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Editorial

In this issue, Boris Groys charts the self-transformation of the working class through labor itself. Workers' bodies, through their own labor, become spiritualized—artificial forms of their own creation. Since modernity, the working class, held up as a universal whole, has practiced "secular ascesis," even if by exploitation and oppression. And where does this spiritualized dimension of the working class manifest itself? As art.

When the ready-made is brought into the museum—or when the museum is filled with giant monochromes, as Alexandre Kojève imagined—the difference between the industrial worker and the artist theoretically dissolves. Neither art nor labor have a utilitarian function, says Kojève via Groys; instead, their "essential" function is to produce the spiritualized bodies of the working class. The museum becomes a site for spiritual unification between ascetic workers, while the state protects "life-forms" produced through work from the danger of slipping back into a history of bloody struggles, wars, and revolutions.

In mapping the "Speeds and Vectors of Energy Terrorism," Svitlana Matviyenko details how a full year of Russia's asymmetric invasion of Ukraine opens a long view on hyper-contemporary practices of war. With the myth of "victory" and the promise of reduced kinetic combat in twenty-first century warfare both dashed, Matviyenko illuminates the entangled vectors targeting Ukrainians today. She also warns that any resolution must seriously contend with the ongoing operational psychosis evidenced by complex propaganda. Russia's imperial army, hellbent on maintaining what Matviyenko terms "terror environments," summons the technical, ecological, corporate, and aesthetic capacities of prior wars, fueling extreme new trajectories for past debris. Meanwhile, air-raid sirens, constant since February 2022, "have generated myriad affective relations between different life-forms throughout the entire country," writes Matviyenko, maintaining "a profoundly cybernetic form of control and communication in the animal and the machine." One need only see the haunted eyes of a fox, a living resident of Chernobyl, to glimpse the immediacy of a terror with a too-long half-life and no outside.

Looking to the near past, Jason Waite shows how the 2011 Fukushima meltdown destabilized Japan's economic and political order and prompted the country's largest social movement since the 1960s. A loose cultural collective called Amateur Riot (Shiroto no Ran) had already been building autonomous infrastructures, which were then put to use. Waite considers Amateur Riot—composed of artists, musicians, and other precarious cultural workers based in a small working-class neighborhood in western Tokyo (Koenji)—alongside the concept of "zomia," which refers to a vast region between South, Central, East, and Southeast Asia that has little state presence due to its mountainous topography. In Koenji, Waite mobilizes the concept to describe embodied, local resilience against encroachments on survival.

Writing about extinction, Ben Ware asserts that anti-natalists choose the tight embrace of death—and in this way carry on in a vibrant form of life. Ware compares Freud's lingering death drive to the "universal death drive" of entropy in the study of thermodynamics, and finds notions of death and its inevitability to be highly conflictual—not least in the pursuit of pleasure.

Thotti continues with the second installment of "We Too Were Modern," a sprawling work on colonial modernity in Brazil. This month's essay details the transformation and transubstantiation associated with the cultural interest in cannibalism, particularly as an expression of radical, national integration. In this belonging that will never pass for colonized or colonizer, "Oswald de Andrade's operation seeks to revive the gesture of hospitality of Montaigne's cannibal, to insert his flesh and especially that of the country into the infinite process of devouring and digesting where any lines between human and thing are erased."

This issue also features work by three poets, selected by *e-flux journal* poetry editor Simone White. Lyn Hejinian's "Lola the Interpreter: Book One" posits that "perhaps an artist is a fantasy creature, author of a genuine inner life, but about whom, eventually, a police statement says that she or he died of weeping or, as some witnesses insist, of laughter." We come to this, in Hejinian's lyrical opening directive, through "let[ting] this begin, precipitously disturbed." LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs lays groundwork through memory structures that are often concerned with the language of—and conflictive relationship between—violence and sexuality. The photograph published with her poems shows one form of infrastructure (electrical cabling) growing through and destroying another (a house). The last line of Diggs's two poems reads: "she reaches for a twelve pack of Nutty Buddy at Target / the book closes :: see / the problem w/ including photos." Her poems and image come from her book *Village*, newly out. Mohammed Zenia's "Fear and Poeming in Upstate New York," which also travels points north and south, presents the ambiguous shifting figure of Funk Flex, in a musically adjacent counterpoint to Diggs's parataxical, layered memories of America. Zenia's work is definitional in its poetic strategies—in the naming of the geographically and personally specific elements of the poem. Read together, the work of these three poets presents parallax affective landscapes that speak through one of Zenia's lines: "survival, the shuntering towards a failed kingdom or an abyss."

Rather than isolating the one "true" Italian operaismo, Gigi Roggero paints a nuanced picture of the movement's historical context. "For revolutionary militants," he writes, "truth is never something that needs to be explained, but is always something that must be fought for." Roggero summarizes the various versions of councilism that preceded and informed the development of operaismo, showing how the movement emerged from the "political desert" of late-1950s Italy. In the end, through ruptures with history and with themselves, the operaist militants opened the possibility of a "history that would become collective." In reading Roggero's retelling of attempts to fortify the collective autonomy of the working class, Boris Groys's opening question reverberates: "Let us ask: Why do people work?"

X

Svitlana Matviyenko

Speeds and Vectors of Energy Terrorism

There was a time—I still remember it—when it seemed we would escape "the gravitational pull of the [all-out] war."[1] But then, in January of last year, President Biden allegedly said in a phone call with President Zelensky that Russia's military incursion was "imminent."[2] When media reports of the phone call surfaced, the war started looking more real. There is no perfect analog to "imminent" in Ukrainian, so the word caused confusion. For example, computer-assisted translation software (CAT) translates it as " *nemynuche*," which in English is closer to the word "inevitable." One major Ukrainian publication used this translation, which was then reproduced and disseminated by others.[3] Suspended between "pending" and "inevitable," an all-out war—no matter how *proximate* —still seemed *avoidable*, until everything accelerated on February 11, 2022. That day, news about a declassified US intelligence report went viral. The message was this: a full-scale war will break out on February 16.

This *announcement* contradicted the regime of the then-eight-year-long *unannounced* war—that is if we start counting from mid-2014, when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and began construction on the Crimean Bridge (linking the Taman Peninsula in Krasnodar Krai, Russia with the Kerch Peninsula in Crimea), or several months later, when Russian forces entered the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. Looking back from today, signs of the potential imperial expansion were visible decades earlier. For example, in 2003, the Russian Federation initiated a territorial dispute over Tuzla, a sandy island off the coast of the Crimean Peninsula that had separated itself from Russian territory quite *naturally* through a three-hundred-year-long geological process of erosion,[4] until a massive storm finalized the split on November 29, 1925 (after which it was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic's jurisdiction and then subsequently to Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union). The island became a dangerously seductive stepping stone for the empire's "adversarial infrastructures" of the future.[5] Despite mounting signs of a looming invasion, the announced beginning of the ongoing unannounced war was thus postponed.

Every day in my town before the announced invasion, we were suspended between a paranoiac sense of *certainty* about the upcoming invasion— *all the dots connected*, all the signs were there—and the disturbing *uncertainty* created by a *deficit of knowledge* that always emerges in states of data overload. Under such conditions, meaning disintegrates and comprehension is subverted by an overflow of conflicting information. After the postponed invasion, however, the gap between what I thought I *knew* and how I started *acting* upon that knowledge started closing fast. Reality imposed itself on me, on us, as a mixture of fiction and nonfiction, with one of them overwriting the other: disseminated maps of bomb shelters, most of them nonexistent; the formation of local groups for territorial defense without a clear agenda;

Still from Chornobyl 22, a documentary film by Oleksiy Radynski, 2023. Camera: Max Savchenko. Courtesy of The Reckoning Project.

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people in military uniforms, still without weapons, populating the streets; me filling online shopping carts with items for my emergency backpack, without buying them. I resisted the idea of the impending all-out war, which was the only form of resistance available until other forms of resistance became necessary.

"Let's say this is a game," I thought in early 2022, speculating about intelligence projections and wondering where the Russian state would stop at demonstrating its alleged martial capacities near the Ukrainian border. How far would the Russian Federation go before militarization spread across every inch of the fabric of our everyday lives, shaking and destroying all our life-supporting relations and energies? I thought their senseless waste of these energies and ruptures of these relations were already profoundly immoral acts. I thought this would be the worst of what people in Ukraine would have to live through in 2022—the *irreversible militarization* of life in proximity to something impending, looming, and threatening. Since March 2021, the massive accumulation of Russian forces on the Ukrainian border had pulled the entire country back and forth, exhausting us in waves: at high tide was the constant threat of all-out war, at low tide a less-intensive disturbance in the east.

The day before the announced (yet postponed) invasion last February, I asked a friend if I could observe our local territorial defense group's training sessions "for research purposes." Two days later, we were in a cab heading toward the outskirts of town. A man with a bag of weapons was waiting for us on the side of the highway. Throwing the bag over his shoulder, he led my friend and I down a muddy trail until we reached, in ten minutes or so, something like a polygon. The man put the bag down carefully. He pulled out helmets, yellow ballistics glasses, tactical headsets, and bulletproof vests, and swiftly wrapped our bodies in all of it. My neck and shoulders gave in under the weight of the equipment while I tried to

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follow the instructor's lecture. Every item in your backpack must be multipurpose; war demands self-care and augments the danger of even the smallest scratches; war is primarily about debris, and only secondarily concerns bullets, rockets, and bombs. In the next three to four hours I learned how to disassemble, assemble, and aim an AK-47. Then, released from the vest and heavy combat helmet, I cabbed back home with a sense that life had already been irreversibly pulled into a disastrous cybernetic vortex by forces impossible to resist. The war, I finally realized, was *imminent* in the sense of *inevitable*. Martial assemblages[6] had formed long before they revealed themselves for documentation.

As political theorist Jairus Victor Grove reminds us, war is a life-form that subsists on rot and regeneration. War decomposes the relations and assemblages that sustain peaceful life, and replaces them with martial relations and assemblages that sustain life during conflict.[7] I could not have previously imagined that within just thirty days, scores of martial assemblages, the extensions of war, would proliferate epidemically. I couldn't have fathomed that Ukrainians would witness—by reading, watching, hearing, seeing, feeling, and sensing through torture—the "borderless" empire breaking into a sovereign territory by means of genocidal and ecocidal destruction, violently territorializing itself,[8] driven by its imperial identity crisis: a delusional quest for its "lost kingdom."[9]

The war progressed throughout the spring and summer of 2022, advancing deep into territories that were still far away from the front lines. It expanded itself by proliferation: as Grove writes, multitudes of martial assemblages, beyond just "soldiers, tanks, uniforms, gas masks, … and bullets" are crucial "to move [war] from the abstract to the concrete."[10] My tenth-floor flat turned into a camp site. A wireless radio sat on my desk. All around me were stacks of canned food, four camping lamps, several headlights, bottles of *horilka*, two camping stoves, propane-butane canisters, four power banks, ten five-liter water bottles, boxes of candles, FFP1 masks that shield lungs from fine and solid particles, and, of course, iodine pills. These objects, gathered in response to new, threatening developments from the enemy's military, entered my space gradually. But soon enough they formed an "intensive fabric of relations"[11] that occupied my immediate surroundings, proving that the exteriority of a hypermodern nuclear cyberwar[12] is imaginary—and that its proximity, to anyone anywhere, is real.

Terror Environments

The Russian government justified the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in which the imperial state exercised its right to kill on the territory of another sovereign state, as a necessary "special operation," aka a "state of exception."[13] It remains illegal in Russia to call this war a "war." The Russian Federation would not even describe its actions as a blitzkrieg, which still implies conduct in accordance with the laws of war. A "state of exception" designates warfare without clear definition, employing unconventional techniques.[14] In this regard, the Russian state's description of its war as a "special operation" is accurate: it declares its intention to transgress the laws of war by opening space for unregulated war crimes, for creating multiple *terror environments* marked by extreme suppression and violence.

The terror environments of the present war are characterized by a simultaneous *double targeting* of Ukraine's population by weapons and by information.[15] The disinformation and propaganda generated by Russian state-controlled media have attracted significant international attention. This coverage, however, has mostly focused on the *internal* vector of Russian disinformation and its impact on the citizens of the Russian Federation. Related media discourse has remained stuck in 1930s and '40s propaganda studies, centered on a unidirectional, behavioristic,

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hypodermic-needle model of the state injecting "lies, lies, lies" into its population.[16] The communication model of Russian propaganda today is more complex than the model described by theorists nearly a century ago, although it still feeds on the basic principles of "crystallizing public opinion."[17] Now the theater of Russian propaganda exhibits a paradoxical mix of Ancient Greek drama and Christian salvation myth—thus the 2018–20 erection of a bizarre Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in the Moscow region. The building's designs initially included a gigantic mosaic depicting Vladimir Putin, Sergey Shoygu, other high-ranking Russian officials, and Joseph Stalin.[18] The chorus of TV propagandists both produces and channels the anxiety associated with a sense of destiny: "It's better not to be born!"[19] This paraphrased "wisdom" from Silenus, the companion and tutor of the wine god Dionysus in Greek mythology, is resurrected in an authoritarian state that supplies its audience with techniques to manage their relationship with *truth* by reducing it to a pure *place*. This place is sporadically occupied, depending on circumstances, by drastically shifting versions of reality, without causing any cognitive dissonance. What matters is that all versions are annunciated from the same place of power, where a convenient deus ex machina or his double in an expensive jacket offers a cheap performance to persuade the audience that he takes every individual sin upon himself. The mantra "This is Putin's war" captures the gist of this social contract.

The *external* vector of Russian disinformation that reaches into the Ukrainian media sphere has not received sufficient attention, but it is a significant factor in the formation of terror environments. Every rocket attack, every reported case of extreme torture, every documented case of genocide is followed by denial and mockery on Russian state TV and associated social media channels. This content is disseminated so broadly that the double-targeted Ukrainian subject of the war has almost no chance to avoid such harmful and traumatic encounters. Viewers abroad are partially shielded from horrific war content courtesy of the algorithmic customer care of online media platforms, which is still performed by underpaid human contractors.[20] Meanwhile, Ukrainians watch and produce their own horrific content, collecting witness accounts as evidence of war crimes in the hope of future justice—that is, if the Hague's International Criminal Court can handle such an overwhelming archive. Ukrainians are forced to defend these irrefutable records of war atrocities against orchestrated accusations of "fakeness." The most notorious examples of this include media campaigns to sow doubt over the Russian bombing of Maternity Hospital No. 3 in Mariupol in spring 2022, and over evidence of the Bucha massacre, which came to light after Russian forces withdrew from the Kyiv region. The genocidal jokes of Vladimir Solovyov, the Kremlin's chief propagandist, have by now become mundane. This is not *information war* as we once knew it. What we need to recognize here is a qualitative shift from *disinformation* practices to the strategic production of *terror*.

Terror environments are centered around *necropolitical data-subjects*, the human targets of ads and drones. Situated at the intersection of global information networks and local media networks, the data-subject is surveilled by both commercial and military technologies. Distinguishing between the two has become irrelevant during the Russia-Ukraine war.[21] Terror environments proliferate through the creation of numerous spaces of interrogation in which Ukrainian citizens are categorized according to their *usefulness* for cyberwar machinery. Torture rooms located all around the temporarily occupied territories and filtration facilities on their edges[22] are supplemented by a growing number of reeducation institutions for children. In these spaces, subjects' digital data, such as social media communications, photographs, and documents, are cross-read together with their biometrics. Meanwhile, their physical bodies are searched for signs of "Nazism" such as tattoos, scars, or other bodily marks that could hint at the possibility of further exploitation. Other Ukrainian citizens are deported to Russian territory as either a labor resource—the Russian state is losing its citizens to war-related migration and battlefield losses—or leverage, in the case of negotiations and prisoner swaps. These necropolitical data-subjects are terrorized into becoming multipurpose resources for cyberwar. Torture rooms, for example, operate simultaneously as machines for extracting information from people, and as the mises-en-scène for Russian propaganda TV, which broadcasts information placed forcibly into the mouths and bodies of disposable war subjects. These subjects are compelled to articulate messages or confessions by means of electric current, water torture, rape, hunger, broken bones, and cut flesh.

