What and How Are Poets for in Our Age of Want: Cognition, Emancipation, Communism

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We have to fight for the right to invent
the terms which will allow us to define ourselves
and to define our relations to society, and we
have to fight that these terms will be accepted.
—Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power*

Living in this age of planned impoverishment, I can only shore some fragments of what may be useful understanding against our ruins—as oriented in good part by the epigraph above by Stokely Carmichael.[1] My title, paraphrased from a poem cited later, is thus not a claim of achievement but a spur toward a horizon. But a horizon is only of use if one attempts to move toward it.

1. Approach to Poetry: Topological Cognition and a Communist Politics

Fatti non foste per viver come bruti
Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.
(You were not born to live like brutes,
But to follow virtue and knowledge.)
—Dante, *Inferno*

1.1. Poetry and Cognition (Understanding)

I shall in short call valid literary cognition (in narrative, plays, verse, essays, etc.) *poetry*. Poetry always implies a distributive beneficiary or addressee standing for a collective audience, ideally his whole class or, indeed, community (this is foregrounded in plays). It should be clear, though I may have to slight it in this essay, that without an encompassing and nurturing working community, either really existing or being remembered and/or prefigured, all arts and philosophies are nothing. By *community* I do not mean a hypostatized beast, whose horrendous caricature can be seen in the Nazi Behemoth, but a mode of existing together of associated personalities, where the togetherness—or solidarity—transcends the silly opposition of society and individual (see Nancy 1990, 256–61). Each of us exists, to put it paradoxically,

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only "in common," in pragmatic or imagined communities of sense and value: "To be whole is to be part" is how Ursula K. Le Guin memorably put it in her great investigation of *The Dispossessed*.[2]

Particularly about creations in words, it was the accepted norm not only for ancient Greece but also for the European Middle Ages or Leibniz that they potentially reach some transmittable understanding of human relationships, so that Baumgarten called his foundational *Aesthetica* of 1750 the "science of sensual cognition." Kant's *Critique of Judgment* then connected a philosophical esthetics with the roots of modern literary (and art) criticism by exploring what may be the function of imagination. In particular, he found that the sensual representation of what is otherwise not straightforwardly—that is, notionally or conceptually—representable has a deeply figural relationship to reason and the noumenal level.

My presupposition is that poetic cognition arising from sense(s) implies an ongoing creativity fusing old knowledge with not heretofore sighted novums about relationships of people with each other. This creativity is an anthropological constant of *Homo sapiens* that enabled our species to stand, in part, above the blind animal necessities of mere survival by developing the working powers of hand, vision, and brain, including language and then tool kits (see Engels 1876). It is species-specific to humans that our situations in all significant cases (and poetry is a preeminent one) imply, create, and in turn presuppose a smaller or larger possible world, by analogy to what we imagine is "our world." Creative cognition or understanding springs from and returns to societal discourse about power and happiness, or their contraries, and amounts to visions of elements and aspects of another, possible world.

However, Kant was also a compromise perpetuator of a whole wing of and tradition in philosophy that has apodictically insisted on two overlapping stances: first, that its method and, indeed, ethics are the systematic organization of clear concepts—a logos, with clear implications of a seamless holy harmony evident in Plato and in the central Christian medieval doctrine for centuries;[3] and second, that only this kind of thought was rational (though Kant allowed that figurative expressions could still be cognitively creative on some presumably lower level). Its breakthrough toward professional dominance came at the time of Descartes, and it has since become the reigning orthodoxy in so-called analytic philosophy, especially in the imperially dominant countries of the United Kingdom and then the United States. It was based on the repression and suppression of connotative

significance, a flattening out of figurative expressions or their paraphrase into "contentual" concepts chasing each other's tails, which entailed a clear loss not only of beauty but also of what joints of the world it could inquire into. Its horizon was a pure technical metalanguage such as logic. Still, this obviously could never reach beyond a handful of specialists and was also flatly contradicted by the poetry of all major religions, so that tropes and indirect speech, and even metaphor, were grudgingly allowed for use in political influence on the multitude—and in the Latin oratorical tradition also for forensic influence against opposing views—as impure precursors of true philosophy or as its regrettable waste products (*Abfälle*), so to speak, dross left over after casting the ideally pure shapes (see Blumenberg 2005, 8–10). This hierarchy perpetuated the religious view that theology was the master while the arts (e.g., images on church walls) were a kind of Biblia pauperum, a servant "speaking tool" of eternal truth for the poor in power and spirit—clearly a translation of class mastery into ideology.

The pseudoanalytic mistrust of shaping and figurativity meant that the strong philosophical tradition I speak of "is indentured to the logic of identity and non-contradiction as its organon and standard of meaningfulness" (White 2016, 411) that then, logically, forbids and even outlaws nonconceptual figures, as bearers of subversive dialectics and uncouth plebianism. This powerful indenturement—a precise expression encompassing constraint to work for a master—remains the reigning political and media doxa or lore.[4] It is of a piece with poverty of a new kind, as a rule consisting in suffocating overabundance of shoddy goods and thoughts coupled with lack of clear orientation and horizon, so that they do not shape a genuine novum but manage only unceasing galvanization, a dictated mentality of trends and fashions forever twitching the plugged-in individual like Galvani's dead frog legs.

To the contrary, investigating the full-fledged metaphor, I found in "On Metaphoricity" (Suvin 1986), after surveying many other theoreticians, that a metaphor's three main basic conditions or axioms were coherence, richness, and novelty:

- It is coherent or congruent: the connotations admissible in interpretation must have a cultural-cum-ideological common ground.
- It is complex or rich: consonant with the first condition, it uses all the connotations that can be brought to bear; "it means all it can mean" (Beardsley 1958, 144).

- It contains or embodies a novum: it is "not inferrible from the standard lexicon" (Black 1977, 436); it is "the emergence of a more radical way of looking at things" (Ricoeur 1980, 152). This novum is necessarily—at least to begin with—strictly historico-referential insofar as it disrupts the cognitive system current when it was coined.

