

In The Meantime Without End

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Eric Cazdyn. *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness*. Duke University Press 2012, 230 pp.

The Already Dead comes at a critical moment in which the vulgarities of the global capitalist system have become increasingly difficult to conceal. The book's approach, at once theoretical and personal, historical and cultural, seeks new modes of revolutionary consciousness that can destabilize both within and without the capitalist system so as to reconfigure everything.

The Already Dead is divided into two parts. In the first, Cazdyn locates the book's origins in his own experience of being diagnosed with leukaemia. As an employee of University of Toronto but a citizen of the United States, his visa was not renewed when he was deemed an excessive burden on the Canadian health care system. Although he eventually negotiated a visa renewal through the courts, this was not before having to pay for an exorbitant course of pharmaceuticals in the US to put his cancer in remission.

Through this exposure to North American medical and immigration systems, Cazdyn identifies a newly emergent paradigm of cancer management which aims to defer death and prolong the present. Akin to the techniques of biopower and the economic management of everyday life, this pharmaceutical based treatment makes the concepts of cure and the terminal less discernible. While relieved to have access to life saving medications, Cazdyn warns that the rise in permanent drug dependency creates a temporal modality he calls the "new chronic". Ostensibly temporary, this unstable condition is not unlike waiting for the US military to pull out of Afghanistan. A deadline is promised, but withdrawal is endlessly put off. As one patient among many who receives regular stabilizers, Cazdyn points to the danger of becoming inured to a permanent meantime of diluted sickness. As unadulterated health becomes a distant and unrealistic dream, he points to how the search for more radical possibilities for cure is put off indefinitely. This is what Cazdyn identifies as an emerging culture of cancer, the chronic state of which will proliferate as diseases are increasingly treated as permanent, creating a long term and continuous dependency on pharmaceuticals.

Refusing to give up on a cure, and as he draws an analogy between this chronic form of cure and the social reproduction of capital, on revolution, Cazdyn seeks ways of overcoming his chronic condition. In the medical system, he proposes that non-instrumentalised models of caring for the dying, together with a skeptical analysis of the medical industry, can assist in disrupting the present regime. Delving into a legacy of thought which works the distinction between life and death, he understands “death as both continuous with life and absolutely discontinuous with life” (204). For those who exist between death and life, who also identified in Zizek’s “undead,” Nancy’s “living dead,” Agamben’s “bare life” and Lock’s “twice dead,” Cazdyn terms “the already dead”. For Zizek the undead is pure difference that exists before and outside life and death, and offers the potential of revolutionary rupture only to regulate and manage it again as the repressed. In Nancy’s *L’Intrus* the introduction of a ‘foreign’ organ to save a ‘host’ complicates the traditional concept of immunity wherein the foreign is rejected. For Cazdyn, the already dead are those who exist in the fissures created from the inherent inequalities and contradictions produced by global capitalism. Since the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2008, aside from a privileged minority who have fortified their financial and physical architecture from the public, Cazdyn includes ‘the rest of us’ who are living together in free fall.

The question for Cazdyn is how to create a revolutionary culture from this political condition. Paradox, in which the terminable (ends) and interminable (endless) coexist, seems to offer a method of overcoming our inner resistances so as to undermine the dominant dichotomies in the meantime. Capitalism, as the hegemonic ideology in North America, underpins its state-corporate organization. Understood as a political force and a way of life that produces liberty, democracy and prosperity, its analytic critique has been over-shadowed by a legacy of virulent anti-communism. The result is that ‘crisis’ and ‘disaster’ are depoliticised, obscuring their causal links to the capitalist system.

Rather than focusing on the immorality of various actors however, Cazdyn recommends the economic interconnections between consumers/workers, the US (privatised) health care system, and related crises such as the GFC and the ‘war on terror’. Prominent US officials seem recently to have even dropped the pretence that capitalism promotes humanitarian democracy and have taken to frank admissions of their geo-economic (and military) objectives of competition and dominance. These are closer to the truth that the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has never been to ‘liberate’ the people of those countries, nor has it been to defeat Al Qaeda, a guerrilla force created-in-part and aided by the US. Instead of going after corrupt officials who show little concern for civic or legal accountability, however, Cazdyn argues that this would seek to reform and reproduce existing social relations. Instead, he calls for a new set of relations within a different system.

The condition of the already dead demonstrates where the work of real democracy is required. Denied health care, poorly paid, barred from quality education and food, disproportionately represented in crime statistics and in prisons, Cazdyn finds that the already dead cannot afford the pharmaceutical course he has procured for his cancer treatment. For these people, the future is a foregone conclusion. While HIV and cancer statistics reflect exposure to globalization as much as immune deficiency, inequity and duplicity in liberal capitalism reflect the fundamental operation of the trinity of capital, nation and state.