Terror environments expand extensively and immediately in size—from a room to a region and a country. Air-raid sirens, a constant in the Ukrainian soundscape since the end of February 2022, have generated myriad affective

relations between different life-forms throughout the entire country. The sirens maintain a profoundly cybernetic form of control and communication in the animal and the machine. Martial assemblages also determine the temporality and spatiality of terror environments. On February 24, 2022, the enemy chose radar units as the target of its first blow. Radar is good at detecting cruise missiles that fly at low altitude, with a relatively slow speed of under one thousand kilometers per hour. The Ukrainian defense system has about fifteen minutes to intercept such missiles; the reported interception rate is 70 to 75 percent. One of the most common tactics of the Russian forces has been to overwhelm the Ukrainian air defense system with a barrage of rockets. Some of them manage to break through. When Russian forces use ballistic missiles, some of which can fly beyond the atmosphere at hypersonic speeds of up to nine thousand kilometers per hour, the window for interception is only a few seconds. This of course makes them much harder to shoot down. And then there is debris. Over the past year, my thoughts have often returned to my bewildering military training session before the full-scale invasion. Exploding debris, my instructor said, defines your immediate surroundings more than bullets do. Since then, while remaining affectively linked to thousands of others in Ukraine by the wailing sound of alarms, I would often visualize the contours of the space formed by multitudinous trajectories of flying debris—all those pieces of glass, metal, and concrete that a shock wave may, one day, carry through my apartment in nanoseconds, leaving me no place, nor time, to hide.

Nuclear Cyberwar

War analysts acknowledge that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has employed tactics and strategies from both World War I and World War II. The conflict is, at one and the same time, a *trench and artillery war* and an *aircraft war*: computation is merged with antiaircraft fire, battlefield strategies are assisted by probabilistic calculations. This is also a *cyberwar* which, apart from the "kinetic" use of helicopter gunships, artillery, rocket batteries, tanks, small arms, and other conventional weapons, also involves electronic command, control, communication, and weapons-targeting systems.[23] All of this is now amplified by signal and open-source intelligence, aerial and ground-based intelligence, and monitoring and analysis of social networks with or without special software. Ongoing cyberattacks and hacks have been consistent with conventional definitions of cyberwar, but the present conflict has also marked a turning point for pilotless aircraft. This development takes the notion of "cyber warfare" to another level.

Both Russian and Ukrainian forces employ drones for surveillance, guiding artillery fire, dropping weapons, jamming local cellphone towers, and sending threatening messages to enemy soldiers, known as "SMS bombing." Apart from their extensive application on the battlefield,

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drones have been used by the Russian army to terrorize and bomb Ukrainian civilians. The United States has led the charge in deploying tactical drone warfare, consistently carrying out drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia as well in the Gaza Strip and now in the West Bank of Palestine.[24] Presidents Bush and Obama together oversaw 620 strikes outside the active war zones of Iraq, Afghanistan, and later Syria, with Obama overseeing more than five hundred drone strikes throughout the Middle East, which, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, killed four hundred to eight hundred civilians.[25] The Russian state exploits the grimmest legacy of the US "war on terror" with its reluctance to admit the scope of systemic "civilian causalities." It rejects the notion of "civilian causalities" entirely, reversing the logic of execution by remote strike. According to the Russian state and state-controlled media, there are no civilian causalities in this war. The secret logic behind such "success" is simple: the rocket, bomb, or grenade always arrives at its destination because its destination is where it arrives.

People across the country can distinguish the frequent, intense sound of these "deadly flying motorcycles" among other noises in the complex soundscape of this war. Armed civilians and city police have attempted to shoot down drones, though officials have discouraged this practice, insisting that air defense is the domain of the military.[26] Even in relatively protected cities like Kyiv, low-flying or swarming drones equipped to resist hijacking can evade Ukrainian radar to drop bombs on civilian infrastructure. Since drones are significantly slower than missiles, they constitute the other temporal edge of the terror environment. In his address to the Russian Defense Ministry Board on December 21, 2022, the Russian president said that the IT and drone industries were a top priority in the coming year.[27] His assertion that "the most effective weapons systems are those that operate quickly and practically in an automatic mode" signals further intensification. The overall use of drones in this war could soon shift from tactical to fully strategic.

The Ukrainian army is consistently short on heavy military equipment and technology; tanks and air defense systems arrive months later than expected. Integrating drones into more complex systems allows Ukrainian forces to contend with Russian forces in this asymmetrical war. This war has also presented a striking case—in scope and effectiveness—for the use of commercial technology. DJI Mavic "wedding drones" and "toy drones," handheld two-way radio transceivers, cell phones and tablets, Google Maps, and Starlink stations form powerful military assemblages communicating data to artillery operators. While such technology provides vital "eyes" for Ukrainian forces, their surveillant gaze can easily be turned back on the same army due to a lack of data encryption. For example, the same Chinese company that produces commercial DJI drones also sells AeroScope, a radar drone detection system used by both sides. This radar identifies the flight path of a DJI done along with the location of the person operating it, which results in immediate artillery strikes. Ukraine, and certainly Russia too, has become a hackathon site for outfitting DJI drones with DIY, battle-ready capabilities like carrying a grenade and evading surveillance.

This is where the "cyber" and the "kinetic" overlap and amplify each other until it is difficult, or impossible, to distinguish between them. In the resulting "hybrid" cyber-conventional war, "the two elements either fully coincide or phase in and out during complex, asymmetrical military confrontations."[28] Even when it involves precision weapons and AI, twenty-first-century cyberwar is inconsistent with late-twentieth-century ideas of reduced kinetic combat. Instead, it demonstrates the combining of recent technologies with leftover munitions from WWII, including raffles and rockets, trenches and dirt. Other elements that we remember from Russian and Soviet war history remain: namely the reliance on an unrestricted supply of cheap, disposable human resources drawn from colonized first-nation communities and many strategically underdeveloped ethnic and social groups within the Russian Federation.

The current war exhibits another continuity between the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: all are "ecologized" wars. As Peter Sloterdijk wrote two decades ago, "The discovery of the 'environment' took place in the trenches of World War I."[29] Starting with the first use of "gas warfare," the "atmoterrorist model" became the primary form of waging war for the next hundred years. "The 20th century," Sloterdijk projected, "will be remembered as the age whose essential thought consisted in targeting no longer the body, but the enemy's environment," the "immediate atmospheric envelope." Since "air and atmosphere [are] the primary media for life," the main target for destruction becomes "the air milieu in which enemy bodies move, subject to their own breathing reflex."[30] The "atmoterrorist model" at work during the Russia-Ukraine war has, of course, a nuclear dimension. At the very outset of the full-scale invasion, we witnessed

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an unprecedented military occupation of nuclear power plants. First, within hours of the invasion, Russian forces entered the territory of the former Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, which is now a state-run, specialized enterprise for decommissioning the plant. Then, a month later, they occupied the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. This became the center of an ongoing international nuclear safety crisis—more accurately described as an act of *nuclear terrorism*.[31]

Although Reactors 5 and 6 at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant were immediately shut down as a precaution when the invasion started, Reactors 1 to 4 were the site of two hours of heavy combat. It was later reported that a large-caliber bullet pierced an outer wall of Reactor No. 4 and an artillery shell hit a transformer at Reactor No. 6.[32] These instances of nuclear terrorism threatened a full realization of the grimmest possible scenario: turning nuclear power infrastructure into a giant nuclear bomb. Soon after Russian forces gained control of the Zaporizhzhia premises, they created an information blackout by disconnecting cable internet and some mobile services around the site. As a result, the International Atomic Energy Agency lost access to real-time monitoring of radiation levels. This "atmoterrorist" environment at the intersection of cyber and nuclear war expanded far beyond the territory of Ukraine, proving again that there is no outside to this war.

The threat of international nuclear blackmail returned around the time of the full-scale invasion, when Putin put Russia's deterrence forces, including nuclear weapons, on "special alert." This order disregarded the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, which prohibited the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States from threatening or using military force or economic coercion against Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Based on the security assurances made by the signatories to the memorandum, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine gave up their nuclear weapons. The occupation of the Chernobyl

and Zaporizhzhia power plants, and the subsequent weaponization of their infrastructure, is different from the nuclear blackmail of Putin's order. The latter was mainly used to manipulate communicative dynamics between major international power players. Meanwhile, Ukraine has been demolished by shelling. And in mid-August 2022, we came closer than ever to a nuclear catastrophe when Russian forces attempted to disconnect the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant from the Ukrainian power grid. This effort lasted until September 11, when, following a visit from an International Atomic Energy Agency delegation, the last working reactor was put on cold shutdown. The weaponization of nuclear energy infrastructure brings an important element of chance into play. Anything can happen, either by planning or negligence, which become indistinguishable in an information blackout.

Nuclear terrorism is one element of this ongoing, complex, asymmetric warfare. At least two vectors reveal its overdetermined nature. One vector is *interimperial*, and it concerns the aggressive processes of power redistribution between several major international players. Another vector is *colonial-imperial*, which primarily concerns the imperial relation that the Russian Federation, Soviet Union, and Russian Empire have long been imposing on their "others." These include Indigenous peoples from Siberia to the far east and Arctic regions, various underdeveloped and federated communities, and other independent states of the former or current Soviet and Russian sphere of influence. The interimperial communication unfolds according to the logic of deterrence, understood as a threat or force applied by one party to convince another to refrain from initiating a particular course of action. While it is extremely aggressive, this is still a *communicative exchange*. The circles of such communication include different politico-economic transactions, and the communication is not meant to break down.

The global economy, a subject of interimperial dependency, strives to reboot itself even at the cost of significant transformation—all the while, however, keeping capitalist power relations intact. If there is anything we have learned—again—from the general slowness and insufficiency of economic sanctions against Russia, it is that there is nothing solid left of solidarity. National interests remain of primary importance. Since the list of countries that retain economic relations with Russia after a year of genocidal war remains long,[33] the role of the "Russian Empire" (as Russian state officials proudly identify "their" country), among other former imperial powers in this economic assemblage, is peculiar. Its extreme extractivism and exploitation serves the fossil-fuelled capitalist interests of the so-called West and its simultaneously "oil-soaked and coal-dusted" democracy, as Cara Daggett puts it.[34] They say nobody wants to know what's on the other side of the pipeline. In reality, what's at stake here is not ignorance, but convenience. Everybody knows what is on the other side of the pipeline. "Your corruption is our economy," one European politician communicated to a Ukrainian government official not long ago. So are your practices of exclusion, segregation, repression, and extreme extractivism. It is not hard to guess that this message is often passed to those corrupt, authoritarian, totalitarian, and now fascist regimes that "have historically been part and parcel of the project of securing Western (fossil) rule."[35] The undemocratic, authoritarian state has things to offer to the so-called West. And the West provides added value by legitimizing (and perpetuating) the violent, repressive politics that sustain fossil-fuel fascism.[36] It is a transaction.

Unlike the uninterrupted communication of the interimperial vector, the colonial-imperial vector is a trajectory of *noncommunication*. It sets the direction for relations of suppression, subsumption, annihilation, and erasure. All negotiations are suspended indefinitely. "Ukraine does not exist" for the Russian state as a party in negotiations, except as an imagined subaltern who must submit to the invader's will. These communicative realities do not meet. And those who propose various negotiation plans must seriously account for this broadly mobilized and propagated psychotic vision. To listen to Putin, the existence of the Ukrainian state undermines the conception of Russian identity envisioned by the state's ultraright ideologues. As fascists often do, they draw linkages to the past, specifically in this case to the medieval state of Kievan Rus. We are often reminded today that "empires do not know their borders." This speaks of ultimate *uncertainty*, and thus of the imperial urge for conquest, which is driven by paranoiac imperial *certainty* about a threatening outside. The Russian Federation claimed that they "had no choice" but to invade Ukraine and kill its people, which constitutes a complex and contradictory epistemological landscape that could probably only be deciphered through psychoanalysis. This urge, ever embittered by an extreme resentment that will only grow in the future, is particularly strong in those citizens of the Russian Federation who already feel—or will feel very soon—that whatever future they thought they had in Russia has been stolen from them. This mass vision of a stolen future will remain one of the many dangerous consequences of this war, no matter what awaits the Russian Federation in the years to come. It will also serve as a resource for future fascist mobilizations.

This same noncommunication sustains colonial relations between the Russian state and underdeveloped communities in its jurisdiction. This noncommunication also extends to 160 peoples who self-identify as Indigenous, but remain unrecognized. Russian legislation only acknowledges forty-seven peoples across the vast landmass. According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, after the annexation of Crimea the list of unrecognized but self-identified Indigenous peoples grew to include the Crimean Tatars, the Krymchaks, and

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the Karaim.[37] The empire only acknowledges the existence of a form of life when it is deemed useful, when the empire sees its potential for resourcification.

Vertical Occupation

A clear-cut victory belongs to the past. The concept of "victory" has changed dramatically as the nature of international conflict has transformed over time, context, and culture, especially with the advent of unconventional warfare.[38] Admittedly, though, the notion of victory has always been a myth. And yet, we keep this dubious concept in our vocabulary because, as one American general authoritatively noted, "In war there is no substitute for victory." No matter how speculative, it functions as an operative means. The fight against the Russian invasion of Ukraine is also driven by the idea of victory. The shared assumption among Ukrainian citizens is that, in this war, a military victory against all odds *will be ours.* This is the imagined scenario: first, a full de-occupation and restoration of the integrity of Ukrainian territory as established in 1991, which was undermined at the very beginning of this war in 2014. This includes the return of the annexed Crimean Peninsula and the removal of Russian forces from all temporarily occupied territories, including the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. A tribunal and reparations to follow. As such, the idea of victory in this war is conjured in terms of territorial *horizontality*.

Vertical occupation, however, is extremely long-lasting and no less terrifying and damaging. It is achieved by wielding pollution as a weapon of war. In scholarship, pollution has been described as a form of "slow violence," given its "gradual velocity" which often makes it difficult to acknowledge in a timely manner.[39] To emphasize ecocide's radical and deadly intrusiveness, my own writing on pollution has built upon the understanding of rape as a weapon of war, which wasn't legally recognized as such until the 1990s.[40] Environmental and political geographer Thom Davies describes the violence of environmental pollution by referring to the conceptual framework of necropolitics as elaborated by Achille Mbembe, who himself has written that "weapons are deployed [for] creating death-worlds … in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead."[41] In war, however, pollution spreads—and violence occurs—at various speeds. In addition to the fast, or extremely fast, violence of rocket strikes, bombs, and other explosions that also release toxic chemicals, other forms of pollution spread "gradually and out of sight," whether as a consequence of these faster forms, or independently.[42] Together, fast and slow violence comprise the chaotic reality of war, whose production of necropolitical "death-worlds" does not lend itself to easy comprehension.

Still from Chornobyl 22, a documentary film by Oleksiy Radynski, 2023. Camera: Max Savchenko.

The deadly regimes of the present occupation exceed the dimensions of horizontality and verticality. They proliferate along multiple vectors and speeds, not only towards the future, but also retroactively, back to what we still know as our past. This war will stay with us as a sequence of heavy losses for the entire earthly community, continually consuming and exploiting the remaining energy of all living and nonliving forms. Accepting such a scenario and working towards yet-unknown modes of survival and solidarity would empower us to transgress the victorious fantasy inherited from earlier imperial wars. It might be unbearable to hear this, but late-imperial wars, like the current one in Ukraine, do not leave us any safe exits from a catastrophic reality. Confronting it is the only option.

X

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Boris Groys

Alexandre Kojève Production of the Spirit

1.