Thus, together with the necessary conceptual systems but also beyond them, metaphors indicate the basic valuations, expectations, interest, and stances linking enunciating subjects—always social, that is, allegorically representative subjects—to the salient contradictions of their time. Their truth or, better, correctness is always situational; as the pragmatists like to say, what genuine guidance does it give? This is to my mind also the measure of concepts, the main difference, at least initially, being that they stick to denotative explication and thus must be clear even at the expense of width or richness, whereas metaphors are richly implicative and consist largely of riffs on how connotative linkages transform denotations. Partly, they relate to concepts as the *how* does to *what*, or *vérité à faire* to *vérité établie*, or *natura naturans* to *natura naturata*—that is, as two aspects or orientations that ought really to go hand in hand.

Poetic creativity can readily be transferred from micrometaphors to metaphoric and indeed narrative texts (each of which, I argue, is a sui generis macrometaphor, adumbrating a possible world) by figuring in chronotopes and agents. A number of authorities, from Spinoza to Michael Polanyi, then concur that, together with coherence and novelty, a significant factor for evaluating cognitive artifacts is internal richness allowing for a richer bite on reality, when an entity has "the capacity to reveal itself in unexpected ways in the future," with a greater range of interesting consequences: the entity's significance is not exhausted by our conception so far; it has untapped depth and a power of manifesting itself in yet not thought of ways (Polanyi, quoted in Grene 1966, 219–20).

Centrally, poetry is bound up with topological cognizing of qualitative spaces and spatialized times, itself strongly enmeshed with bodily perception and feelings, occurring in and shaped by historical situations. Topology is to be found on all levels of semiotic organization, for example, in rhythm, but in semantic texts it is most evident in metaphor, where A denotatively always somehow stands for B but then also implies rich connotations not available to the naked concept of B (I argue this in Suvin 1994a, 1994b). In the stronger case of the

so-called absolute metaphor — one that cannot be fully and economically replaced by existing conceptual propositions — it becomes evident that such topological imagination in poetry has, as in all arts, equal cognitive dignity to the conceptual one (Blumenberg 2005, 10–13). For one canonic example, literary knowledge was posited by Erich Auerbach (1969, 17) as an attempt "to designate man's place in the universe." Another formulation is "that the literary use of language may lead the writer and reader to a knowledge of relationships between people different from the knowledge brought by a practical or scientific use of language" (Fortini 2003, 1796). Especially today, in the dearth of the "virtue and knowledge" that Dante's Ulysses held to be the species-specific difference of man and animal, no emancipatory politics stands a chance without this contribution.

Poetry is then an autonomous yet transitive activity that always presupposes an addressee, for whom it is Stendhal's promise of happiness, a measure of itself and of what it spurns. In word art, each linguistic proposition has, together with a possibly implied subject, an explicit fulcrum of predicate that refers to a class of entities (things, relations, actions). Therefore, no discourse is walled off from its source and address — it is not simply a combination of discrete linguistic units but relies on the interplay of identification by subject and predicative reference. Any series of speech acts works within and interacts with other acts and events in a given situation and community: "Language is directed beyond itself" (Ricoeur 1976, 20; see also ibid., 11–14, 35–36). For a number of writers it then became logical and ethical to think of translating poetic creativity into politics as a kindred type of choosing within concrete societal relationships. Any choosing implies freedom to select among diverse extant possibilities in sociohistorical space-time and is an existential bet on the best possible outcome, rendered probable by some hypothesis about the course of history; the choices and the hypothesis are in feedback, modifying each other (see Fortini 2003, 227).

1.2. On Poetry and Politics (Communism)

How may writer-creators as such, that is, professionally, participate in politics? This was no problem for poets in the era of Homer, Alcman, or Solon when they spoke truth — providing information and clarifying stances — to a clearly delimited, local ruling class but became complicated when political units grew larger as well as more obviously based on divergent class interests and the (always existing but now critical) oppression of a major part of the body politic. Plato felt poets

were worrisome competitors to his philosopher-king and advocated banning all those who did not fit his norms. There followed many painful historical experiences, which came to a head during the rise and unfolding of capitalism, and the central contradiction within its revolutionary bearer, which Hegel and Marx summarized in the great opposition between the *citoyen* and the *bourgeois*, tilting ever more from the former to the latter. During the revolutionary rise of this class, this included in Europe the Enlightenment's social mandate for the arts and poetry as an organ of universal conscience. In the defeat of the revolution, this mandate was sorely mystified, though still in effect in some splendid if often naive attempts by poets to participate directly as bards of revolt—of a piece with an altered language, as in Victor Hugo or in the early fallouts of the October Revolution. In the enduring and growing defeats of the *citoyen*, intellectuals more and more split into the opposed camps of either national bards, with progressively less emphasis on democracy, or the disgusted and despairing wing that had lost its spiritual homeland within the bourgeois horizon and turned away totally from corrupted civic politics into merely personal introspection, which meant leaving politics to the ruling status quo.

Finally, as of the latter half of nineteenth century in the economically most evolved nations, and spreading in the ensuing century to the ends of the world, it became clear that, in proportion to its cognitive value, verse and prose were revealed to "belong to an order of value analogous to a horizon which the capitalist system systematically and inevitably obstructs" (Fortini 2003, 172, freely interpreted; see his whole argument at 170–79).[5] Poetry, just as the best politics and other wisdom, constantly reminds us that the pursuit of happiness is not only different from but also in crucial ways incompatible with the capitalist purchase of goods and services in a regime of exploiting labor power of proletarians; as Virginia Woolf (1944, 41) cursorily remarked, "the great writer—the Hardy or Proust—goes on his way regardless of the rights of private property." This alternative horizon is a revolutionary socialist one of human disalienation, opposed to the lesions and horrors of capitalist dehumanization. It might be called, better, a communist horizon in Marx's original emancipatory sense, and it recurs in this essay as a touchstone. To understand a poet's politics, I make an apparent detour, taking into account this horizon.