In Cazdyn's experience of Canadian immigration policy and the US health care system, he finds the same narrow definitions of productivity informing policy. As a biopolitical operation of molecular intervention, the Canadian government identifies and rejects would-be migrants who are "reasonably expected to cause excessive demands on health or social services" (127). In this logic, state borders are a threshold across which pre-emptive interceptions are regularly conducted. As a bioeconomic operation, the US health care system ensures that those who cannot afford it receive limited or no public health care. Falling into what Cazdyn calls the "global abyss", those who have illnesses that are listed as too costly are denied entry from a body of émigrés who seek hospitable healthcare systems. This occurs at the same time as global corporations exploit publicly funded clinical research programs to manufacture and market their pharmaceutical products. Effectively undemocratic, a system resembling a form of economic eugenics emerges.

This link between individual illness and capitalist investment in an over-arching juridico-political temporality also suggests the condition of undocumented workers (mobile, foreign, flexible) who are encouraged to migrate to the US precisely for their cheap and vulnerable labour potential. Originating from a Euro-Japan-American colonial corporate-state apparatus, and evident in the supply chain between "first world" consumers and sweatshops, raw materials and other nefarious operations in the "third world," Cazdyn proposes that globalization has now entered a new phase. Instead of being debilitated by a sense of powerlessness for our consumer-complicity in this system, he argues that understanding how consumption perpetuates exploitation is not enough. Instead he seeks to explore modes of revolution and cure so as to re-shape our consciousness anew.

The criticism of global capital through lived inequalities and ecological destruction engages the personal while opening it out to further possibilities of change. The already dead, who endure in an unbearable present, embody a revolutionary consciousness required for the collective will to change the system. As non-recouperable entities living in the cracks of modernity, whose existence sustains the privilege of the few, their indignation inexorably builds toward rupture from within, so as to open out

toward an unrealized future.

What shift in consciousness might activate this rupture? Regarding the gaze of the camera as reflecting present social relations, Cazdyn turns to the temporal modalities invoked in the works of prominent, yet experimentally inclined Japanese filmmakers (Tsukamoto Shinya, Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Miike Takashi, and veteran Yoshida Kijū). Presenting a choice between an endlessly looped (and apparently safe) surveillance time, or an unbounded time of an unknown freedom, Cazdyn's point is to develop his notion of the new chronic through film. Where allegory and metaphor are apparently eschewed by both generations of filmmakers, he perceives the pointlessness of identifying the criminal with ever-more sophisticated surveillance technologies when the crime is a default outcome of the system. Similarly, Cazdyn never refers to the source of the leukaemia, as in the logic of "the already dead," seeking restitution from specific causation does not seem to matter. Instead of disciplining 'model behaviour', a non-moralizing analysis of systemic production is required.

Cazdyn's analogy between the delaying effects of pharmaceuticals and the deferral of revolutionary consciousness is an accurate diagnosis of the present artificial interventions to prop up a system which has run its course. Instead of accepting prescriptions of public sacrifice through austerity, stubborn indignation fuelled by a full awareness of the imminence of death can be the only assurance against total collapse. The practice of holding life with death in an unbearable present in which the economic imagination has dominated public discourse is, Cazdyn argues, to nurture the seeds of revolution.

Together with the biopolitical tools of repression and depoliticization, the bio-economics of the pharmaceutical industry that determine who may recover from illness and who may not suggest a more diffused but no less effective version of Hobbes' notion of the Sovereign right 'to kill and let live'. In this sense the ethno-nationalist promulgation of "the biological growth of the nation" is overlaid with the state-corporate imperative of economic growth. Even as social and medical illnesses are produced at greater intensity by the greater capitalist system, the burden for these illnesses is increasingly borne by the individual, both financially and in terms of identifying cures. This is vividly apparent in the practice of death insurance investment where cures are considered undesirable as they reduce returns.

In the unapologetic logic of profit and expansion, there are few choices left other than acquiescence to permanent inequality or collective revolution (154). The vulgarity and bluntness of capitalism in its advanced form, Cazdyn argues, is directly proportional to its responding politics of resistance (48).

Subcomandante Marcos' statement "We have nothing left to lose, we are already dead," suggests liberation when death permeates the living. While death and life endlessly cycle in the concept of *bardo* in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the already dead who feed the accumulation of capital and reproduce the power of sovereign rule, as Agamben's theory of biopolitics maintains, indicates an "inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism" as the secret of modern power (Agamben 10).

As the most exposed to crisis, as is critical to the functioning capitalism, the already dead embody contradictions that cannot be resolved through "good governance." As ineligible, stateless or criminalized populations continue to expose systemic causation, Cazdyn argues that associationist networks of consumer/workers offer real economic alternatives through transnational, legal and non-violent means. Revolutionary collective projects beyond the nuclear family as the principle organizational unit may interrupt the current regime toward a livable future (200).

For Cazdyn, repossessing death from its ideological use in the interests of the sovereign (terror and sacrifice), is to confront fundamental limits (mortality). Cazdyn cites Antigone who lived in symbolic death, Oedipus who lived with death beneath life, and Hamlet who is animated by the presence of death, to exemplify subjects who risk or carry death with them, in radical refusal of self-preservation to critique the social order and liberate erotic energy to interrupt the smooth chain of production (164). As the undetected malignant tumour that metastasizes and erupts from within, death can reconfigure everything. Rather than managing the death drive (uncanny excess of life), re-thinking the function of healing and cure can re-admit those otherwise repressed and marginalised and produce a set of social relations toward a livable future.

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