Let us ask: Why do people work?

In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel,* Alexandre Kojève explains the origin of work by referring to the initial battle scene in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind*. According to Hegel's description, two self-consciousnesses fight each other—and one of them wins. The other self-consciousness then has two choices: (1) to die, or (2) to work to satisfy the winner's desires.[1] Thus, we see two types of humans emerge: masters and slaves. Hegel's masters would rather die than work for others, while slaves accept their fate and work for others until death. If we follow Hegel down this path, it means none of us ever work to satisfy our own desires. Our desires and needs are satisfied by aggression, violence, and dominance—not by work. Workers—slaves in Hegel's dichotomy—suppress their own desires to satisfy those of the masters.

That is why, in Kojève's reading of Hegel, only the workers are truly human. The masters remain animals; their behavior is determined by "natural" desires such as hunger or sexual desire. By contrast, workers are denaturalized, alienated. Kojève writes:

> Therefore, it is by work, and only by work, that man realizes himself objectively as man. Only after producing an artificial object is man himself really and objectively more than and different from a natural being … Therefore, it is only by work that man is a supernatural being that is conscious of its reality; by working, he is "incarnated spirit," he is "historical" World, he is the "objectivized" History. Work then is what "forms-or-educates" man beyond animal. The formed or educated man is the completed man.[2]

Work, as well as education, are specific, secular forms of ascesis. Through work, the slave/worker suppresses their own nature—and, thus, forms it. One ceases to be an animal by suspending one's own natural desires. This reduction of animal desires, Kojève explains, makes humans "supranatural," "spiritual" beings. In the "natural" world, humans are subjected to their base instincts. But workers become masters over nature, including their own nature, in the new, technical world transformed by their work.

The embodied "spirit" of which Kojève speaks should not be confused with the soul, with identity, self, subjectivity, and so on. In other words, spirit is not something that precedes incarnation. Incarnation is not an act of creativity that makes visible something previously "hidden" inside the human body. For Kojève, the driving forces inside the human body are always the same natural needs and desires that operate within all other animal bodies. A

Detail from fresco by František Gajdoš, Untitled, 1960. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

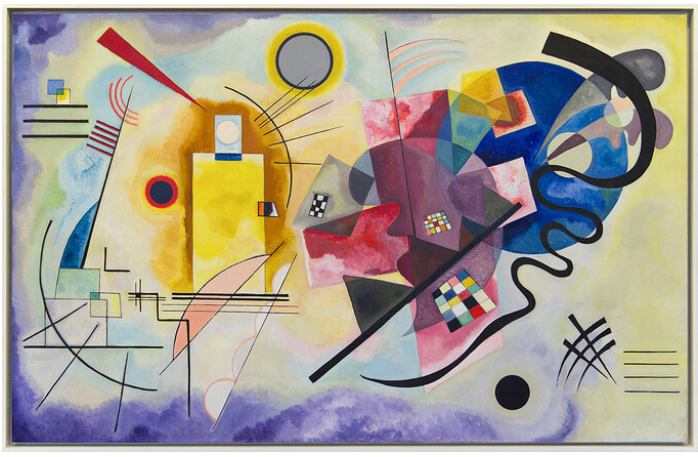
specifically human body is artificially produced by means of some external pressure—be it work or education—that suppresses innate needs and desires. Throughout history and the present, when confronted with an ascetic body—with an ascetic lifestyle—we often speak about a manifestation of the spirit. In this sense, the production of spiritualized bodies through ascetic practice precedes the phenomenology of the spirit. Christian and Buddhist monks turn their bodies into spiritualized bodies through ascetic practices. They suppress their animal desires by working in the service of a particular divine principle. Since modernity, the working class has practiced secular ascesis. Even if this ascesis is a result of external social and political oppression and exploitation, it turns the working class into a spiritualized, "chosen," universal class. Under the conditions of modernity, this spiritualized dimension of the working class manifests itself as art. Art demonstrates that the utilitarian function of every kind of work, including industrial work, is merely accidental. The essential function of work is the production of the ascetic, spiritualized bodies of the working class.

2.

For Kojève, an artist is a worker who produces autonomous, artificial objects. To become truly autonomous, an artwork must radically reduce any desire for representation that connects art to all other animal, natural desires and needs. In his 1936 essay "The Concrete Paintings of Kandinsky," Kojève claims that (his uncle) Kandinsky's artworks operate by ascesis and the reduction of everything natural. Kandinsky's works are not abstract, but concrete—as autonomous and concrete as any other natural thing. However, these artworks are not products of "natural creativity," but rather of an unnatural "spiritual negativity." They reduce all representation and, thus, all objects of natural desire. The bodies of these artworks are spiritualized bodies. Or, if you will, Kandinsky's works are negativity incarnate, spirit incarnate.

In fact, Kojève goes further than Kandinsky toward reduction and negation. To illustrate the status of an artwork as an autonomous thing, Kojève uses the example of monochrome painting. He writes:

Wassily Kandinsky, Three Elements, 1925. The painting belonged to Kojève and later to his widow Nina. License: Public Domain.



Wassily Kandinsky, Yellow-Red-Blue, oil on canvas, 1925. License: Public Domain.

A museum consisting exclusively of sheets covered in different uniform colors would be, without a doubt, a museum of paintings: and each of these paintings would be beautiful—and even absolutely beautiful—independent of whether or not it was "pretty," which is to say, "pleasing" to some and "displeasing" to others, would be beautiful—and even absolutely beautiful.[3]

Here "beautiful" means autonomous, not referring to anything outside of itself, including the "natural," "animal" predispositions of the spectators.

In fact, monochrome paintings were very rarely produced, exhibited, and discussed at the time Kojève wrote this essay. The exceptions are few: three monochrome paintings by Alexander Rodchenko—blue, yellow, and red—presented at the exhibition "5×5=25" (Moscow, 1921) and discussed by Nikolai Tarabukin in his book *From the Easel to the Machine* (1923), one of the key texts of Russian constructivism, which was most probably known to Kojève. Tarabukin proclaimed Rodchenko's monochrome works to be the "last paintings." They ended the history of painting, Tarabukin argued, by turning an individual painting into an object.[4] In his essay, Kojève stresses that the monochrome painting is manmade and cannot be produced by nature. But the same can be said for all technically or industrially produced objects. Placing any industrially produced thing inside a museum as a ready-made—alongside a monochrome painting—reveals that thing's pure, autonomous form. In theory, the difference between the artist and the industrial worker thus disappears. And the modern museum becomes a place for epiphany of modern secular working ascesis.

Aleksandr Rodchenko, Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour, 1921.

3.

According to Kojève's analysis of the master-worker dialectic, the worker suppresses all animal desires *except* the most important one—the desire for self-preservation. One works because one has a master. And one has a master because one fears death. To become completely

free and autonomous, workers also have to suppress their fear of death; they have to, that is, make a revolution. But what do humans do after a successful revolution? The traditional answer is: they become the new masters and begin to impose their will on the losers. Indeed, such is the usual historical dynamic. However, Kojève believed that the working spirit—or rather the spiritualized working body—could be victorious over the animal human body. In other words: he believed that after the proletarian revolution succeeds, proletarians will continue working. But they will not work merely to live or satisfy their desires; they will work to maintain the spiritualized life-form their revolution achieved.

In his *Sophia* (1939–40), Kojève describes the postrevolutionary, post-historical state as a communist state.[5] And he takes as a starting point for this state the main principle of communism: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." He interprets this principle as dissociating the recognition of a particular individual from their contribution to the collective economy. Bourgeois society values individuals according to the degree of their participation in the economy. And it also recognizes and satisfies a specific individual's needs according to their economic contribution. Under communism, the needs of an individual and the contribution of this individual to the economy are separated. In this sense communism can be seen as a return to the aristocratic definition of individuals as masters who possess unalienable, sovereign rights to satisfy their needs. Of course, there is a key difference: the historical master did not work, and the communist citizen works. But communist citizens do not work for an income; their living is—at least theoretically—guaranteed by the communist state according to their individual needs. They work only to acquire and keep their autonomous life-form. For Kojève, the communist citizen is a combination of an aristocrat, who gets their living for "free," and a worker, who works for the purpose of producing oneself as a spiritualized body. Thus, communist citizens live in a double ascesis: being masters they are ready to give up their lives in defense of the communist revolution; being workers they are ready to deny their "natural" needs and desires. The main principle of communism is con-formism: everyone lives not according to their desires, but according to their life-form produced through working ascesis.

Only relatively late in his life did Kojève became aware of the danger of losing the difference between achieving a post-historical state of con-formism, and the return to a prehistorical state of nature. In his famous footnote to the first edition of his *Introduction* (1947), Kojève refers to Marx's prediction that the historical Realm of Necessity, which placed humanity in opposition to Nature and one class in opposition to another, would be replaced by the Realm of Freedom, which would open to humanity the possibility of enjoying art, love, play, and so on in harmony with Nature.[6] Here, communist society (much like the earlier Christian notion of paradise) presents itself as a collective version of retirement benefits—as a time and space that allows for the delayed realization of desires frustrated by the historical process.

However, for the second edition of the *Introduction*, Kojève added a second part to this footnote. There he writes that in 1958 he realized that "the Hegelian-Marxist end of history was not yet to come, but was already a present, here and now."[7] According to Kojève, (especially) the American way of life allows and even induces ordinary people to consume and, thus, turns them into "satisfied animals." And, Kojève remarks, the Soviet and Chinese citizens of his time also want to consume, to become like Americans. If this happens, he insists, it will mean that the human being who, as we know, is defined by the spirit of ascesis, will disappear. What remains will be human animals. Kojève writes:

> After the end of Man, human beings begin building their houses as beavers, making music as cicadas and frogs, playing as young mammals, and making love as adult beasts. This means one cannot say that these human animals will be happy—they will merely be content. The discourse, the Logos will disappear—human language will be like the language of bees. Not only philosophy but also Wisdom will disappear. For in these post-historical animals, there will no longer be any understanding of the World and of the self.[8]

Thus, the philosophical project of achieving wisdom at the end of history could collapse. The post-historical state could lose its language, its Logos, and risk falling back into the prehistorical state of nature. And Kojève writes further: "To remain human, Man has to remain 'a subject opposed to the object.'" Thus, even if "action negating the given and the Error disappears," humans must also remain opposed to nature beyond the end of the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical process. According to Kojève, the opposition between form and content will lead humanity further than historical battles for mastery: "Post-historical Man must continue to detach form from content, doing so no longer in order to actively transform the latter, but so that he may oppose himself as a pure 'form' to himself and to others taken as 'content' of any sort."[9] Here the communist state is understood not as a happy return to nature, but rather as a museum in which ascetic, spiritualized human bodies can manifest themselves beyond any utilitarian function.

An artist or a philosopher can practice working ascesis and suppress their natural, animal desires in the name of pure form. But what about the masses—do they have the

Wilhelm von Kaulbach, Reynard the Fox, 1846. Source: Art and Picture Collection / The New York Public Library.

same ability to choose con-formism over the satisfaction of their natural desires and needs? The answer is: probably yes. While workers traditionally used "free time" after working hours as a period of rest, today one might use this free time to go to "work" at the gym. This example may seem trivial, but it indicates the readiness of the masses to embody a particular "pure" form that in earlier eras was only characteristic of the aristocracy. And in a society in which everybody cares for their own form, the state also keeps its form. The whole state becomes an aesthetic object—a pure form that is opposed to nature, to animality, and to all attempts to return to the world of natural needs and desires. In other words, the post-historical state is still opposed to "corruption"—if by "corruption" one means a loss of form under the influence of different "human, all too human" factors. It remains necessary to protect this form from corruption by time—from the danger of slipping back into a "state of nature" and then maybe also into the history of bloody struggles, wars, and revolutions. If the post-historical state is able to keep its form, the citizens of this state will be perfect con-formists—working not for recognition and reward but in the name of pure, uncorrupted form.

X

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Lyn Hejinian

Lola the Interpreter: Book One

Shut up! *Favete linguis*! This is about to begin!

—Horace, *Odes*

Let this begin, precipitously disturbed. There: its only alternative now is to continue, which is to say: there's no real alternative at all. Skepticism—doubt: it can prove liberating: SKEPTICISM, says the motto, WILL KEEP YOU FREE. But it can lead to a sense of hopelessness, impossibility; it can seem to promise nothing but dead ends and fatigue: SKEPTICISM WILL EXHAUST YOU. Ergo, says the logician, freedom is exhausting.

With a change to my name would come a change to the things people want from me and a change of people wanting them, but needs and demands are not the product of a name, though it produces effects, they are, as it were, causeless, like the semi-invisibility (semi-transparency) of the Pleiades: explicable, therefore to some degree logical, though without cause. From across the small table Cyrus Ratad leans toward me: "Do you believe in freedom?" he asks. "That's a simple yes or no question!" he adds, jabbing his right forefinger in my direction. "Are you asking if I believe people live in freedom or if I believe they should?" "Simple yes or no question: do you believe in freedom?" He is sitting taller in his chair—elevated by his ideology. "I'm not free now," I say, aware that I had agreed to meet him entirely out of a sense of obligation.

There it is: a fit of deviltry, then a fit of patience—or is it skepticism or disdain or a flash of irrelevant tranquility?

But fictions are the problem at hand: the fictions we are told, and especially the narratives we tell ourselves, limiting the possibility of human freedom. So let's consider human understanding rather than freedom. A play of words invites an act of understanding. Then reason outdoes itself. Understanding shrivels in the embrace of reason, atrophies in the cage of narratives' systems.

Say one bluntly states, "I've had a terrible day": do we wonder who or what is to blame or do we cast the blame at the heels of fate as it runs ahead? One never sees fate's approach, only what remains after its departure. Happiness is never fashionable and always indescribable, but this can't be why we doubt happiness but never doubt unhappiness. Circumstances are conditional, everything is interconnected, we live in a medium of interpretation, etc. We know that a stone responds: the sunlight falls on it, it warms, its atoms vibrate more quickly, perhaps a tiny fissure opens somewhere on its surface. But we assume that it can't act of its own will; indeed it cannot will, and therefore it isn't free. Facts are said to be true but not to be free.

Misha Dutkova, Untitled, Naarm, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Okay, but nonetheless I'll continue, "bargaining," as Lauren Berlant puts it, "with what is overwhelming about the present." In the kitchen, that theater of domestic life, a spoon eligible for a real superlative, a lettuce wilted through no fault of its own, worry of the kind that afflicts even infants, cream that the heat of the moment has curdled, a slow diminution of the shadows cast by a tree through the windows as storm clouds pass in front of the indifferent moon, gather. But I dream on, obviously, bound to the endless task of interpretation. In the dream, an overcoming man is like a female trucking elephant that's like a fallen pine tree to which he condescends or which he fells. The mind, lacking centripetal force, whirls and its thoughts are cast. Understanding is the mind's intended prey. Mind? I ask those who prefer to call it an absurdity. One puts a period at the end of the sentence. The sentenced is identified by that mark as a stretch of significant time, a time that has fulfilled a purpose, however small, a time that has fulfilled an obligation (the thought has completed its sentence).