What communism and poetic cognition have in common as open conspiracies (a term of H. G. Wells's, which has nothing in common with terrorism) has been defined by Franco Fortini (2003, 177)

as "a shaping faculty exercised on life, an ordering that starts from its intended end or *telos*" (see also ibid., 384), rather than from the perfect egotism of the possessive individual. *Shape* or *form* implies a project of intention and meaning in our lives, a savoir vivre, and in temporal terms a traffic between our existentially present values and long-duration ones from the remembered past or wished-for future. Life itself is an entity that sustains and propagates its form. Disalienating projects in practical societal life and in poetry are always shapes of sensual meaning and oriented time; they strive for a formal use of life. With Fortini, and more articulated in Jameson 1981 (see his discussion of genres throughout *Political*, and then his respectful recuperation of Northrop Frye, esp. 69–72), I would even call this a ceremonial that carries over into lay creativity the notion of supreme access to value or holiness. Formal closure aspires always to a kind of perfection—the very root of *perficere* means to finish or limit doing. As William Blake (2008, 269–70) noted, "Every poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity" (but then, dialectically, "Unity is the cloak of folly"). However, a static closed perfection is since Rousseau and the industrial revolution subject to what Rousseau called in *Discours sur l'origine* (with much ruefulness) *perfectibilité*, a species-specific potential differentiating people from animals and allowing for perpetual development where every closure is also a rung in an open historical process.

This shapely use of life is centrally informed by freedom with poetic justice: Marx's slogan, of Biblical and utopian origin, "From each according to his capacities, to each according to her needs" (1875, chap. 1), is a sterling example of such justice, and so is his horizon of a realm of freedom beyond necessity of exploitation and other kinds of alienation, strongly wedded to playfulness. This homology to the communist project means that the cognitive writer's shaping and his deepest values are always already engaged in politics—the destiny of her community, finally that of humanity as a whole—whether this is explicitly assumed by the author or not, and indeed whatever her actual practical involvement in daily politics may be or not be. Form, the shape and structure of any text, is always *en situation*, sociohistorically situated.

It is to my mind very significant that historically, when the world is shaken, when human beings need to make sense of things because their usual sense is lost, and the way out is found in armed resistance, for example, a communist revolution, it is often twinned with a major outpouring of poetry (verse and technically more accessible forms of fine arts), written either by formerly unknown plebeians or by top creators.[6]

Not so incidentally, much poetry (I would claim; most of the works that remain as classics) is a strange and indispensable fusion of the class stances pragmatically incompatible in everyday split society. On the one hand, there is the aristocratic view and stance from above, imbued with the frontline knowledge of its epoch (see Tronti 2009, 39) and embodied in the interminable comet tail of connotations to any significant concept and topos. On the other hand, there is the plebeian view and stance from below, boldly oriented toward and focused on the lifesaving denotations useful and indeed salvational in material everyday life. This fusion informs also the communist narrative: both these vanguard "creative minorities" (Fortini 2003, 389) propose to a wide and primarily plebeian addressee the highest cultural and cognitive insights of the ruling class purged from the pervasive dross of complicity with exploitation, violence, and humiliation. I find in this another confirmation for the projects of poetry and communism being communicating vessels, if not complementary twins in different walks of life.

A key mediating and shaping concept here is the addressee and his horizon of expectation, as supposed at the moment of creation and most clearly visible in the creator's initial choice of literary or artistic genre (always consubstantial with a long-duration horizon of expectation by the user—viewer, reader, and similar) in function of the intended effect. (Let me add that all other opening gambits of a work should be considered here, in verse, say, the choice of the first line's rhythm that determines how the rest may develop.) Two end-horizons or teloi are inextricably fused here: intention and social historicity. As to the first, the notion of intentionality has been richly formalized by Umberto Eco and company—I shall mention only Eco's *Lector* (1979a) and *Role* (1979b)—but for the present purpose the sterling summing up and improvement of Russian Formalist debates by Jan Mukařovský (1996, 1970) may suffice. He founds the historicity and sociality of a literary work in the interaction between the artist's personality—which, for the critic, means centrally the implied author educed from the text, though it can be compared for given purposes with the real psychophysical personality—and the addressee's expectations within which the work is reincarnated. Though in the intentionality of the work created these two subjects fuse, it remains a societal sign system that implies a historical audience of readers prior to the work, which is thus imbued by an interiorized sociohistoricity. This by no means amounts to a simple reflection but is as a rule a contradictory dialectics of reflection of and reflection on. Centrally, this means that literature is, as most arts, an exemplum in the wider sense, a finding, a kind

of more or less open-ended allegory: it makes a point about collective situations. It is fully steeped in social historicity, as brilliantly argued in Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* (1981), especially the first two parts. From his rich repertory, I here mention only two most consequential cognitions: first, in general, why and how "the structure of the psyche is historical" (62); second, in particular, that "[literary genres] are essentially literary *institutions*," embodying "[a social contract] between a writer and a specific public" that specifies an artifact's proper use in that structure (106).

In Roman terms, poetry is a *votum*, a meaning melding the elements of desire and aspiration with prayer and solemn, even numinous promise. This has a solid underground connection, as postulated in the shape of communicating vessels, with community and communism. Now, origins and root meanings in semantics do not prove much, since meanings change in history (see Suvin 1996, 114–16). Still, there are long-duration nuclei of meaning, and it is suggestive that the term *communism* derives from the Latin *cum*—which became *con*—prefixed to *munus*. *Munus*, *muneris* seems to derive from a putative Indo-European root meaning "swap, change, or exchange" (thence also *municipality* and *immune*—not subject to change). In Latin it had three main meanings, all rooted in "mutual service or favor": service to community, office; duty, obligation, also burden; and gift. And it had the derived meanings of "a service as favor" and "public show, spectacle." The term then became attached either to the obligation or contribution—in work or in kind—imposed by the Roman state and/or municipality on its members, or to public works provided for the Roman people by prominent and wealthy citizens, and primarily to gladiatorial games, supposedly given as gift to the community by the emperor (en.wiktionary.org/wiki/munus). "*Con*" or "*cum*," meaning "with, together with," was a preposition denoting association, company, standing beside, and at times it had an intensive force and denoted "completely, fully." Thus, *munus* was originally an equitable exchange of services, favors, or contributions inside a community of equals, but with the rise of the state it shifted toward office or obligation. The adjective *com-munis* could thus, I think, be associated either, positively, with sharing—or even sharing fully and completely—an obligation or service with and for other members of your community or, negatively, with being outside or beside a personal obligation. The latter use easily slides into ruling-class sneering at the "common" people that systematically associated "common" with at least "ordinary" and usually "low" and "vulgar" (see Williams 1983, 70–72).

