the accumulation of capital, will work to ensure that the exchange of goods respects the use value, and therefore defends the lived without life.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *El capital Tomo I/Vol. 1* (Siglo: XXI Editores, 2019), 44. The translation is from the author.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

One of the complaints coming from humanism is that computing has eroded the symbolic order that sustains society. This is because the letter of the algorithms penetrate the Real beyond the symbolic order. We put an emphasis on the letter and not language itself, since, for Lacan, the letter can make an incision on the Real, while language is only part of the symbolic. In computation, the letter is what builds a syntax, while language is a semantic concern. According to *An Sich: An Apology for Algorithmic Reason* by Noah Horwitz, everything can be formulated algorithmically, but these do not offer interpretations or explanations, they are only effective demonstrations, taking into account that mathematics is a science without consciousness. According to Horwitz's cybernetic ontology, because existence is itself syntactic rather than semantic, anything that can be expressed algorithmically is possible. In its actuality, it provides the transcendental conditions of itself. The event is then a change in programming, through the negation of existing rules and the creation of new rules. If algorithms can affect the Real, then they can cause an event, in the sense that they can transform one situation into another. If algorithms have the ability to think according to a syntax of the Real, which in our case thinks from the point of view of the radical metaphysics of immanence and not only the Real according to Lacan, as Horwitz proposes, then there is the possibility that they become the basis of a non-standard socialist economy, and not just the receptacle of a work that becomes immaterial in order to manipulate ideological subjectivities. If we give up thinking about the rationality of algorithms, if we only try to escape towards romanticized forms of resistance that are inoperative outside local scales and whose material precariousness do not allow for expansion, then we are condemned to proletarianizing our economic condition. On the other hand, if we can understand what kind of algorithms can help us generate an event that results in new forms of material exchange and cooperation between various agglomerates of communities, then we will see that true political activism today not only cannot ignore the technological condition of existence, but that it is precisely through technology that a new political horizon can be glimpsed.

Until now, an economy that respects use value was considered impossible for most economists, however, this is now possible thanks

to blockchain technology computed through category theory. This is thanks to the fact that, as we see in the work of Alain Badiou and Rocco Gangle, the metaphysics of category theory is immanent, and with the power of quantum computers they contain a compossibility between different programming environments, for what appraises the fair price of a commodity becomes possible. It is through Badiou's and Gangle's work that we can glimpse what kind of logic is necessary to integrate surplus value, use value and exchange value in a cybernetic system that makes a materialist economy work, having as a basic axiom the defense of the lived without life, however, its non-philosophical cloning implies some modifications to how philosophers have used category theory, especially in relation to Badiou's ontology.

In *Mathematics of the Transcendental*, Badiou explains that the ontology of category theory is extrinsic, since an object is determined exclusively by relations or movements, of which it is the source or objective, since they involve the mathematical universe of which it is part. In our non-philosophical scheme, it will be important to keep objects as isomorphic and determined by the One, postulating identity over the conservation of differences. As Rocco Gangle indicates in *Diagrammatic Immanence*, one of the most important philosophical aspects of category theory is that through the isomorphism of its elements, the degrees of identity and difference in an abstract domain can be estimated. Isomorphism is, in this sense, a generalization of a strict identity in the 'pragmatic' context where relationships count more than objects. Economically speaking, this means that the relationship between use value and exchange value can be idempotent, but only in relation to the universe of which they are a part. It is with this form of programming that the price calibration, given, thanks to the immanent logic of the market, could be carried out, avoiding the havoc that financial speculation can cause. In contrast to the metaphysics that capitalism implies, where the accumulation of capital is taken as a transcendent and absolute good, an immanent economy would imply thinking without utilitarian residues in relationships, such as surplus value.

The monetary and technological theory of non-standard socialism that we propose is a way in which it seeks to transform social relations, in such a way that its futureability is to make the forms of

production more just, despite the fact that the phenomenon of economic exchange is not still a phenomenon of a material nature. To enable this, we must pursue a unilateral superposition of the forces of production and forms of exchange. As we see in Laruelle's *Marx with Planck*<sup>3</sup>, to rethink a socialist economy it is necessary to think in terms of non-commutativity, which means that between the modes of production and the forms of exchange there is no hierarchical relationship in their importance and becoming: both the exchange relations and their material conditions are linked, and one has the power to transform the other, in such a way that if there is a more egalitarian mode of exchange it will also lead to more egalitarian forms of production. In Marx, the concepts of modes of production and forms of exchange are fused. Our task is to rethink them as unilateral concepts, that is, they can be independent and at the same time have a change effect on one another. This means, in economic terms, that if we manage to make the modes of exchange fairer, reciprocally, the modes of production will also be able to obey the immanent rules of non-standard socialism.

The main impediment to the social *tekhné* that Kolozova invites us to conceptualize is the tautology with which money generates money. That is why our *tekhné* has to go through new monetary practices, where exploitation through surplus value is minimized. By calling for a defense of the lived without life, Kolozova invokes a revolution similar to the divine violence of which Walter Benjamin speaks, since it would mean a sovereign and non-negotiable right to life. A monetary practice is still immaterial although it still has material consequences, a reciprocal currency can be the beginning of subsequent forms of *tekhné* that ignite a new form of social pact that stops the suffering caused by the logic of our world, offering as a first step a way to redistribute wealth; but if it does not have the defense of the lived without life as one of its main purposes it will be a vain effort. Conversely, if it is possible to conceptualize a *tekhné*, where the defense of the lived without life is postulated as a basic axiom, other extremely important struggles such as the well-being of the environment will be decisively benefited.

## Conclusion

Katerina Kolozova's work is one of the strongest ethical guides for anti-capitalist struggles. She leaves us, to her readers, the task of thinking of a social *tekhné* that respects the syntax of the Real, and therefore gives respect to the material reality that sustains the exchanges of value. The generic sciences that Laruelle proposes can open a new horizon to formulate more ethical modes of exchange, through the production of a new algorithmic logic that respects the syntax of the Real. For the moment, thinking about the horizon that opens *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals* gives us a correct guideline as to where the anti-capitalist struggles for militant thinkers should be directed, especially those inspired by the gnosis that opens up non-philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> François Laruelle, Superposition: *Laruelle and the Humanities*, eds, Rocco Gangle and Julius Greve (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 157-177.