In "micro pigment ink for waterproof and fade proof fine lines," a sentence introduces Milly Margaret Willis, a retired child welfare attorney: "The place on her arm that Milly Margaret Willis accidentally smashed against a doorknob yesterday when moving a heavy chair hasn't recorded the event with a bruise." The sentence doesn't guarantee everlasting existence, and besides, Milly Margaret Willis is a mere literary character, she's not real. That's one thing that defies human understanding: nothing. Nothing prevented Milly Margaret Willis from banging the side of her right arm against a doorknob. There's a widespread belief that crossing one's legs, right over left or left over right, will bring some action to a halt. Perhaps this is why many men spread their legs when traveling, whether by horse, bus, train, car, or plane, or when talking. When conversation suddenly pauses some say an angel has just passed overhead but others say someone has crossed their legs— *they*, not *he* or *she*, because *they* is the pronoun of the unknown and that is something they we have to admit, however much we may doubt its cogency. If there's to be skepticism, then there has to be a skeptical mode of subjective response to things in the world. This might assume the presence of a subject capable of, or susceptible to, skepticism, but if there is such a subject it would only be present at a moment and in one of its moods, while the cat it is sleeps or the shrub it is shrugs in the wind. This is the only

present, the moment at which a combination is achieved, right here. Oops, gone! Hui!—another! Why would a poet, or indeed any writer, turn toward something close to fiction, you might ask, why invent characters, and one possible answer is that humans know nothing other than fiction, fictions are what thinking makes, fictions are the artifacts of synthesis, analysis, explanation, critique, interpretation. It's "where all could be justified and no one is just."

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On the eighth day of a calendar year I sit indoors reading with the cat on my lap. You could doubt the truth of that statement on multiple grounds, but let's stick to the overt untruth of it: I claim in the sentence to be reading but the sentence is written in the present tense, so I can't be reading: I'm writing. This problem can be remedied, and I'll fix it: I sat reading with the cat on my lap. There: I have cast it into the narrative past tense. I could continue; I could perhaps say (write) something about my sensations as the cat purrs (purred), or I might describe the street sounds audible through the open window (bus accelerating from the stop sign at the corner of the street as it crosses the intersection of Higher Flat Ave. and Rusty Street, heading south toward Oakland), or I could (though perhaps I shouldn't) acknowledge some source of anxiety or some object of inappropriate desire, I could draw the reader in with the narrative past tense as it begins to spread its fiction like fog over the present scene.

In one narrative, more historically credible than more, Lola poses a question and the question persists: Why does a poet insert characters into an essay? The answer is obvious: characters are everywhere, just look around. The *human* is a creature that cognition can't codify and understanding can't close. Though no field failure, here's the human goose worm hornet that nibbles the sky and lives as a rock in the forested sea. Or to put it otherwise, there's confusion. Interpretation then mobilizes diverse modes of arrangement. The character we know as Lola plays the stranger as she crosses a street so as to move away from the self-evident.

I first met Lola shortly after her birth, no more than two or three hours had passed, I had taken off my shoes. Nothing had yet begun, reality was as yet unpopulated, the cast of the world comedy had yet to arrive. "The natural result of any investigation is that the investigators either discover the object of search or deny that it is discoverable and confess it to be inapprehensible or persist in their search"—thus begins Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. It's not inappropriate that the dates of a major propounder of classical skepticism are "uncertain": Wikipedia logs those of Sextus Empiricus this way: "c. 160 – c. 210 CE, dates uncertain." It is less uncertain, however, that he lived; though dying may undo the will to live, death can't undo living. I leave the date of Lola's birth unspecified—in effect, uncertain. Meanwhile, don't ask who I am.

It's in remembering my childhood and youth (but there's no remembering here, only storytelling) that I most forcefully encounter the impossibility of understanding my understanding, it disappears into the maw of infinite regress that devours being as it devours understanding. I'm not forgetting that individual being is as irrelevant as human expectation—human hope, worry, anticipation. The triviality of human concerns is pathetic—passionate. But, though irrelevance generates anxiety, frustration, and ennui, all of which make it almost impossible to continue, passion prompts us to begin. Mounting the bold carousel horse, awaiting the decision (which she is powerless to make) as to when it will set forth on its travels, does the child imagine a destination? The child can take the risk because she doesn't know what she's risking, she can enjoy the thrill of adventure and even of danger without feeling fear or fear of fear. The music begins—brass and drums, tuba, piccolo, accordion—and the horse heaves forward, there's no version of the story that doesn't have war somewhere in its far reaches or close proximity, distantly recent, the horse turns away and faces it: war is always in the wings. In the bas relief of vulnerability—the sculpting forth of being from the stagnant flat wet negativity of exposed clay—the vibrant hysteria of the artist (take, for example, the work of Julia Xanthe Jones) comes into view and is immobilized. The war horse bounds forward, charging in advance of the love plot circling the music in the middle of the field. But imagine the interpreter's shock to discover that the long affirmation she sustained in her childish enthusiasm couldn't nullify nullity, nonexistence, lack of being: the interpreter herself is a fiction. Some say that a human is a plant inhabited by a ghost, others that it's a stream of words on a course it can't gloss. Internal contradictions are everywhere; whether or not you find them intolerable is yet to be determined. Nonetheless, either really or not, here I sit, an occupant of an overcast chill damp silver January midmorning in a jumbled sequence of days glimpsing in the sky unidentifiable meandering details only peripherally perceptible whose drift I try to follow; it's like watching through a microscope the floaters in my eye. David Hume had it right: "Nothing is more free than the imagination of man; and though it cannot exceed that original stock of ideas, furnished by the internal and external senses, it has an unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision."

Every stone is a faceted fact, a 3-D quiddity, a thing. But a stone isn't a simple thing: for starters there's the gravity that holds it and the fire in which it was forged. It is gray and mottled green—like a frog and its setting shadow. Voilà: to see that one thing is not another is an extreme perception, producing an extreme experience. Cat and third-grade teacher, jargon and compass, boeuf bourguignon and screw driver, womanhood and

surrealism—manifold differences in a fabric of associations. To set out to live the life you want to have led—that is the Nietzschean challenge—without a single detail changed, ready to live it again: stung by bees and stinging back. But all too swiftly we become habituated and blind to differences, or we become hostile to those things from which we differ; in either case, eventually a great continuity occurs, a dismal indifference.

The ancient Greek thinkers pondered over justice but thought little about freedom in our sense of it. Freedom in our sense of it? East of the city lie populated hills, under the city creeks are buried, between the hills are canyons, and rumor has it that each canyon harbors its own mountain lion, but at any given moment this is unlikely to be true. Things come into existence and depart from it "according to necessity," as Anaximander put it, paying "retribution" as they go "for their injustice according to the assessment of Time." Believing that the course of one's life was determined by the gods, the ancient Greeks could not value freedom; there was too little of it. Perhaps all that could be said of it is that to be free is to belong where one is, while the streets through the city are traveled by nomads. But things acquire their definition not on their own, autonomously, but from what's around them; they are given by their associations and held to them. Our sensations proliferate, fated to support another's panorama. But how can one characterize freedom as a condition of inseparability?

Ulysses Theo Upton declares one evening that for him the supreme value is reason. Why then is he a scholar of poetry? We are in a bar on a side street five blocks from the plaza where, moving three pretzel loops from a small bowl on the table between us, I ask him that question. "I believe in reason," he says, "but I don't believe in poetry." The pretzels are as pure as cactus. The former are the material made by mortals, the latter mortal material, but mere aesthetic playfulness no longer satisfies the old critic. Montaigne says that "philosophy is but sophisticated poetry"; in other words, poetry is the skeptic's philosophy. On the table lie seven daffodils, they are bound at the ankles—sold this way by the florist as if this were compatible with Western aesthetic values while reminding purchasers that prisoners, if they dance at all, dance in their heads. With this, comedy lies on the brink of death.

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So, what of it?—I'm gaining the greatest pleasure from my current secretarial tasks: the invention of order and distribution of disordered thoughts and useless (dysfunctional) desires over topographical undulations, rivulets, back alleys, and storm drains where they can thunder and burble and romp and prompt compassion here and fury there; perhaps such tasks are proper grounds for a politics. Lola would object that the things that surge past or tumble by are just quickly and peremptorily thought out whims, to which I'd retort: they are flapping from files and will pile into middens with architectural as well as columnar effect. Or I'd say they are barrels in a ring, a reference that makes her laugh since, at least for a moment, we acknowledge that while performing the role of a gadfly with the powers of an unmastered urchin, she is also a dauntless barrel racer. The fact is that Night has never yet unhorsed her. But let me return to my tasks, opening files to interpretation. Here's a wishful prediction that Camus recorded in October 1940: "This wind cannot last if each and every one of us calmly affirms that the wind smells bad." Let's imagine Camus in an apostrophizing mood as, with "Mediterranean fatalism," he poses a rhetorical question to the sky (or an outspread sheet of paper): O star, did you see the tide under the clouds? With such a sentence signaling a moment, calm is restored, then disturbed, and this, as Rosie Consuela Mahieddine would insist, justifies punctuation, or, at least, the comma. Written with a light hand, which is to say by applying a pen so that it makes only the gentlest of landings on a page, touching down only briefly and sporadically and hardly at all and with minimal to no calculation, commas appear, one after another just as stars appear as the night sky darkens.

With things I can see (like a pair of cowboy boots, a bicycle chained to a fence, a sprawl of nasturtium flowers, a plastic bowl, a child on a swing), as with things I cannot see (like time, suffering, knowledge, black holes, ennui), I'll play the phenomenal world's ongoing game of hide-and-seek. Carried forward by intuitions and curiosity, perception reaches the limits of logic and passes over them. *Fort/da*. We're just overhearing a toddler at play (they say it's Freud's grandson Ernst, who has a toy attached to a string), repeatedly discovering the principle of return—but how "innocent" is the pleasure of discovery? Say a human (some specific fastidious one—let's call it Luc-Antoinette Preston) thinks about what's real in order to pull it, mold it, nurture it, pierce it, all the while assuming that every discernible phenomenon is unique and material, each manifestation just a scrap of launched particularized stuff. The conscious mind can have a strong impression of a blind window on a blank wall, or of an acidic sycamore on an urban street, or of a goldfish gasping in a glass of wine, or of a scrappy rat body scurrying, heaving, swaying through a city. Meanwhile, underlying consciousness lies the unconscious, lodged in the throat, perhaps, or pressing against the viscera or the genitals. So what is the mind, that something "appears" in it? And how very different from each other are water-borne insects, crepuscular rag rugs, and a fungus ring in a forest? What can a human understand, what empathies, what changes of mind or perspective can she or he or they or it embrace when surrounded by a reality imbued with what is unavailable—when, by being unavailable, things assert their alienation from human interests? Before I can deal with these such specious questions, a waking dream

came to me of weakness buoyed by Cheerios; I am reproached, and fall back, to participate in the widespread laxity that we interpret as getting along by going nowhere immediately or almost. A human such as L-A Preston would say that to win a phenomenal game one must "invent interpretative strategies anew with every phenomenal form that one encounters." The winner then will be what Nietzsche in "On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense" calls "that master of deception, the intellect." If so, then so much for that great discontinuity Life.

As a teenager, Lola might have asked, if a tree falls, does it … etc., etc.—yes, of course, because there's never "no one," there's always something, with the fall of trees reverberating even in winter beside a creek rising under heavy rainfall. Every event has its own sound form, its own thought stack, its own noise construction. One can feel the full thrill of the event of the fall's irrelevance to the human world; it has dodged the prison house of human history. Coos from the pigeon fancier's yard continue in full compliance with the gleaming steel sky. Why remember anything—the resulting stories mean nothing, they are empty of everything but musty odors, old shit. What time is it, you ask; it's dissevered time, time split through the middle, time caught not quite on the dot but definitively on the line, half of now on one side and now's other half on the other through the long now we never quit. That—or rather *this*—can't be nullified.

Black sweater, black skirt, gray hair—I pass through Pug Blade Alley and, turning left onto Flagrant Street, I see a weave of shadows spread across an ochre façade. I am alive, part of the present, which is drawn out of the past: what in the past was in the future included me, making me also a presence, though not yet present, in the past. Or maybe not: as humans conceive of it, history (often occluded but also cruel, indifferent, destructive, stupid) doesn't provide a home for every moment. Yet history, in so far as *history* is a term for all that has happened (fate might be another), exceeds human historiography and includes not only all that is remembered but all that is memorable, which is to say everything (including the sound of the falling tree and the moss, twigs, redwood sorrel, and ferns onto which it fell). Roland Barthes (in *The Neutral*) speaks of "Michelet's ambition to give memory back to everything." Does this mean that everything that exists would be remembered or that everything that exists would be remembering? And on the basis of what, or, since we should narrow our options lest we drift into an infinite expanse of possibility as featureless as the void, on the basis of experience or of simple perception?

One would have to have absolutely no sense of humor to imagine that humans have ever produced a "simple idea." What John Locke meant by simple ideas were impressions or bits of information, passively received onto a tabula rasa, and thus made available for assimilation, combination, and development, but the tabula rasa hypothesis has been disproven. Perhaps what we begin with is indecision, grounded in its past, future, and the present's near synonym: eternity. We've no choice yet other than to imagine Lola as an unfinished person with wide distribution, or perhaps it's her rationality that's widely distributed, but, since it's buffeted by chance, the random, the trivial, the perpetual nagging of "the bitches of everyday life," its effects get scattered as if in obeyance to some air-born algebra, playground gossip, or mycelial calculus. Mistrust, thirst, reluctance, ambition: these are the spare parts of reason. Proliferation, speed, struggle, victory—in the right circumstances these are values, but so too are contemplation, generosity, strolling, indifference. Interpretation is merely a quest for a slower chaos. It departs from the center, it takes place in the margins and on the peripheries. So how do we explain? But why explain? It is always the same words telling the same lies. And yet having said that, I can hardly concentrate on a particular poem at hand, so powerfully does it thrill me with the strangeness and ubiquity of life. The thrill is in the living, without possibility of certainty, without possibility of universal assent. "The thought is obscure, the syntax gasps for air."

Let's consider the condition of the unlonely. There are times when the unlonely feel irritated at interruptions to (or intrusions into) their unloneliness, their solitude. Solitude is a sphere of one's own making, a sphere under one's control. There is an aesthetics of unloneliness for those who exercise their faculties with doubt and experience, but where would a politics fit into that? There is always something to address in public but it may not always be necessary to do so publicly, it could also be done indirectly or, better, obscurely, say by poetry, prophecy, or divination.

Rambling thought on shall walk ambling shock: this is minimal but not meaningless, a small materialized cluster of elements, a point (or surge) of conjuncture that forms a perceivable object rather than a cognizable fact. As it happens, I objectively like it, and, in a completely amoral way, I am the better for it. But I don't ask you to be better for it too, or wiser. Still, let's have more of it. At least for the moment we can change rhythm, change pace, pace again. Page again. *Thistle down loosens lock time while profligate hens drag duck straw*.

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If punctuation is scanty (or absent altogether) we can assume that what's been written is poetry. The poet (some particularly interesting one) insists on developing linguistic syntax that can indicate the way in which the sentence is being used sufficiently on its own, without recourse to punctuation; to punctuate would be a form a cheating. But, you might point out, lack of punctuation can't for that reason be categorically poetic (poetical?), since poetry is so often (and sometimes explicitly)

engaged in cheating. And what we're calling cheating might in fact be an act of freedom, one that takes the form of liberality and munificence. Restrictions are lifted; anything is allowed.

For Aristotle (should we want to take him for our authority—and I don't see that we should) freedom is actualized by doing good and fulfilling one's obligations, neither of which are possible without a social context; to be free is to bind oneself to social responsibility, to happy sociality per se. At that I entertain a fantasy scenario of protestors during a pandemic: holding slender six-foot-long poles known as "social wands" in each hand, with which they measure the distance between each other, hundreds of students and workers are on strike in front of city hall, chanting, shouting, cheering. The contemporary social world, at least prior to the coronavirus pandemic and the "social distancing" everyone is told to practice, is one in which people are caught up in circuits of social negotiation, requiring circumspection and, often, some degree of dishonesty practiced behind a façade. One outcome of this is a sense of social alienation; another is complicity with common values that one, in fact, doesn't believe in. Those values cause certain kinds of behavior, shape that behavior, and, ultimately, bring about behavior's failure—and loss of freedom.