As for *community*, it has been magisterially analyzed by Raymond Williams (1983, 75) as encompassing meanings relating to groups of people and to "a particular quality of relationship [indicating material holdings in common, as interests or goods, or indicating a common identity or characteristics]." In sum, he found the semantic complexity of "the warmly persuasive word [community]" to arise from "the difficult interaction between . . . the sense of direct common concern [and] the materialisation of various forms of common organisation, which may or may not adequately express this" (76). Jean-Luc Nancy (1990, 257) glosses its French use as "a being together"—*en commun*, also translatable literally "in common, in what is common—or as "being together" (*ensemble*: in English "togetherness," something "that is neither in nor out of a singular being . . . where the interior . . . becomes exterior," an existence that is its own essence). The quasi-utopian community of a theater troupe has in some languages kept this ancient communist tinge, thence also Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. For Nancy two main matters follow from this: first, personal and distributive ones—that each person, by birth and death, does not have "a beginning and an end which would be *ours*, but has them (or is them) only as others and through others" (259); second, that "history is community, that is, the coming about of . . . a certain spacing of time, the spacing of a 'we'"—the sense of history and any meaning that might be found in it is not a chronological succession of events but what the events "have in" or "are" in common (260–61; I would say, in terms of human relationships of power and/or happiness).

My conclusion is that *communism* means at its core something like a system of society instituting mutual and common sharing and exchange of services and contributions to one's community as its principle and supreme good. Whatever other meanings were added and retracted after Marx, Kropotkin, and Lenin, I proceed upon this durable rock.

However, is it not too constricting to call the disalienating politics of art (poetry) analogous only to a communist project? In some cases this analogy may not be directly applicable, but I would claim that poetry's semantic and pragmatic horizon is finally one of classless politics conducted by "pencil, not pistol" (as Brecht put it in the prologue to the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*), in full associative democracy. In other words, communism is the only name and tradition for a consistent, encompassing, and possible alternative to a planned and systematic immiseration of 95 percent of humankind so that they would have to sell their labor power, which is today threatening to end in

full-scale, if hypocritically masked, fascism and warfare. For half a century already, "the link between democracy and capitalism has been definitely broken" (Žižek 2009, 132). In that time, world financial capitalism has "carried out a veritable mobilisation of State functions" to implement a new class war from above, "a [covert or overt] civil war: not only by military and police means and by states of emergency, but also through psychological and informational warfare and corresponding cultural and political strategies" (Guattari and Negri 1990, 86). Underlying all of this is the drastic failure of sustainable capitalism, of putting new productive forces in the service of people's happiness; capitalism has become a parasitic force. Today's young people will see an ecological collapse in a few decades; its symptoms are already among us. In a kind of creeping neo-Nazism, the "contractual" or normal exploitation of the proletarians is supplemented and multiplied by death from explosive weapons and, despite high-sounding plans, from famine (endangering about 800 million people by imperfect statistics). In the domain of semantic orientation, critical forms are preempted and repressed in favor of forms of empty affirmation the purpose of which is to preserve power, so that the public sphere and articulate reasoning are circumvented; a good example of this may be the Bush Jr. presidency's custom of defining terrorism by pointing at whatever suited them, in other words, by fiat and by violence rather than argument (see Wegner 2011, 263–305). Epistemology as such, the problem of how we know what we know, and finally what is a legitimate definition of human reality, is thwarted and ignored as a subversive discipline.

Therefore, I must consider further the presently useful use of the term and concept of communism, for the waters have been thoroughly muddied by friend and foe alike. Obviously, this is (and has been) a matter for many books.[7] However, which or what communism are we speaking about? There are at least three variants of what I would recognize as a central denotation for this concept: the communism of Marx, of Kropotkin, and of Stalin (with Lenin participating of all three, but at his strongest when halfway between Marx and Kropotkin, as in *The State and Revolution* and in most of his practice). Which variant meaning has been shown by historical experience to be irremediably self-defeating, in part emancipatory but then finally sterile and repressive? Clearly, the state communism of Stalin, leading to some memorable achievements, such as the victory over Hitler, but finally to a repressive oligarchy much too heavy in blood and misery—with all of its ramifications in the world (I argue this theoretically in Suvin 2015b and at

length in Suvin 2016b). Symmetrically obverse, the generous immediate anarchism à la Kropotkin has, for all of its admirable aspects that have to be integrated into our prospect and stance, never managed to maintain power when refusing some, however modified, form of the state. But accounts with a communist stance and horizon as envisaged by Marx—and Morris, and so many others—have not been settled; they are open and on the agenda of any history that wants to combat this total militarized savagery into which capitalism is rapidly descending, where colonial warfare is unceasing and nuclear warfare a constant threat. Orientation toward a communist horizon means, I am persuaded, the self-preservation of humanity and its ecosystem, to be reached through radical self-determination on all levels, by means of peace and disalienated labor. To be or not to be, that is the question.

Crucial for my argument here, Marx was the inventor of societal epistemology: how any understanding of reality is inevitably shaped by class assumptions and horizons, and how to compensate for this by taking the part of the classes that work and create all wealth. In his wake, I accept here the—certainly not full nor fully precise—formulation of communism by Fortini (2003, 1655–56) as "a tendential unity of *equality, fraternity, and sharing* with scientific *knowledge* and ethico-religious *wisdom*. . . . Humanity is a species defined by the capacity for (or hope of) to know and steer itself and to have pity for itself." Last not least, "The absolute test by which a revolution can be distinguished, is the change in the form of activity of a society, in its deepest structures of relationships and feeling" (Williams 1979, 76). True, we should now continue by noting the optimistic errors of Victorian Marxism, but even those can be best rectified within its tradition, beginning with Lenin, Luxemburg, and Gramsci, and going toward plebeian self-government.

1.3. On Poets in Alienated Time(s)

To return to the poet's stance in politics (aporias lurk in it), I first approach it in terms of the quandary between quantitative (or clock) and qualitative (or axiological) time. This is rooted in the insight, best reactualized for modern times by Walter Benjamin, that a sense of history and any meaning that might be found in it is not to be found in the mere succession of events in chronological duration but in how such events interact with the significant context of human relationships of power and/or happiness. Centrally, human liberation means in temporal terms to "reclaim mastery over work time, the essential component of life time" (Guattari and Negri 1990, 16). As Marx

(1973, 711) put it, "The saving of labour-time is equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power" (I discuss this in Suvin 2010b). The time of any established class order will be continuous and homogeneous but qualitatively empty. In capitalism, clock time dominates as measure of work and profit; however, in its ripe and decadent form it can also use, as a subordinate form, a qualitatively collapsed "time of image-consumption, medium of all commodities," a pseudocyclical or "spectacle" time (Debord 1987, 124). Opposed to it is the disorder, or potentially a new and better order, of a discontinuous and qualitative time reposing on virtuality or productive possibility. The dominant course or shape of time is in capitalism linear, coursing to a false infinity, while in the prefigurations of a classless communist society time can be branching, mutating, spiraling, and so on. It is "a field of forces" (Benjamin 1980–82, 5.1:587), "blasted out" of the bad continuum. The most exasperated or condensed guise of their collision would then be the messianic irruption point of "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*), a pregnant present point of change.

There is no reason that poets could not and should not participate in joyful annunciation and laudation of (say) justice, harmony, and bliss in human relationships (see Moylan 1991–92), and many have wondrously done so. But for the ages of oppression, such as the capitalist age—and most etatist "real socialism"—I shall follow the lead of Jacques Rancière (but see on poetry as cognition also Spivak 1998, 115.) and posit that if the poet-creator can—in fact, cannot but—participate in politics, he can do so only paradoxically. True, most critics in our mass societies would realistically acknowledge that poetry changes nothing, directly. Yet it is a kind of prefiguration incarnating elements and aspects of the possible and necessary revolution to come.

This means, literally, that the creative poet is one who doubts the views, opinions, and stances of the reigning lore or common sense, one who swerves from them by infringing old usages and meanings and implicitly or explicitly creates—or at least is groping for, foreboding—new ones. Epicure's ruling principle of the atoms swerving from the automatically straight path may stand as the great ancestor of all creative methods and possibilities (see Suvin 2010). Existentially, this is testified to by the exile of so many poets throughout the ages, never more frequent than in the century beginning with the first capitalist World War; the enmeshment in the world is often also an exile across official boundaries, making evident that, as in the age-old "inner

emigration," poets have always been half inside and half outside dominant institutions and stances. To put it in the useful terms of Raymond Williams about hegemony and "structures of feeling," our lives are largely shaped by a complex societal hegemony that includes the determinations by political economy as well as direct political control and social group control but also, for Williams (1977, 109–10), all "the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living. . . . It [hegemony] is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values." Within such hegemonies, structures of feeling are sociohistorically particular qualities "of social experience and relationship, . . . actively lived [meanings and values]" (131). Poets embody and correlate these structures inside and outside texts (in the larger semiotic sense) since they are also structures of experience; these structures are evident in textual "forms and conventions—semantic figures" (135) that can be taken as constellations of sense and meaning.

Consequently, verse and prose poetry have been places of truth-bearing thinking not sundered from feeling, often filling in the voids left by institutionalized science and institutionalized philosophy, and of course by most institutionalized politics and ideology, inimical to humanity because enmeshed in oppressive and exploitative class rule; I cannot imagine major poetry and art that extol psychic oppression or physical suppression of people. I think in particular of two mutually supporting reigning ideological practices of these our times: first, doctrinaire, neurotic possessive individualism, where experiences matter because they are "mine"; second, wars of domination. Opposing these, poetry is always engaged in concrete generalizable experiences, ideally soliciting all open-minded readers, and it makes love or hate, but never war. I revisit aspects of the poet's politics for the capitalist kalpa in section 2.

To sum up: all ruling institutions and ideologies use generalization, irremediably wedded to abstract concepts that cannot satisfactorily account for the relationship between people and nature, the finite and the infinite. Poetic creation sutures conceptual thought to justification from recalled immediate sensual, bodily experiences that are, thus far, much more difficult to fake. As important is its ranging through richer time horizons, recalled in Williams's (1977, 121) categories of the dominant, emergent, and residual in culture: remembering supposed qualities within human relationships, absent today, in

the past as well as hoping—and working, acting—for them in the future by finding, cherishing, and developing its seeds today and yesterday, in the hidden complicity of happiness and hoping. The main difference to Marxist communism would be that the latter's categories and values are shaped (and therefore also limited) by societal history, posed as a closed world. The biological and indeed cosmic aspects of human beings are here, as it were, bracketed out for the present needs of struggle, but beyond such a horizon of a militant church, poetry and all arts cannot forget, and thus need incorporate, the triumphant—and, obversely, the sorrowful or suffering—aspect (I worry more at this in Suvin 2017).

I proceed to buttress and unfold the argument that poetry is an irreplaceable cognition needed for survival of humanity—and thus a communicating vessel twinned to communism—by reading the complementary masters Bertolt Brecht, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Franco Fortini.