All the while, everyday life is underway, with trees, trout, bedbugs, humans, sand, crows, dogs, weeds, bugs, microbes, rocks, buildings, shrubs, glaciers, rain, and so forth living it. A long mottled dog on a narrow red leash tied to a silver bike rack beside a gray faux classical building plaintively watches me as if hoping I'm the human it's waiting for, but recognizing the dog I know who the expected human is and the dog whines. Sabrina Q. Wells, being consistently inconsistent, is predictable. She is animated, she veils strong opinions behind a pretense of confusion, she is snarky. Her friends call her "fiery"; others call her capricious or wacky. She now once again pretends not to see me, or does so until I approach the room she is exiting—then she vigorously pushes the door shut and walks away. We should have outgrown this shit long ago. But contemporary (early twenty-first century) social relations may be dismantling bourgeois values (like collegial friendliness) behind our back, so to speak. We participate in, and our subjectivities as well as our public and private living spaces are shaped by, a constant media flow, which is, above all else, a narrative flow. Many of these narratives are false. We inhabit narrative communities; we both generate and receive narratives; we choose from among them and, having chosen, we set up camp within the story's bounds. Or we set up a tent in an Occupy zone in defiance of every story. The distinction between freedom *for* (choice, commitment, engagement) and freedom *from* (sheer freedom, mere freedom, the "abyss of freedom" of which Kierkegaard and, later, Sartre speak) is conceptually interesting but it may be only that and of little practical value. Freedom is a practice, ultimately, and as such, it exists in situ, in process, in uncertainty, and without definition.

For all practical purposes, one understands how things in the social world work. If x happens, y will follow. But if the name for x—the name by which we know it—changes, our understanding of the social world has to change, too; the social world, if named differently, would work differently. Day after day Phillip Kilmartin sits curbside facing the door of the corner café, impassive, saying little and only when someone speaks to him, holding an empty paper cup, with a homemade hand-lettered cardboard sign behind him: "Need money for Rent by the 15th of the Month, Hungry, No Sugar." I am patient and pathetic, he thinks; I am persistent, but what's the necessity for understanding? "We don't know much about him," says Bonnie Rose Roberts, "except that he's here." She provides him with a chair from the café and, occasionally, a cup of coffee. All that's needed now are bits of information; when we have those we can slip shadows and story inside the outlines.

The imagination, disordered and murmuring or scrupulous and willful as it may be, by definition (qua imagination) either generates or receives images.

Aren't the eyes, too, instruments of imagination then, and the ears? As the sound of a "barking dog" reaches one's ears, isn't the "barking dog" an image, something imagined? And the dog itself?—some would say it's apparent, rather than real, but if that were the case, and if we were to characterize it therefore as a product of the imagination, it would have to be the product of either a collective imagination of vast dimensions or a concoction presented by whimsical gods or a 3-D quadruped mirage produced by some confluence of natural forces. The barking dog would not, in any case, be sitting, trotting, or on watch along what Parmenides called (according to the evidence in the extant fragments) the "Path of Truth." And yet it was Parmenides who said, "It needs must be that what can be spoken and thought *is*; for it is possible for it to *be*, and it is not possible for what is *nothing* to be." Worrying about the difference (if there is one) between appearance and reality is too metaphysical; more lively and immediate is the difference (and there seems indeed to be one) between reason and irrationality. Lola interprets—or judges—art in practical, rational terms, and she finds it puzzling—entirely lacking in practical value, outside the realm of efficiency, too much bound to either immediate (temporary) pleasure or to materialism (the buying and selling of works of art), and irrational. "Okay," she says, "maybe it's rational to paint a landscape or a portrait of somebody, though doing either seems pretty useless." Lola is never insouciant but she is also never sullen when she spots a stupid thought. "Writing a love poem that impresses the person it's for could be useful, I suppose—or a poem that stirs up political feelings," says Lola. From her perspective, it's all irrelevant. "Arggh—how can you take art so seriously?" I say I'll think about it and I

raise my head and stare across the room at a wall hung with drawings, photographs, collages, small paintings above three bookcases set side by side and filled with books, their titles indiscernible from where I'm sitting but I know what they are and know the books contain thoughts and in some cases stories, stories and thoughts: ghosts, dogs, passions, accounts of entomological and anthropological research, plots, and theories of the good, the universal laws of physics (*sive natura*), the turn to language, commodity fetishism, chaos. And all those thoughts and stories are exchanged and change from day to day or occur to humans as something entirely strange in their dreams.

Everything that exists is involved in perpetual processes of interpretation, simultaneously generating causes and effects. Perhaps an artist is a fantasy creature, author of a genuine inner life, but about whom, eventually, a police statement says that she or he died of weeping or, as some witnesses insist, of laughter. Moved by the pull and pulse of a long guitar solo audible through the speakers on the wall on either side of the bar and thus behaving little like the skeptic I claim to be, I flip my hand in time to a beat and protest, "Of course it's possible to have an idea and not know it." "The skull lit by eyelight," Samantha Jane Jenkins remarks. Thinking, almost by definition, entails receptivity; it's experiential. And each day is different from all others; chance takes its every advantage. "It was no longer the beginning that illumined and transfigured the everyday; it was the everyday that made the beginning intelligible, by supplying models for an understanding of how the world had been shaped and set in order."

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Everyday life assumes that lives are lived day by day, each quotidian life underway within a cultural sphere that's structured by habits, assumptions, beliefs, individual propensities, social and personal expectations, socioeconomic structures and their requirements, material resources, and so forth. Which is to say that everyday life is underwritten to one extent or another by ideology. And ideology can take on the aspect of fate. There it is: belief, caught in the act of creating a fact. Will the fact make history? Or to rephrase that more capaciously, more variably, and more specifically: will that fact *enter* history, will the fact *create* history, will the fact *fabricate* history, will the fact *alter* history? The link between fate (everything that happens) and time (naked as a rat's trailing tail) is obvious. How many everyday particulars—how much of the stuff and experiencing of everyday life—is experienced actively, consciously? People are conscious of things, but perhaps unconsciously conscious, as, for example, when negotiating a pathway around chairs and tables in a café or through pedestrians or traffic on an urban street. A pair of excited matched small dogs catches the attention of Jumi Brianna Stein, each excited dog secured by a yellow leash to a parking meter to the left of a man with a sign behind him: "Need money for Rent by the 15th of the Month, Hungry, No Sugar." Jumi Brianna Stein automatically notes that he has diabetes, steps into the café, greets me with a nod, takes her wallet from her bag and pulls a dollar bill out of it, steps back outside and drops the dollar into the man's paper cup, says "God bless you, too" to the man's response, and joins me at a corner table. The everyday is absurdly authentic! At a circular table nearby, a woman whoops with delight and applauds the vertical chocolate swirl atop the storybook pastry that Reggie Clara Toss sets in front of her on the circular table. Like most distractions, this one provokes an unwanted act of consciousness, and the unwanted act of consciousness provokes irritation, animosity, anger: a recontextualization of the moment, the place, the experience—a change in the situation.

David Hume states, "The command of the mind over itself is limited, as well as its command over the body." He goes on: "Our authority over our sentiments and passions is much weaker than that over our ideas." I don't disagree. I have little doubt that the brain crowns a system, though I don't believe that thinking must always obey it. The system crowned by the brain carries out a myriad of functions, but it doesn't construct narratives. The internet makes a clear (though perhaps suspect) distinction: "Brain is considered to be a physical thing, the mind is considered to be mental; the brain is composed of nerve cells and can be touched, whereas, the mind cannot be touched." But does the internet have that right? Don't we live by our senses in a tangible world, pushing thoughts aside, tossing ideas around, putting our mind to work on abstract problems or quotidian tasks? Metaphors—we cough metaphors, pant metaphors, sigh metaphors, and usually don't think about metaphors, but let's admit it: they're great stuff.

Thoughts wander; we should go in hot pursuit of them, unarmed of course: there's no utility, benefit, beauty, or intelligence in dead thoughts. That said, live thoughts are not always that great either, motoring us along without any sense of direction, until we chance on something of interest. Some experience takes place and we perceive it as an unassimilable whole, its temporality internal to itself rather than attuned to history, and then along comes art to poke a hole in it. The day loses its weapons, the small hole that a thumbtack makes in a wall comes to exemplify daily life. Consider the irreality of the hole: as the French say, "Into the shadows the hours go to hide."

X

Poet, essayist, editor, and translator **Lyn Hejinian** is also the author and coauthor of several books. Hejinian has been the coeditor of *Poetics Journal* since 1981, was editor of Tuumba Press, and is codirector of the literary

project Atelos. Honors include a Writing Fellowship from the California Arts Council, a grant from the Poetry Fund, an NEA Translation Fellowship (for her Russian translations), and a fellowship from the Academy of American Poets for distinguished poetic achievement. She teaches at the University of California, Berkeley.

LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs

Two Poems from Village

Apt 5FE. Photo: LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs.

X

A writer, vocalist and performance/sound artist, **LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs** is the author of *Tw ERK* (Belladonna, 2013). Diggs has presented and performed at California Institute of the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, The Museum of Modern Art, and Walker Art Center and at festivals including: Explore the North Festival, Leeuwarden, Netherlands; Hekayeh Festival, Abu Dhabi; International Poetry Festival of Copenhagen; Ocean Space, Venice; International Poetry Festival of Romania; Question of Will, Slovakia; Poesiefestival, Berlin; and the 2015 Venice Biennale. As an independent curator, artistic director, and producer, Diggs has presented events for BAMCafé, Black Rock Coalition, El Museo del Barrio, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, and the David Rubenstein Atrium. Diggs has received a 2020 George A. and Eliza Gardner Howard Foundation Fellowship, a 2020 C.D. Wright Award for Poetry from the Foundation of Contemporary Art, a Whiting Award (2016) and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship (2015), as well as grants and fellowships from Cave Canem, Creative Capital, New York Foundation for the Arts, and the U.S.-Japan Friendship Commission, among others. She lives in Harlem and teaches part-time at Brooklyn College and Stetson University.

Mohammed Zenia

Fear and Poeming in Upstate New York

Misha Dutkova, Untitled, Naarm, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Misha Dutkova, Untitled, Naarm, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

X

Sudanese/Eritrean poet **Mohammed Zenia** is the author of the book-length poem *Tel Aviv*, released on Porosity Press in April of 2020, and the forthcoming collection *James Baldwin' s Lungs in the ' 80s* from Chat Rooms. Mohammed was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1988 and currently lives in New York City.

Thotti

We Too Were Modern, Part II: The Tropical Ghost Is a Cannibal

Continued from "We Too Were Modern, Part I: Of Brazilian Autophagic Flowers and Navigators"

It is possible to state here that there is no pure settler nor pure colonizer of Brazil or anywhere, just as there is no pure law nor pure exploration. And yet their distance between rhetoric and promise allows for a fusion into a legitimately Brazilian Frankenstein—the rapist Father who does not give the law, but exploits and enslaves through the imminence of his law. It is precisely in the legitimation of this figure that both positivism and Brazil's republic are inserted—not in a redemptive hope for Comte's social sentiment, but as part of the national museum of hybridizations between colonized and colonizer. These hybridizations feed on the maxim "I explore to give the law," or simply "I give the law because I explore"—leading to a law and a government made of nothing but an infinite series of potlatches.

Marcel Mauss described a potlatch as a ceremony in which "it is not even a matter of giving and returning gifts, but of destroying so as not even to appear to desire repayment."[1] Such destruction, such consummation, such an expense that cannot be repaid becomes precisely the source of the recognition that legitimates authority. Through the potlatch, the colonizer can transform his urge—for enjoyment, expenditure, and the consumption of land and body—into power. It is through the potlatch that exploitation can be constituted as state policy, always foreshadowing for the settler a final exploitation, an orgasm, a totalizing gift from which the name and nation will finally be born. The Father would be born from a gift impossible to repay, one that ultimately legitimizes and redeems the law. However, the potlatch that feeds the law and Brazilian sovereignty is always a potlatch in debt. However extravagant it may be, it is never enough, because it is always compared to the ghost of the law that colonizers and settlers are unable to forget: the Father from whom the Brazilian psyche flees, but whose simulacrum of unquestionable will still imposes itself.

In this way, Brazilian authority becomes trapped in producing potlatch after potlatch, transforming its legitimacy into a promise while constantly governing in the name of the exception, in the hope of consumption and expenditure, of enjoying a sacrifice so extraordinary as to erase its spurious and deficient character. It is this debt that allows the colonizer to coexist with the settler insofar as the colonizer can continue to explore, consume, and enjoy through the potlatch, and the settler can see in the colonizer's enjoyment and expenditure the future birth of law and name. And yet, this birth is always postponed because the authority is burned, inevitably consuming itself in the fire of expenditure, from which the farce of hope and name must be restored with new clothes. It is no wonder that novelist and poet Machado de Assis deftly noted about the 1889 Proclamation of the Republic and its positivist slogans that "you change your clothes without

Ismael Nery, Namorados, circa 1927. License: Public Domain.

changing your skin."[2] Clothes burn in the manufacture of the gift, yet the skin of settler and colonizer remain because it is made of absence.

It is curious that the new republic put on its military uniform precisely when the disastrous Brazilian Empire contradicted its own logic of exploitation and enjoyment by turning what were legally things into subjects with the abolition of slavery. This brief moment exposed the wound in which the nation is manufactured. The settler who supposedly always asked for law and order, for a name and a Father, could make abolition his skin, the beginning of the end of the colonizer's logic. The settler could use the gesture to replicate the transformation of Brazil into a Brazilian subjectivity, to finally give himself a name and make a country. But the settler is always a colonizer; and between them, there is a permanent state of confusion that can only beckon and renew the potlatch, since the colonizer can only see in exploration and autophagy the possibility of finding himself. Abolitionist André Rebouças's statement that the Republic was proclaimed *against* the 13th of May (the day Brazil abolished slavery

Portrait by André Rebouças, William R. Quintal, 2020.

in 1888) is fair; after all, the Republic was proclaimed mainly to renew the possibility of being a colonizer with different excuses.

From positivism, "order" and "progress" remained on the Brazilian flag next to the abandoned temple in downtown Rio de Janeiro, remnants of a mimosa tree in which settlers and colonizers hid to start a new cycle, promptly followed at the end of the nineteenth century by Ruy Barbosa's schizoid liberalism, the *caudillismo* of Floriano Peixoto's strongarm leadership, and the genocide of Canudos, always anointing order and progress while continually surrendering—whether in misery, blood, or gunpowder, the incomplete enjoyment of an intermittent baptism. This baptism permeates the wealth of the coffee barons, the scars in the sugarcane fields, and the pau brasil torn by its roots, from a place where one is born without discovering satiety nor name.

These earlier scars would appear to foresee the famous reaction of Monteiro Lobato, the writer par excellence of the decadent coffee aristocracy—and the embodiment of the confusion between settler and colonizer—when he came across the first sketches of Brazilian modernism in the work of Anita Malfatti. His 1917 article asks right in the title: "Paranoia or Mystification?" Soon after, he will frame Malfatti as an artist who sees nature "abnormally, and interprets it in the light of ephemeral theories, under the squint-eyed suggestion of rebellious schools, emerging here and there like boils of excessive culture."[3] Lobato's reaction comes from the fact that what Oswald de Andrade described in his *Pau-Brasil* manifesto was already in the contorted nose of Malfatti's 1916 *A Boba* (Silly woman): "A single struggle—the struggle along the way. Let's break it down: Import poetry. And the Pau-Brasil Poetry, for export."[4] The struggle of Pau-Brasil poetry is, above all, to become just like pau brasil wood, to become the object of exploration, to mix with the other and make it yours. The nose of the lady deformed in Malfatti's ink and absorbed in the canvas is a cry to become just a body, no longer living for pleasure or in hope of a name, but only for voracity. Brazilian modernism presents itself as the paranoia of both settler and colonizer in the mystification of finally becoming Brazil, becoming a body without a name or interdiction, a body of alterity, a body without skin and only of pores that devour subject and world, rendering everything the same tropical utopia.

The impulse of the Week of Modern Art of 1922 is an impulse beyond the division of the modern. This impulse marks all and any modern art, in the prophecy of a discovered totality. In order to make Brazil a totality, from 1922 onwards some ventured to devour the mimosa that hid the divided sign of colonist and colonizer, forgetting the lesson of Homer's lotus eaters. If the Greeks discovered sleep in the lotus, then it was inside the mimosa that the beast and its lips of blood awaited, awakened.

3. Rubídea (Redness)

Of the many European testimonies born from the encounter with the New World, none has the frankness of Michel de Montaigne in his *Of Cannibals* (c. 1580). Already anticipating the anthropology of the twentieth century by denying the stigma of savagery, Montaigne confronts the notion of civilization by refusing the period's popular conception of natives as people without salvation, or as barbaric enemies. Faced with a way of life doomed to annihilation and the possibility of true barbarism originating from Europe itself, Montaigne had little of the plaintive nostalgia found centuries later in *Tristes Tropiques*, where Claude Lévi-Strauss's writes that

> from the day when he first learned how to breathe and how to keep himself alive, through the discovery of fire and right up to the invention of the atomic and thermonuclear devices of the present day, Man has never—save only when he reproduces himself—done other than cheerfully dismantle million upon million of structures and reduce their elements to a state in which they can no longer be reintegrated.[5]

Lévi-Strauss's words resonate with the climax of Montaigne's confrontation, which, supported by the cultural relativism of the text as a whole, shamelessly legitimizes the cannibal. And rather than do so explicitly, Montaigne lets the native victim himself, the one who will be eaten, speak in the text: "Come all, and dine upon him,

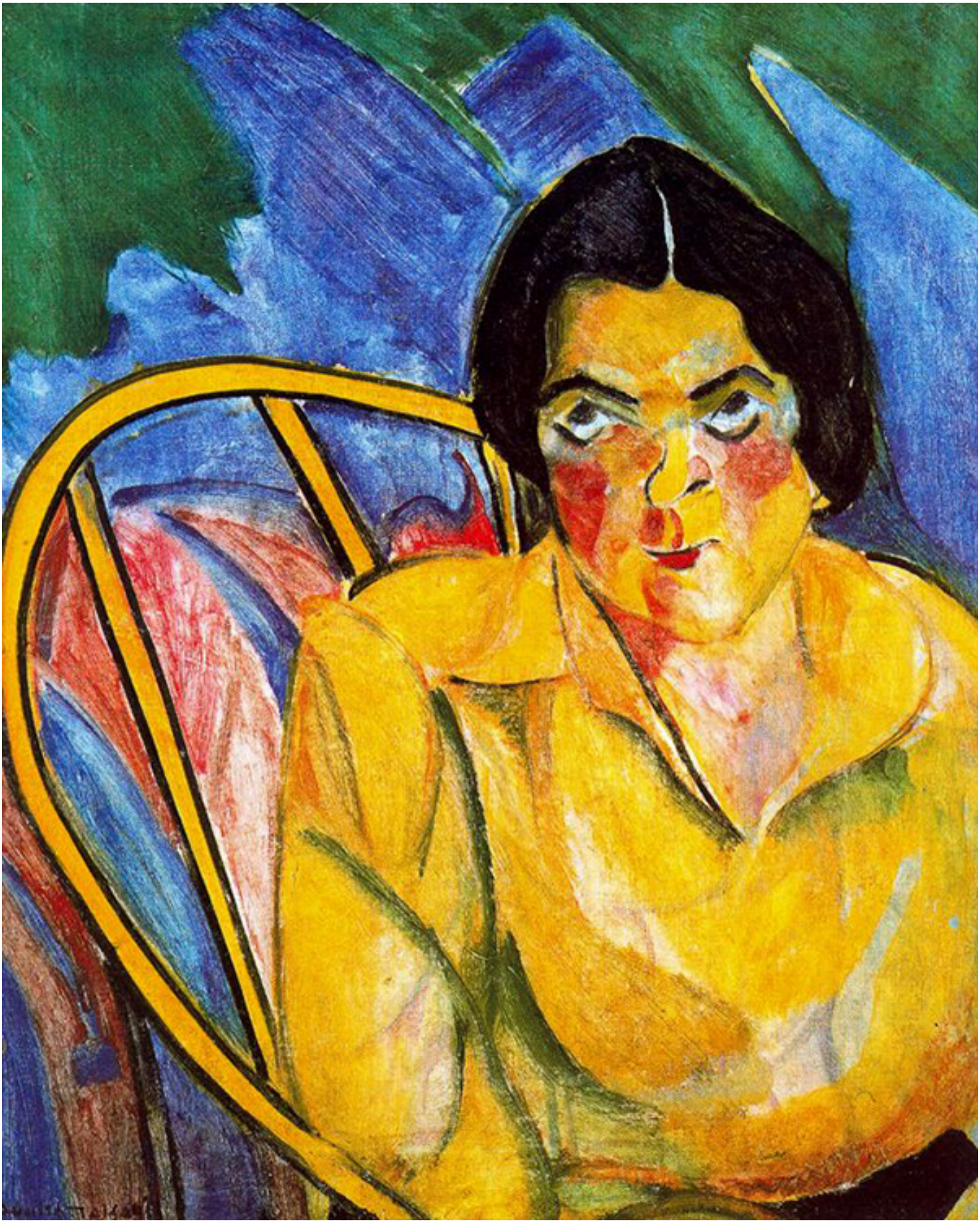
Survivors from Canudos, 1897. License: Public Domain.

and welcome, for they shall withal eat their own fathers and grandfathers, whose flesh has served to feed and nourish him."[6]

In the speech of Montaigne's cannibal, who understands his flesh as a mere bridge, it is possible to find the tears of the Tupinambás in their welcoming ceremonies with which Derrida opens his essay on hospitality. Tears "associated with a cult of the dead, the stranger being hailed as a ghost."[7] Cannibalism is part of the same dynamics of encounter, of hospitality that transforms the other into the self through the very dead matter that strips away the individuality of a body, and that is a vehicle for several. Montaigne emphasizes that the natives he knew in France Antarctique (today called Rio de Janeiro) had a way of speaking that divided men into two parts.[8] It is in this game of halves that the unity given by the flesh is a vital fragment, merging life and death through the mouth to make past time, divided and hidden, flow back. Cannibalism here is a gesture of temporal and radical hospitality that seeks through dead matter to revive an impossible totality—to transform the subject into an open and manufactured body that, while part of an infinite process of devouring and digesting, has no end or limit. The radical consequence of this cannibalism, at once autophagic and self-fertile, is a conception of time that also knows no end or beginning. Continuously renewed from each death and fragment on the margin of European history, such a conception of time promises that the world is always about to begin—and end.

If on the margins of history the fragment renews itself, inserted within Montaigne's time and his promise it becomes a sign of decadence and ruin. This is the main characteristic of the work of art born from the world after contact with the Americas: "The image is a fragment, a rune … The false appearance of totality is extinguished."[9] The Baroque allegory is a symptom of a cosmic vision torn apart through contact with someone other than me in a world that expands as it grows tired of waiting. Lost in seas and machines alien to salvation, it is abstracted from the self: a symptom of history without the possibility of redemption, a history without God or synthesis.

Benjamin explains that the Baroque allegory is a reminder of the skull, in which the odor of destruction coexists with the maintenance of the human form. It is as though the desperate choice was between obeying God along with the kings and queens that promise to preserve man's eternal character, or being condemned to ashes of things.



Anita Malfatti, La Boba, 1915. Courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil

Vicente do Rêgo Monteiro, The Hunt (A Caçada), 1923.

This choice is nothing more than the choice between becoming an object in a world without God or remaining a subject in waiting. This is the only Baroque drama that Hamlet enacts, contemplating the skull that terrifies him and from which he cannot escape: he too will become a fragment, he too will become a thing. There is no hospitality between these two poles. Unlike the flesh on which the cannibal gorges himself, the skull does not speak the name of the mother, father, or grandfather. It only renews the silence of history in its bureaucratic process of Man's condemnation.

Benjamin writes about Baroque allegory mainly to understand and validate the origins of the avant-garde artwork of his time, provoking the same rupture in the model of formal unity in favor of the fragment. In fragmentation, the avant-garde precisely unveils the work of art as a thing and as a technique. But as Benjamin understands this fragmentation, it gradually passes from suspension and analysis to become a source of "profane illumination."[10] In the initial moments of his first surrealist manifesto, André Breton already states that "man, that inveterate dreamer, increasingly discontented with his fate, finds it difficult to evaluate the objects he has been led to use."[11] If Breton's manifesto and the surrealist movement start from this divorce between subject and object, from their total dissonance and incompatibility, from the thing-character of the work of art, they are based on an incessant appeal to make this world of dead things and profane things speak to Man through the alphabet of desire.

The price for this desire between subject and object, between man and art, is, however, to radicalize the self beyond the limits of a rationality that organizes things by a utilitarian logic. It is to reach the threshold of the very idea of a thing that ceases to be a means and becomes a reflection. This justifies the obsession with the dream—the search for a zone of reality beyond the tombstone of the utilitarian organization in which reason itself is sustained, a zone where it is possible to change "the human facets for the face of an alarm clock."[12] Stripped of utilitarian ties, far from the Enlightenment that necessarily turns every object into a tool, the surrealist cuts away at the world and its things under the auspicious and solitary curatorship of the libido that no longer analyzes, but instead desires.

In the first surrealist manifesto, Breton speaks of transforming himself "into simple receptacles of so many echoes." At the same time, he says that "man proposes and disposes. He and he alone can determine whether he is completely master of himself, that is, whether he keeps the body of his desires, each day more formidable, in a state of anarchy."[13] In its first systematization, the movement is already immersed in the ambiguity between wanting to be a receptacle of the profane world and, at the same time, its inventor. A Heliogabalus anarchist and king, the surrealist is the God of his own liturgy, of the vision of his prophecy that, in his search for the world, only finds himself everywhere, producing the magic and effects with which he is dazzled. Like a neurotic on the couch, he struggles under the island of the self. The recording instrument in which he is cross-dressed never remembers more than the scream of a skyscraper, never the primary noise, but an echo covered by infinite layers of desire for another, for a world beyond its continuous collage of self. When Breton says that the most real phase of life is childhood, the child here can at most be a memory of the mirror phase, and never the intended playful integration between being and world. Whatever the intensity of desire, this integration is forever closed.

Breton seems aware of this when he indicates dialogue as the form of language that most closely aligns with surrealism. According to him, in the surrealist dialogue, the interlocutors

> simply pursue their soliloquy without trying to obtain any special dialectical pleasure from it and without trying to impose anything on their neighbor. The remarks exchanged are not, as is usually the case, intended to develop some thesis, however unimportant; they are as discontented as possible.[14]

It is precisely by balancing the desire for profane illumination and the certainty of its discontent that surrealism and its alleged dialogue between being and world, subject and thing, is, above all, camouflage. In this way, the surrealist claims that the beach is under the cobblestones as if selling canned goods with increasingly short expiration dates.

It is no coincidence that the second issue of the

Victor Brecheret, Head of Chrtist, 1950.

anthropophagy magazine edited by Oswald de Andrade declares: "After surrealism, only anthropophagy."[15] The most radical systematization of Brazilian modernism doubles down on the surrealist collage. Anthropophagy interrupts the lines of dialogue, abdicating the desire to be a *vate*, or enlightened prophet, to say: "I'm only interested in what's not mine. Man's law. Cannibal law."[16] Oswald de Andrade's operation seeks to revive the gesture of hospitality of Montaigne's cannibal, to insert his flesh and especially that of the country into the infinite process of devouring and digesting where any lines between human and thing are erased. In favor of the fusion given by the appetite that no longer sees distinctions, everything serves to be devoured. Everything is fragmented flesh, including Oswald de Andrade himself and the modernists who fade away amid their voluptuousness. The fundamental question becomes only evoking and, above all, subverting the Baroque drama of Hamlet through the native Brazilian heritage of the Tupi tribe: "tupi or not tupi?"[17] Resurrected, the cannibal transcends not only being and nothingness, not also the borders between the world of men and the world of things. He takes from the flesh of the other, from the lost and found world, from what Brazil never had: time.

It is time that flows through the braids of Victor Brecheret's *Head of Christ*, his open mouth, his phallic form, a Christ without cross or promise, a Christ without race, a Christ of life and permanent joy, a body of Christ that lives and proclaims Brazil through immemorial times that turn Brasilia into Judea. Pregnant time, gushing like milk from the exposed breast of Tarsila do Amaral's *A Negra* (The Black Woman), inventing in ink a story where everything begins in that breast, not enslaved but divinized as origin and encounter, as if there wasn't so much blood between America and Africa. There is still so much time in the famous *aí que preguiça* (how I am lazy) of Mário de Andrade's 1928 novel *Macunaíma*—Brazilian modernism personified—which roams the jungle and the city, changing shape and race to be one from many, to finally give a body and a breath to the country between Christ and Tupã. In these works, Brazilian modernism, in its most brilliant moments, realizes Oswald de Andrade's utopian maxim: "Only anthropophagy unites us."[18] In these works, almost by a miracle, Brazil is not the *now* that its modern settler and colonizer think about being born and condemned to. Instead, it is a transhistorical, eternal, and tender body, multiple and open. It is filled with new and old colors and names that devour each other without ceasing to belong to the same fabric of past, present, and future. In these rare and brilliant moments, Brazil exists beyond momentary enjoyment or interdiction. It is not mere history or promise, but invented as if it was always there.

The tragedy of Brazilian modernism is that these brilliant moments of paint and words do not sustain themselves. They never leave pages and pictures because devouring implies being a body, and being a body also implies being devoured. Contardo Calligaris says, "To reduce oneself to a body is to give oneself to whoever wants to enjoy us."[19] From this perspective, the modernist gesture of anthropophagous revival becomes as innocuous as the words of Montaigne or Lévi-Strauss, watching the end of a way of life. It reproduces the same tragedy of colonization in which Indigenous people stretched out their hands and had their arms cut off. One can no longer be Tupi because one became Brazilian without knowing it, because devouring no longer renews time but instead means merely self-violation and self-abandonment. The aesthetic project resists; it is celebrated and lauded, but anthropophagy as a national signifier is fragile, easy prey. It only produces a more voluptuous body for the colonizer, for the consumer, and perhaps here the criticism of the aristocratic and bourgeois origins of the modernists touches too deeply on their carnage and absence.

Maybe this has never been so well illustrated as at the end of Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's 1969 film adaptation of *Macunaíma*, where Macunaíma—the modernist hero who changes shape, body, and face—does not become a constellation; the body that devours does not integrate into the cosmos (as in the book), but is instead also devoured. He is transformed into a pool of blood, with all his wealth of signs, symbols, and forms that he had collected through devouring, which become blood too. In the ultimate end of anthropophagy, the cannibal does not build a transhistorical body for the country. He and the country become the same pool of blood; the ultimate end

of the impossible anthropophagous digestive tract is a vacuum.

Participants in the 1922 Modern Art Week at Hotel Terminus in São Paulo. From right to left: Couto de Barros, Manuel Bandeira, Mário de Andrade, Paulo Prado, René Thiollier, Graça Aranha, Manoel Villaboim, Godofredo Silva Telles, Motta Filho, Rubem Borba de Moraes, Luiz Aranha, Tácito de Almeida, Oswald de Andrade. Pphoto: Archives of Museu da Imagem e do Som.

The Modern Art Week of 1922 did not give birth only to the cannibal. While Oswald de Andrade spoke of Pau Brazil poetry and advocated transforming the country into a body that devours the foreigner, at the same time the gloomy figure of Plínio Salgado drew flags with tapirs and sketched the first traces of Brazilian fascism. If all modernism starts from the desire for a totality that imposes itself on the splitting of the modern, Salgado did not want to be a body or an object; he ultimately wanted to be a father. This helps explain why his Integralismo became one of the most significant mass movements in Brazilian history. The green shirts, the flags fluttering with the Greek sigma, the Tupi Anauê greetings, and the nativist Catholic nationalist broth that Plínio conjured settle in the heart of the promise offered to the settler who, since 1500, asks for affiliation. In an extensive work of aestheticization, Plínio ends what Romanticism and its twisted nativism began: Brazil as a total subject.