2. The Stance of Emancipation: Brecht's Theory, Hölderlin's Verse, Fortini's Criticism

All serious thinking about art must begin from two apparently contradictory facts: that an important work is always, in an irreducible sense, individual; and yet that there are authentic communities of works of art, in kinds, periods and styles.
—Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*

2.1. On Brecht's Stance and Bearing

A key mediation between the shapes and values of a sociohistorical body or structure and an individual body or personality is Brecht's concept and exemplary practice of *Haltung*, translatable as "stance, bearing, or attitude." I have explored this at length (the notion, in Suvin 1999 and 2002, and the practice in essays collected in Suvin 1984 and 1994a and in Wegner 2011) and here summarize the points pertinent to my argument on creativity and poetry. *Haltung* meant in German semantics, within a discourse originating in the ruling class, a precise bodily bearing in a hierarchical interpersonal relation, usually positively evaluated as strong and worthy behavior. While refusing the term's traditional statics from above down, the bourgeois and individualistic concepts of an internalized and atomic character, as well as the faceless economic determinants in Engelsian historical-materialist vulgate, Brecht retained the body as the codetermining

anchorage for a person's stance. He thus arrived at a concept that yokes together a subject's body orientation in space-time and the body's meaningful insertion into major societal flows of things, to which bearing he could allot a central role in his work and understanding of the world. This engagement of the whole body, which does not split the sensorium from the brain, was diametrically opposed to learning through systematized ideas. On the one hand, "people do much that is reasonable yet does not pass through their reason (*Verstand*). We cannot well do without this" (Brecht 1988–98, 825). On the other hand, for Brecht the systematized notional constructs tend toward false harmony and ideological univocity necessarily present in any closed doctrine or world view, which then grows more important than its learning bearer.

Picking up the young Marx's Epicurean assumption that the development of the senses is the central criterion for hominization as against alienation, Brecht pioneered a discourse articulating a reintegration of the body into the practice and theory of our knowledge. This importantly includes, as I argue in Suvin 1999, 1994b, and 2008a, some emotions such as sympathy and indignation in tandem with embodied reason. Without knowing of him, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of a writer as one that crystallizes a vital situation in language, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's notion of literary meaning bound to embodiment and location brought about significant developments of such embodied thinking and feeling.

Stance brings about a particular form or shape, in personal relationships as well as in poetry and other arts (where it is foregrounded and focused on); a poetic text is "an ensemble of linguistic and behavioural choices . . . organised into structures and implying an end or *telos*" (Fortini 2003, 962). Criticism, institutionalized or not, flows out of "[the possibility] to clarify this end to others; in that sense any criticism is ideology and precept" (962). This is different from the veneration of a pseudo-avant-gardist stress on vitalistic chaos, much akin to or at least clearly impotent in front of fascism; it also differs from the imposition of a shape taken from an ideology or doctrine, as in bourgeois rationalism, as well as from a limited catalog of traditional forms, as in academic conservatism. Rather, it means contesting the mystifying forms that lower classes adopt from dominant discourse. It favors formalizing—that is, emancipatory—stances, new or old, that "change into choices the largest possible part of destiny" (390).

2.2. On Hölderlin and Transition

How is such an approach to be reconciled with the irreducible impact of individual works of art, as the quote from Raymond Williams asks? A famed example of poetic procedure and of major cognitive dignity may be found in the opus of Friedrich Hölderlin, and I take as an example his great poem *Brod und Wein* (*Bread and Wine*, 1801) and focus on the last eleven lines of its stanza 7:

> Nur zu Zeiten erträgt göttliche Fülle der Mensch,
> Traum von ihnen ist drauf das Leben. Aber das Irrsal
> Hilft, wie Schlummer und stark machet die Not und die Nacht,
> Bis daß Helden genug in der ehernen Wiege gewachsen,
> Herzen an Kraft, wie sonst, ähnlich den Himmlischen sind.
> Donnernd kommen sie drauf. Indessen dünket mir öfters
> Besser zu schlafen, wie so ohne Genossen zu sein,
> So zu harren und was zu tun indes und zu sagen,
> Weiß ich nicht und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?
> Aber sie sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester,
> Welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht.
>
> Only at times can mankind bear the divine fullness.
> Dreaming them is life from then on. But the errance
> Helps, also sleep, and the need and the night make for strength,
> Until heroes enough in cradles of brass have grown to be,
> With hearts as strong, and in other ways alike to the heavenly ones.
> Thundering they come nearer. Meanwhile it seems to me often
> Better to sleep, than thus to be companionless, so to wait
> And wait and what's to do in this while and to say
> I do not know and what poets are for in an age of want?
> Yet they are, you say, like to the wine-god's holy priests,
> Who wandered from land to land on through the holy night.
> (translation emended)

This breathless oral rhythm is thickly strewn with nodes of compressed insight. A central node is the rich expression "dürftige Zeit." The *Zeit* is obviously a historical epoch, in this case the bitter reflux of the great French Revolution and its attendant hopes—in that way analogous to the great October Revolution and its longer reflux for us today, finally sealed in 1989 and lasting still beyond its centenary year. *Dürftig* can be translated as of dearth, of distress, a destitute, hard, meager, scant, paltry, miserable, feeble, wretched, impoverished, insubstantial,

jejune, necessitous, straightened, or penurious age. Centrally this is an age of deep and radical, moral and material, need (*not*—also *Bedarf*, *Bedürfnis*, the latter suggested also by the keystone *dürftig*; also translatable as requirement, lack, want, desire for what is needed). For the moment I translate it as "an age of want" as most suggestive.