The memory of Brazilian Romanticism is fundamental not only because of Salgado's explicit adulterated nativism (whether in his Tupi Anauê chant or in all nationalist propaganda), but also because it is in Romanticism that, in a first effort to legitimize Brazilian national identity, Gonçalves Dias and especially José de Alencar metamorphosize the figure of the native into that of the medieval Christian knight. The "honored Indian" of

Romanticism, whether in Dias's poem "I-Juca-Pirama" or in Alencar's novel *The Guarani: Brazilian Romance*, is struggling in the literary forms of the late nineteenth century to stop being an object of exploitation or the colonizer's conversion, to be portrayed as a subject in the European mold, which means already possessing Christianity's moral compass. The transformation of Indigenous representation in Dias and Alencar is ethical precisely in echoing the passage from land to a nation based on law. If the first son of the earth has the law of Christianity, the earth must have always had it.

The fascist Integralismo of Plínio Salgado will immediately recover this gesture in its greeting from the Tupi Anauê and in the declaration of its greatest enemy: cosmopolitanism. "Cosmopolitanism, that is, foreign influence, is a deadly disease for our Nationalism. Fighting it is our duty."[20] The duty of Integralismo is justified for Plínio by a scenario that puts the Brazilian way of life at risk: "Our homes are impregnated with foreign words; our lectures, our way of looking at life, are no longer Brazilian."[21] The implication is that true national identity has been lost in the absence of immunological responses. The confrontation between Oswald de Andrade and Plínio becomes apparent as the former proposes to embrace (devour) the lack of a national syntagma, and the other speaks of a lost identity that must be rebuilt. But like the Romantics of a century before, Plínio Salgado is somehow aware that Brazil never existed, that it is still necessary to discover it: "We, united Brazilians, from all provinces, propose to create a culture, a civilization, a genuinely Brazilian way of life."[22] His fascism, above all, needed this constant and individual aesthetic discovery. Perhaps for this reason, despite being popular, Integralismo never had political viability. It was condemned to be an auxiliary line of president Getúlio Vargas's traditional Latin American populism, and to inspire the resounding failure of a minor insurrection.

Although many were willing to wear green shirts and shout the Tupi greeting, Integralismo was incapable of self-designing a past. The definitive law that Integralismo's multitude had been waiting for so long to materialize did not come. Integralismo needed a collective effort to become a father or to syncretize Salgado's aesthetic research, which was still a tropical Frankenstein and a disguised cannibal (just look at the Nazi and fascist influences that Plinío carefully collected on his visits to Europe). Despite its efforts, Integralismo could not escape the *now* where Brazil never really begins or ends. Like Alencar's medieval Indian, Integralismo was never more than a paper tiger. In the end, when reality imposed itself, Integralismo abstained, not by choice but by duty, in accordance with its own totalitarian fantasy of annunciation.

Mário de Andrade, the writer of *Macunaíma*, twenty years after the Modern Art Week of 1922, wrote in his autopsy of the modernist movement that he perceived in almost all of his work "the insufficiency of abstentionism."[23] De Andrade's autopsy is a sad one because it reports the distance between art and the world, which, in a way, is the same as saying that there is no world. After all, if art is already without threads for sewing, everything has already come undone. De Andrade says that after so long, he still seeks in his work and that of his companions "a more temporary passion, a more virile pain of life. There is none. There's more an old-fashioned absence of reality in many of us."[24] Both Oswald de Andrade's revived cannibal and Plínio's father are in-vitro fertilizations—born, bred, and killed in museums. Whether in the terrifying pages of history or in beautiful galleries, its fragments, sometimes sensual, sometimes violent, lean over, attempting to devour the walls of cellulose and glass but never escaping the abstention in which they were created: the abstention of a country, the abstention of time itself, the abstention of already being modern.

The cannibal devoured in his own blood, in his own invocation of flesh; the father drowned in his endless aesthetic research of tapirs, Greek letters, the Tupi Guarani language, and violence; modernism and its beasts, its cannibal dream, its fascist nightmare as undeniable proof that it would not be possible to surpass Brazil as an eternal rehearsal of its own samba plot. What remains is an avenue through which the torture poles[25] that make up our bones go on parade, looking for the end of the night where the pale ghosts of captains roam, staring back at us.

*Continued in "***We Too Were Modern, Part III: Of Earth and World***"*

X

Thotti is an artist from Rio de Janeiro, currently based in New York and producing independent films.

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24
De Andrade, *Aspectos da Literatura Brasileira* , 252.

25
Pau de arara (macaw's perch) is a torture technique in which the victim is tied up and forced to hang from a pole by their bent legs. The technique was widely used by during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85).

Jason Waite

Para-zomia: Cultivating Interdependence in Koenji

On March 11, 2011, the triple meltdown of nuclear reactors at Tokyo Electric's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station set off a literal and metaphorical shockwave that caused major shifts around the world—economic, political, and cultural. Germany, for one example, moved to permanently shutter all nuclear plants, canceling pending nuclear infrastructure projects while accelerating a turn toward renewable energy.[1] Coming in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown, which sparked revolutions in the Middle East, the Occupy movement, as well as uprisings across Asia, the Fukushima meltdown destabilized the established economic and political order in Japan. However, what would become the largest social movement in Japan since the 1960s, a protest movement involving hundreds of thousands of people, did not begin in front of the seat of government or Tokyo Electric's headquarters. Instead, its earliest expressions were cultivated in a small neighborhood in western Tokyo called Koenji.

The instigator of this gathering that grew into a vast social movement was a loose, autonomous cultural collective called Amateur Riot (Shiroto no Ran) composed of artists, musicians, and other precarious cultural workers. Commentary on the mass social movement that the group spurred—as well as its successes, shortcomings, and generational impacts—often omits the important local dynamics in Koenji which laid the groundwork. Shifting the focus to the smaller scale reveals the long-term work of Amateur Riot in contesting the durational crisis of neoliberalism that had profound effects on already precarious youth, and that created some of the foundational connections for it to grow.[2] To counter the cultural and economic neoliberal shift towards precaritization, Amateur Riot has worked for almost two decades to reestablish local agency and to foster forms of interdependence for collective social reproduction, creating what I call, following the writings of political theorist James C. Scott, a "para-zomia"—a self-organized community embedded within an urban area.

Though Amateur Riot includes artists and cultural workers, the collective does not consider itself a producer of artworks, signaling a move on its part past what is usually considered art. My interest is not in how Amateur Riot labels its actions, but rather how a collective practice developed an infrastructure capable of materially addressing the precarious conditions affecting artists and other cultural workers, and how the collective's interventions in public created the possibility for gatherings, cultural activities, and finally mass protests.

Amateur Riot

Amateur Riot was formed in 2005 by activist Matsumoto Hajime, artist and designer Yamashita Hikaru, hip-hop critic Shin Futatsugi, and others.[3] Before forming the collective, Hajime and Hikaru sold second-hand items and clothes to make a living. Following this model, the group

Overview of Koenji neighborhood. Photo by Kenji Morita. Courtesy of Chim ↑ Pom from Smappa!Group.

Chim ↑ Pom from Smappa!Group made a public street through their studio in Koenji in 2017. Photo by Kenji Morita. Courtesy of Chim ↑ Pom from Smappa!Group.

first opened an eponymous shop together, called Shiroto no Ran 1 Gouten (Amateur Riot No.1), in the working-class Tokyo neighborhood of Koenji. Through the operation of this shop, Amateur Riot developed into a loose collective: a bric-a-brac of artists, musicians, cultural workers, and friends all centered in the neighborhood, organizing local film screenings, dance and music performances, and even an English class called Amateur Riot University.[4] Besides organizing cultural events in their space, the group eventually intervened into their local environment further by organizing an infrastructure of resale shops, bars, an art gallery, a radio station, and a guesthouse, forming a dense mesh for practicing cultural activities, knowledge-sharing, and collective social reproduction. As part of this mutual aid network, the group shared its experiences on how to find second-hand clothes and items to refurbish and sell, thus enabling others to open their own resale shops. Friends opened their own stores in the area, utilizing the Amateur Riot name, adding consecutive numbers as they were established: Shiroto no Ran Shop No. 2, Shiroto no Ran Shop No. 3, and so on. The stores were not a chain or franchise; they were all independently owned and run.[5] Thus, sharing the practice and know-how of recycling and reselling electronics, household items, and clothes became an open-source tool that spread throughout the

community as a means of supporting both those in Amateur Riot and their friends.

Clothing store affiliated with Shiroto no Ran, located in the Koenji neighborhood of Tokyo. Photo: Kyun-Chome.

To complicate any definitive characterization of the collective, the composition of Amateur Riot is not entirely clear even to its founders.[6] People come in and out of the group. The name functions as a kind of open commons and floating signifier which can be claimed by anyone. The stores functioned in different ways, serving as meeting places and as nodes for organizing protests, performances, and interventions. Thus, the infrastructure of the store as a shelter and gathering place, along with its physical tools, including phones, computers, toilets, and kitchens, could be repurposed for multiple and overlapping activities, including planning events and demonstrations. This is evident in the 2011 film *Radioactivist*, an independent documentary following the group after the Fukushima meltdown, which depicts Hajime fielding calls while organizing an upcoming protest on his shop's phone, and other scenes showing different organizers using the space for banner-making, communal meals, and meetings.[7] This shows that the site of work for Amateur Riot can be a means of subsistence while also being bound up with other forms of the (re)production of everyday life.

While these multiple modes of life are integrated through the spaces and collective work they allow, they can also be in tension. As Hajime notes, "My greatest anxiety now is how to maintain the balance between the shop's function as a mainspring of my and the staff's living, and its function as a base of riots and commotion."[8] This concern highlights how the contradictions of fulfilling labor and social reproduction under capitalism cause stress when space is created to allow for a greater freedom to undertake a multiplicity of other activities. Emphasized by Hajime, the goal of the store is not accumulation, but rather the fostering of a fertile, diverse ecology where those experiencing economic precarity and social exclusion can flourish with little means. The activities and alternative infrastructure can be seen as part of an experimental attempt to construct a postcapitalist, prefigurative set of practices that aim to develop ways of living outside of neoliberalism in the present.[9]

Amateur Riot Radio (Hajime Matsumoto, Ruquitwora Matsumoto, Kaho Ikeda) broadcasting after the SAVE KOENJI protest to counter large-scale development in the area. Image courtesy of Amateur Riot Radio.

Para-zomia

Amateur Riot built a broader prefigurative infrastructure in the neighborhood to create the conditions for cooperation and collective formation. In this prefigurative infrastructure in Koenji, Amateur Riot spatialized a nourishing ecology where a community could survive as well as express itself through various cultural outlets. In contrast to moving to the countryside to build a new society in a perceived "terra nullius" (as back-to-the-land movements propose), in Koenji there was a desire to be together in urban space.

The concept of "zomia" can be useful in understanding the practice of Amateur Riot in the broader context of Asia.

The word "zomia," common across the Chin/Kuki/Mizo language groups in parts of Myanmar, Bangladesh, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, means "remote peoples" or "hill people." The term was used by the historian Willem van Schendel to name ("Zomia") the highlands that form a largely contiguous transnational area ranging from southeast China down to Vietnam and across to eastern India.[10] Van Schendel's focus on Zomia aimed to complicate the disjointed, geography-based academic disciplines that this area traverses (South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia) and to examine the Cold War dynamics that kept the area out of the limelight. The political and social dimensions of Zomia, and the way its residents have used its mountainous terrain to evade the effects of colonization, was later explored by anthropologist James C. Scott in his landmark book *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Scott describes the area as a "riotous heterogeneity" of Indigenous people and historic and contemporary refugees.[11] Due to the difficult terrain, this vast region has little state presence—a common condition that connects populations that are otherwise diverse in their languages, customs, ethnicities, and types of societies. In the absence of state control, writes Scott, self-governance has bloomed. Unlike Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zones, Zomia is an enduring, uneasy topography where diverse means of self-organization have flourished, from Indigenous governance and revolutionary movements to composite communities that evolve their own ways of being together.[12] Invoking Zomia here is not intended to idealize the difficult conditions faced by its highlands communities, but rather to (1) highlight the shared environmental and topological conditions that shape culture; and to (2) posit a common non-state orientation across East and Southeast Asia. Scott proposes an environmental reading of the shared conditions of Zomia to explain why communities with diverse languages, cultures, and histories have nonetheless tended toward a common way of life: self-government.

Printed matter produced by Amateur Riot. Image by Art & Labor.

Treating Zomia as not only a place but a concept, I suggest that a form of "zomia" can also be cultivated in urban space, as evidenced by Amateur Riot's work in Koenji and beyond. This might seem surprising given that Zomia's relative self-governance is enabled by its altitude and remoteness. However, urban terrain, while often a locus of state power, is also a composite of cracks and fissures with the capacity to evade certain forms of state control. In this light, Amateur Riot's community in Koenji can be thought of as a "para-zomia," where a diverse economic and social mesh creates another site of topographic resistance. Indeed, the urban conditions of Koenji can produce a sense of removal from the state and an intersectional self-governance akin to that of Zomia.

Koenji's winding passageways and dense housing engender a close relationship between neighbors and a different set of relations to those promoted by urban capitalism. As Hajime writes in Amateur Riot's DIY-book-cum-manifesto *Counter-Attack of the Poor:*

> I want to devise a means of creating a space where it is easy to make a life in the broadest sense, encompassing personal connections and the local area. This is an area-wide, self-sufficiency strategy for all the poor. Wow! To put it another way, if we can devise an amazing fools' area in which places of work, of play and housing are lumped together, then we wouldn't have any reason to be afraid.[13]

The reflexive humor of a "fools' area" underscores the lightness of Amateur Riot's approach, but it does not detract from the group's serious intent to establish a generative ecology that combines collective social reproduction with cultural practices. The development of this para-zomia has not been a top-down plan but rather an ad hoc collective project based on the needs and desires of economic refugees from neoliberal precarity. The physical spaces of Koenji's small shops and cultural sites, networked to provide mutual support and cooperation, have reestablished a sense of enduring community in the area, as evidenced by Amateur Riot's continuing fifteen-year existence. This para-zomia was founded with and through artistic and cultural practices. Art and music are not byproducts of the community, but rather its connective tissue. This living ecology has provided fertile terrain for a new generation of artists, cultural workers, and collectives to emerge in the area.

Curiously, the para-zomia in Koenji has not given rise to the sort of gentrification seen in other metropolises. This is because Tokyo does not have the kind of centralized development planning used in, for example, New York.[14] In Tokyo, there is not a trend of renovating dilapidated buildings; instead, home and apartment prices are generally fixed according to the year of their construction,

and these prices typically depreciate over time. This means that in Tokyo, it is new buildings—in particular large-scale apartment towers—that are the generators of gentrification, as was the case with Mori Tower in Roppongi and the recent construction of tech office towers around Shibuya.[15] Large building corporations, facilitated by local municipalities, raze entire areas for large-scale new developments. By contrast, the living ecology produced by Amateur Riot has not led to rising rents or the displacement of longtime residents in Koenji. Instead, Amateur Riot has sought to band with these residents. The group enrolled in the long-standing local committee of neighborhood shopkeepers, and also helped contest a 2018 plan to construct a major thoroughfare through Koenji, which would have bisected the neighborhood and disrupted its intimate network of alleyways.[16] Amateur Riot has also organized an annual protest in Koenji, which channels the collective agency of residents who dislike the heavy-handed planning approach of the larger municipal authority. The group fights to preserve the dense, Zomia-like character of the neighborhood against top-down forces of capitalist homogenization.