The fragment chosen thus centrally speaks to the needy 95 percent of us in the age of the great turbocapitalist distress pivoting on finances as the supreme good—which wondrously manages to be both fake and lacking. This totally alienated time is the unbearable day: the poem opens with a first stanza praising the night and sleep as against the dominant daily awareness and impact (it was published separately as a short poem *The Night*). To escape this day, night-cum-sleep and wandering without fixed abode or certainties are at the moment the only means of minimal defense while awaiting the new age of heroes worthy of "divine fullness." In today's language, we are living in a dystopia that is also an antiutopia, while remembering, perhaps vaguely, an age with the horizon of and vector toward concrete utopia. In this dystopia we are all atomized individuals, "companionless"—*ohne Genossen*, "without comrades"—and it is most remarkable that the poem never uses *I* or *my*, only *we* or impersonal forms. The poem's voice and indeed stance deeply disbelieve in sundered individuals outside of great impersonal (or divine) powers that traverse humanity and on the daily human level outside of a *we*.

This is only one possible interpretation, which does not exhaust the riches of this much commented text—for example the important *Irrsal* (errance, but also radical, if rather disconsolate, deviance, and much more) of verse 2 or the mysterious "you" toward the end. However, for us today, what is the "divine fullness" that people can only fitfully bear, yet that Hölderlin is here yearning for? Regardless of what the author might have meant, the poem's stance is magnetically oriented toward a poetically transformed French Revolution with its heroes—now both exiled into and transfigured by Dionysian mythology. Little illusion remains as to its necessary harshness; it was a cradle of brass (not gold, silver, or wood), yet it is one we hope for again, while waiting in dearth and distress, destitute and miserable, wretched and impoverished, and the rhythm hurries us onto the culminating existential desolation of "what's to do in this while and to say / I do not know and what poets are for in an age of want?" Well, it is at least clear that the poem is, obviously, "for" being written as it was, as a witness, mourner, and herald. The answer to the question momentarily unanswerable—for a long moment, lasting decades—is first of all

to speak (locution), testifying to the question's weighty pertinence, and to speak about its context and reason (illocution), which brings at least the basis or foretaste of the answer (perlocution). And having spoken it, the poets are already participating to some degree in this fullness, in the seminarist Hölderlin's lingo they are holy: they already wander in the holy night firmly disbelieving the certainties of the day.

2.3. On Fortini and Poetic Justice

The already much used Franco Fortini, one of the twentieth century's best critics of poetry—himself a significant poet, and an intimately epistemological and political one to boot—defined "the literary use of language" as a homology to "a formalised i.e., conscious and conscientious use of life that is [the end and goal of communism]" (2003, 184). This homology (to my mind in part annunciation-cum-denunciation and in part prefiguration, a shadow falling from the future) necessarily transgresses the hegemonic discourse, in our times sadly clichéd; I would call it cognition constituted by memorable pleasure. Poets too, just as revolutionaries, are itinerant, geographically or nationally unfixed announcers and denouncers, rooted in times rather than spaces. They remember the past, dispute the present "use of life into which we are forced by alienation of labour" (Fortini 2015, 35), and carry their lessons into projects of possible lives reaching for the future. What Fortini means by form in poetry can be characterized as an interpretation of the world by means of what word constellations both say and leave unsaid but suggest and give clues to, always suffused by firm if dynamic values shared by a societal class. We may recognize that the "look into thy heart and write" (31) orientation may be a device, enforced by defeat, that allows precious personal testimony counteracting the dispossessed persons' (and classes') lack of stability and legitimation. In lyrics, looking outward takes most often the detour of first looking inward—an old topos, present at least since Petrarch and Philip Sidney, if not Catullus. However, Fortini's dialectically richer view can not only englobe such a contradictory detour from collective horizons but also diametrically oppose the presently prevailing obscurantist use of form as a demolition of meaning and sense, as a ghetto instead of a lookout: "form is a tension to incorporate, confront, and elaborate what is outside the frontiers of poetic form" (38). In Jameson's (1988, 356) terms, "cognitive mapping will be a matter of form."

Arthur Rimbaud (1992) phrased this in *Une saison en enfer* as *Posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*—"To own truth in a soul and a body [and possibly through or by means of it]." Furthermore, no

text can have a meaning for somebody who would try to deal with it "totally apart from all its extra-textual relations," since all the presuppositions and conventions that make a text meaningful come from that extratextual domain: "The extra-textual bonds of a work can be described as the relations between the set of elements fixed in the text and the set of elements from which any given element in the text is selected" (Lotman 1977, 50). This constitutes a horizon for poetry that is both political in the nobler sense and also, as it were, cosmological, for its greatness and misery deal—as Fortini (2003, 1454–60) spelled it out in an interview—with human resistance to death by means of a systematic project, and therefore as a self-education of which artworks are exemplars. To recall the brief focus on time in section 1.3, both poetry and communism choose the radical break with capitalist pointlike time, extending maximally to this year's profits, toward a long duration of polymorphic solidarity, where, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, "disorder would be less fatal, and death less senseless" (quoted in Fortini 2003, 1458). Poetry longs for embodiment of its values as ends (though individual authors may not know or wish this): "*It demands, with the force of its own authority, its incarnation*" (1278).

Such a creative horizon in our age immediately shapes the poets' attitude as an intimately personal paradox of living in politics as an antipolitics. All that is commonly taken for politics since the failure of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions (for my generation, say, since the effects of the antifascist wars, such as peace and the welfare state, have been largely or fully expunged) is alien and inimical, where not the actively threatening and murderous drones and renditions. The reigning commonsense, brainwashed understanding includes from our ancestral heroic ages of liberating politics—the liberal, communist, and antifascist ones—only a few impoverished slogans. Therefore, as Rancière (1992) remarks of verse, poets have to retrace the line of passage that unites words and things, and in prose, I would add, the line that unites human figures and space-times by means of plot and metaphoric clusters. In brief, where personality is valued for and as consumption in view of profit, and carefully shaped phrases or images pertain increasingly to mendacious and death-inducing advertising, art has to upset (see Suvin 1986, 1994b, 2012a).

As Rancière (1992) has pointed out, the deviation and scandal of modern art are well expressed by our immediate major poetic ancestor, Rimbaud—in a filiation clearly enmeshed with political revolution and beginning with Milton, many Romantics, Heine, and Baudelaire. Rimbaud was led to exasperation at having to reconcile his deep hatred

of the bourgeois society with the irrefragable fact of having to breathe and experience within it:

> . . . industrialists, rulers, senates:
> Die quick! Power, justice, history: down with you!
> This is owed to us. Blood! Blood! Golden flame!
> All to war, to vengeance, to terror . . . Enough!
> - - - - - - - - -
> . . . I'm there, I'm still there. ("Qu'est-ce pour nous," original in Rimbaud 1992, 113)

The obverse of this aporia (the *assez* vs. *j'y suis toujours*) is Thomas More's great coinage of utopia: the radically different good place that is in our sensual experience not here but must be cognized—today, on pain of extinction. What is not here, Bloch's yet unknown, is almost always first adumbrated in art and fiction, most economically in verse. From many constituents of the good place, I here focus, as does Rancière (1992, 92–93), on *freedom*—Wordsworth's "Dear Liberty" (1888, l. 31), which translates the French revolutionary term of *liberté chérie*—that then enables security, order, creativity, and so on. The strategic insight here seems to be that the method or epistemic principle of great modern verse from Rimbaud on—and prose too, in somewhat differing ways—is freedom as possibility of things being otherwise and humanly better; this is to be understood by means of the interaction of what is being said and how it is being said, a consubstantiality of theme and stance. This is also of a piece with the fact that the eye cannot function without the brain; there is no brain without socialized presuppositions; therefore there is no innocent eye. Every reading will establish its own, value-laden meaning out of the text's sense. Every reading is a denial (suppression) of other readings, meanings, and values. Any "positive" act is also the negation of a negation; any truth a denial of incompatible "untruths." All shaping and articulation entail the suppression of alternative shapings and articulations for the relationships it refers to: it can never exhaust such relations.

Collective and distributive human freedom from oppression, exploitation, debasement, and destruction is today our supreme truth and supreme good. As a privileged metonymy of and ally for this emancipation, poetic freedom is a historically situated, political experience of the sensual, which is necessarily also a polemical swerve from and against the dominant lore, in favor of fresh cognition. This freedom is intimately melded with knowledge or cognition. The work of

poetry gives shape, voice, and bearing to a previously uncognized, mute and nonarticulated, category of being; in that strictly notional sense, the final sediment of all fiction and art is the thesaurus and the collective imaginary encyclopedia. And this encyclopedia is a list of the categories, topoi, and shapes that direct people's orientation in our common world.

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Notes

1. This essay continues and develops matters I have been worrying at as long as I can remember, rendering unavoidable the many references to my work (though I limit their number). Immediate forebears are Suvin 2008b, 2012b, 2015a and 2016a, and Wegner 2011. Cognate matters may be found in Suvin 2017.

2. I wrote a lengthy analysis (Suvin 2010a) about and arising out of Le Guin's splendid novel, from which I learned a lot; it included first suggestions about the subject expanded upon here. On this kind of communitarianism now, see also Nancy 1990, 230–31.

3. I cannot enter here into a central unargued presupposition, encapsulated by White (2016, 412) as "it is generally conceded that the concept of the concept is vague or ambiguous," thus knocking out the basis of this whole dogmatics. I share the opposed philosophical tradition on continental Europe, hermeneutic and dialectical, starting in the Stoics and Epicureans and powerfully reemerging with Hegel and then Marx, Nietzsche, and on, that has no need to taboo or downgrade figures and allows alliances or even unions with other officially sundered disciplines in discussing meaning, sense, and values of human living together. As White concludes, this tradition "even recognises that 'fiction' may be less the contrary of 'fact' than a different way of mediating between sense and imagination" (414), and he goes on to instantiate this in some great modern poets.

4. John McCumber's (2001) horrifying book on professional US philosophy's subservience to McCarthyism gives examples that are not quite fascist or Stalinist only because there was no need for concentration camps and extrajudicial murder. That huge repression, which banished from teaching of philosophy all pursuit of cognition except in the form of conceptual assertion (ix) and resolutely fenced off the discipline from all others, led to a series of attacks on nonmainstream teaching, for example, a recommendation to de-accredit the program at New York's famous New School of Social Research because it taught the likes of Hannah Arendt (51).

5. A separate matter that I cannot enter upon here, either, is the contradictory but finally failed relationship between the artistic and the political communist consciousness—that is, between the intellectuals and the ruling communist party—that ended by falling back into the dichotomy between ideologists of power and estheticism, due mainly to the party's oligarchic agoraphobia. I have attempted a general approach to such aporias in "Fifteen Theses" (Suvin 2015b) and find many particular useful stances in Fortini 2003, 384–96, 944–53.

6. At least this obtains in the two cases I know something about, the Russian and the Yugoslav ones (but I think the Asian ones are similar); their creators were not only many prominent intellectuals but also mainly manual workers, mostly urban in the Russian case and mostly rural in the Yugoslav one. See samples and discussion in Steinberg 2017, 24–25, 31–32, 86–87, 102, 113, 132; for Yugoslavia in general, in Matvejević 1977, 167–80; and for the best explored Yugoslav case of Slovenia, samples in Paternu 1987, with discussion in Komelj 2009 and in *Slavica Tergestina* 2016.

Lenin's remark in the 1905 revolution, "Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles" (Lenin 1905, chap. 13), seems to me right—if one-sided.

I find it pleasing that Gramsci (2017, 75) thought along similar lines; his article on the Russian Revolution of July 1918 says: "As a song exists in the poet's imagination before it does on printed paper, thus the advent of societal organisation exists in conscience and wills."

7. I suggest here, together with Lenin, Luxemburg, Gramsci, and Brecht, Badiou 2009, Guattari and Negri 1990, Nancy 1990, Žižek 2009, Douzinas and Žižek 2010, and Dean 2012 as most stimulating.