Using a prefigurative approach, Amateur Riot has developed collective material and cultural practices that counter precarity and foster an alternative economy in the Koenji. This para-zomia includes spaces for cultural experimentation, mutual support, and community building. The urban ecology of Koenji offers a model for a fundamentally different way of life.

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1
Yet the mining of coal and its ongoing displacement has not ended in Germany. See Ingmar Björn Nolting, "The Eviction of Lützerath: The Village Being Destroyed for a Coal Mine," *The Guardian* January 24, 2023 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/jan/24/eviction-lutzerath-village-destroyed-coalmine-a-photo-essay .

2
Rather than seeing neoliberalism as a set of economic policies aiming to separate markets and capital from democratic governance, theorist Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism is itself a "rationality." Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 21.

3
See Julia Obinger, "Aufstand Der Amateure!: Alternative Lebensstile Als Aktivismus in Urbanen Räumen Japans" (PhD diss., University of Zurich, 2013), 49.

4
Alexander James Brown, *Anti-Nuclear Protest in Post-Fukushima Tokyo: Power Struggles* (Routledge, 2018), 56.

5
Matsumoto Hajime, interview by *Magazine9* , 2007 http://www.magazine9.jp/interv/hajime/hajime.php (in Japanese).

6
Matsumoto Hajime and Amateur Riot, interview by Jason Waite, trans. by Kenji Kubota, March 21, 2017.

7
Julia Lesser and Clarissa Seidel, *Radioactivists: Protest in Japan after Fukushima* (Ginger and Blonde Productions, 2011).

8
Matsumoto Hajime, *Binbōnin daih anran: Ikinikui yo no naka to tanoshiku tatakau hōhō* (The great pauper rebellion: How to struggle against a hard world while having fun) (Asupekuto, 2008). Quoted and translated in Carl Cassegård, *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (Global Oriental, 2014), 108.

9
Alexander James Brown has undertaken a study of the term "prefigurative politics" in Japan, including the critical role of Sabu Kohso's translation of the term as "*yojiteki seiki*" in 2006 and its subsequent usage. Brown, "Translating Prefigurative Politics: Social Networks and Rhetorical Strategies in the Alter-Globalisation Movement," *The Translator* , April 15, 2020.

10
Willem van Schendel, "Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, no. 6 (December 2002); Arkotong Longkumer and Michael Heneise, "The Highlander," *The Highlander: Journal of Highland Asia* 1, no. 1 (December 21, 2019).

11
James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale University Press, 2009), 26.

12
Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* , 2nd rev. ed (Autonomedia, 2003).

13
Matsumoto Hajime, *Binbōnin No Gyakushū: Tada de Ikiru Hōhō (* Counter-Attack of the poor: How to live for free) (Chikuma shobō, 2008), 56. Translated in Brown, *Anti-Nuclear Protest in Post-Fukushima Tokyo* , 91.

14
Ralph Lützeler, "Population Increase and 'New-Build Gentrification' in Central Tōkyō," *Erdkunde* 62, no. 4 (December 2008).

15
Roman A. Cybriwsky, *Roppongi Crossing: The Demise of a Tokyo Nightclub District and the Reshaping of a Global City* (University of Georgia Press, 2011); Munehisa Ishida, "The Changing Face of Shibuya: Renewal Speeds up Shift from Cultural Center to IT Hub," *The Mainichi* , January 7, 2020 https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20200106/p2a/00m/0bu/022000c .

16
William Andrew, "Residents and Activists Protest Proposed Kōenji Gentrification Plan," *Throw Out Your Books* (blog), September 25, 2018 https://throwoutyourbooks.wordpress.com/2018/09/25/residents-activists-protest-proposed-koenji-gentrification/ .

Gigi Roggero

Italian Operaismo

Preface to the English-Language Edition [1]

This book brings together six seminars on operaismo held between January and February 2019 at Mediateca Gateway, a library and center of political and militant formation in Bologna, Italy, which has now become .input. The title of the course, "Futuro Anteriore," was taken from a book published by DeriveApprodi in 2002—the result of a project of co-research whose point of reference was Romano Alquati—which includes roughly sixty interviews with people connected to operaismo.[2] The subtitle of that book, *Dai "Quaderni rossi" ai movimenti globali: Ricchezze e limiti dell'operaismo italiano* (From "Quaderni rossi" to the global movements: The wealth and limits of Italian operaismo), anticipates the political method that will be used here.

Now, as then, tracing the history of operaismo doesn't mean celebrating an icon or fixing an orthodoxy. Despite its "-ism," operaismo always refused ideology and any loyalty to sacred scriptures. This began with its radical rereading of Marx and Lenin against the Marxism and Leninism that was dominant in the social-communist tradition, in both its Stalinist and so-called heretical versions. We will revisit that history, our history, to overturn it against the present: not to contemplate it but to set it alight. To appropriate its wealth, to fight against its limits, to transform it into a political weapon. Not because continuity is possible, but because for us discontinuity means assuming the operaist *point of view* of partisan collectivity on and against this world. We must reject both the exaltation of the new and nostalgia for the past, the desire for the "post-" or the "pre-," as they are two sides of the same coin.

The term "militant formation" (*formazione militante*) should be clarified to avoid misunderstanding. It has nothing to do with indoctrination, based on ideological transmission, or with education, based on the transmission of preestablished values. On the contrary, it is a process of constructing a point of view and a capacity for critical reasoning, of being able to continually call into question or subvert the knowledge being formed. For a revolutionary militant, the *point of view* is an indispensable premise and at the same time that which must be continuously fought for. When we no longer have it or search for it, as premise and as conquest, we stop being militants. Today we are faced with the problem that most political militants have stopped engaging in militant formation and critical reasoning. In periods like this, then, in which we are unable to glimpse any possibility of radical transformation on the surface, there is a widespread tendency to flee into ideology, or into the values of microcommunities, seen today in the "bubbles" of political activists both on social networks and in real life. This consolatory form perhaps allows us to endure the current reality, but certainly not to fight it. In fact, the closest ally of that reality is everything that allows it to be endured by

"The Game of the Dragon," from Rosso: Giornale dentro il movimento, December 1976.

those who could or would like to fight against it.

The people who participated in the course—about thirty comrades from different generations, although mostly young—did so not to imbibe the words of the sacred scriptures but to find tools for rethinking the present, to dive down into the obscure ambivalences that bubble beneath the surface. Their contributions and questions were decisive in the spiral construction of the course, whose discursive style we have chosen to maintain here. For the sake of the fluency of the text, they have not been transcribed as interventions, but are directly incorporated into its development.

This explains one of the two reasons why the first-person plural is used and not the singular: it was a collective process. The other reason is that a militant is always a collective individual; when you go back to thinking, and thinking of yourself, as an "I," you cease to be a militant. The process of militant formation reaches the point where the individual both speaks and is spoken of from the *point of view*, in the sense we have alluded to and will elaborate on: not as a dogma, but because the point of view guides the way we see every aspect of the world and situates us within and against it. In other words, the militant is always part of a collective process; their subjectivity is formed through struggle against the modern individual, the abstract egoistic and solitary subject of the liberal and democratic tradition.

Operaismo is our point of view, it is a *method* or a *style*, our *Weltanschauung*. It is an irreducibly partial point of view, an irreducibly conflictual point of view, in relation to both the world and ourselves. Because in order to fight the world in which we live we must at the same time and continuously fight the world that is embodied in us, that produces and reproduces our lives, our way of seeing, our subjectivity.

In the last twenty years or so there has been a rediscovery or, perhaps more accurately, a discovery of operaismo on the international level. Since the publication of Negri and Hardt's *Empire* and the diffusion of its categories and lexicon in university departments across the world—where it has taken on the label of "Italian Theory" or "post-operaismo"—that revolutionary and irreducibly partisan political thought has definitively left the Italian province. But, in the process, it has been watered down

Cover of Quaderni rossi, no. 1.

and deprived of what made it revolutionary and partisan. The global university is an extraordinary machine of depoliticization: you can say whatever you want, as long as nothing you say affects the relationships of domination. This form of freedom neutralizes the radicality of thought, rendering it compatible with and functional to the machine of accumulation: the problem is not the absence of freedom but the liberal form of freedom. Thus, for reasons that will be explained in the text, that prefix—the "post-"—has engulfed the noun, neutralizing the method.

But be careful. This book does not set out to explain the "true" operaismo. For revolutionary militants, truth is never something that needs to be explained, but is always something that must be fought for, just like the point of view. Everything that is needed to fight the current reality is "true," everything that isn't needed isn't "true." In this book, then, readers will find themselves confronted with the radicality of operaismo in the literal sense: that is, the ability to get to the root of things, to grasp it, to try to tear it out or overthrow it. And the root is not underground, as you might think, but actually at the top, in the central points and contradictions. This requires a posture that isn't in thrall to fashions or dragged into the ephemeral vortex of public opinion. It means criticizing what everyone else accepts, also on a conceptual level. And it means criticizing what is accepted not only in the mainstream but also and above all in activist communities.

To give one example among many, we might think of the term "intersectionality," which has become fashionable in these circles. Here class disappears as a central contradiction and as conflict, being reduced to an economic fact that becomes one of the many identities located on a horizontal line, an identity of fragments in which every individual or small group can feel recognized in the hierarchy of subalternity. These identities are potentially infinite, much like the market. The sum of these fragments is never recomposed, or rather is always recomposed by capital. And so, having gone out the door, the old Marxist economism reenters through the window of intersectional identities, together with various other "-isms." This book will explain why the operaist concept of class composition already anticipates by many decades the best critiques of intersectionality, insofar as gender and race dynamically and continually redetermine that composition. From the political point of view, class is composed through struggle and conflict, not on the basis of objective identities. It is not the exploited and the subaltern who compose themselves as a class, but those who struggle against their exploitation and subalternity. As Mario Tronti says: there is no class without class struggle. In the same way, the critique of universalism and historicism that has been so fashionable since the 1980s was practiced and anticipated by operaismo in a completely different direction, beginning from the irreducibility of the partisan point of view, and not—as was the case in the era of capitalist counterrevolution—from the end of the grand narratives with which the lexicon of the "post-" has endorsed the prohibition of the very conceivability of revolution. And the revolution means civil war, that is to say, the class struggle at the highest level of intensity. The operaist *polemos* is always the strong thought of subversion, never the weak thought of cultural and political relativism.

In short, the reader will find no room here for liberal pluralism, in which everyone can get together in the name of the general interest—including the general interests of community micro-identities. Because the general interest is always the interest of capital, and when everything is held together, it belongs to the bosses. On the contrary, the operaist method is, first and foremost, *divisive*. One side against the other; either you're on one side or you're on the other. And because of its formative character, this text will not give the reader ready-made answers or easy solutions; there will be no peace and quiet. Operaist formation uproots acquired convictions to get to the heart of the problem, for it is there, in that heart, that we must collectively and continuously reconstruct our capacity to *be against*. This is an act of force, of violence, that tears us

away from the quiet management of our existence. Only those who are willing to be disturbed by this problem can open up the possibility of solving it.

Thus, the invitation we make to our readers is—as Alquati, one of our "tutelary deities," used to repeat continually—to use this book like a machine, not passively, but by acting to make it come alive, that is, as a tool that can be transformed to abolish the present state of things.

ter 1: Context and Specificity: The Breeding Ground ian Political Operaismo

We can say from the start that operaismo is unfashionable or, to use a Nietzschean term to which we will return, "untimely."

Our next question is whether operaismo had anything to do with the glorification of factory workers as factory workers. We should first point out that other workerisms existed during the 1900s, and we will briefly summarize the main examples.[3]

Wojciech Fangor, Forging the Scythes, 1954. Courtesy of Museum of Warsaw.

First, there was councilism, which was at its strongest in the 1910s and 1920s and was based in the experiences of workers' councils or soviets. Some concrete examples include Rabociaia Oppositzia (Workers' Opposition) in the Soviet Union, whose most significant leaders were Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shliapnikov; Ordine Nuovo in Italy, centered in Turin, which included Antonio Gramsci; the German groups linked to the insurrection of the workers' councils at the end of the First World War;[4] and, among many other militant thinkers, the Dutch theorist Anton Pannekoek.

The central figure in the councilist movement was the craft worker (*operaio di mestiere*), considered to be better than the bosses at keeping the factory going. This leads to a vision of the self-management of the factory and society by workers united in the collective form of the council. Thus, councilism involves the glorification of the figure of the worker as such, a work ethic that isn't simply ideology but is rooted in a specific class composition, in which this worker and their pride in their craft play an important role in the productive process. These workers bear the stamp of their predecessors, the artisans. They are a sort of split artisan, struggling to regain complete autonomy over their skills, capacities, and forms of organization. Councilism fights against the expropriation of the crafts, which is implicit in industrial development, and tries to guide development toward a strengthening of the collective autonomy of the working class. To simplify, we could say that the councilist movement's perspective on self-management doesn't deny the tactical function of the party, but forcefully asserts the strategic hegemony of the soviet.

Lenin's critiques of councilism are relatively well-known.

His text *"Left Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, which is now more often cited than read, was used in the decades that followed by various communist parties (including the Italian Communist Party) as an argument against all forms of class autonomy. We would instead recommend reading the debate on the function of trade unions in the Soviet Union between 1920 and 1921, a few years after the Bolsheviks took power; and three lectures held in 1967 in Montreal by the Black communist C. L. R. James, which were dedicated to this subject.[5] We will now briefly summarize that debate. On the one hand, Lenin argued against Trotsky and Bukharin, who, coming from a bureaucratic perspective, wanted a complete statalization or even militarization of the trade unions, reducing them to a means for transmitting Soviet power. On the other hand, he heavily criticized Workers' Opposition for their naive democratic ideology: it was as if they thought that workers' control was a natural point of departure rather than a process to fight for. We would say, perhaps forcing the argument a little, that the questions of workers' autonomy and the extinction of the state are central to the debate on the function of the trade union. Trotsky and Bukharin denied them; Workers' Opposition hoped for them as if it were simply a question of ideological will. But for Lenin they were important strategic stakes in the struggle, the fruit of a political process made up of conflict, organization, and the overturning of the relations of force. In this sense, it was precisely in that particular historical period that the trade union was not what it had been before and was not destined to be what it would later become: it would have to be used tactically, as a school for class struggle and for the development of workers' autonomy, toward the extinction of the state.

Also at stake in this debate was the relationship between the soviet and the party, or rather, the old question of spontaneity versus organization. For Lenin, it was indeed a *relationship*, and so never given once and for all. This can be seen in his continually changing point of view between 1905 and 1917: there are periods in which spontaneity is more advanced—as happens with the revolutionary process after the Bloody Sunday of January 1905 and with the soviets between February and July of 1917. In these cases, organization had to follow spontaneity, rethink it, and reform it by beginning from it. There were other periods, such as between July and October 1917, in which the party had to reinvigorate the soviets that were at risk of falling into a stagnant democratic parliamentarism. In these cases, organization was used to reopen the way for the full development of spontaneity.[6]

In addition to councilism, there was another workerism of a very different, or even opposite, kind: the Stalinist workerism of the 1930s. In this case it was not the soviets that were central, but the party.[7] However, the working class played an important role, being used against the intellectual and peasant petit bourgeoisie. Although it was a symbolic and instrumental reference, it produced concrete effects, both in terms of workers' participation in the managing bodies of the party and, most importantly, in the exchange between obedience to the regime and relative technical autonomy. Rita di Leo describes it as something like a pact between the party-state and the workers, which guaranteed power to the former and a certain role in managing the pace of work to the latter, in apparent contradiction with the Stakhanov myth. But the contradiction is relative: the slow pace of production in the Soviet factories, which would continue in the following decades, was in fact a concession made in exchange for the symbolic role that the working class played in Soviet ideology—glorifying the proletarian condition and labor as something to be extended, not abolished.

Unlike Marx, who saw being a productive worker not as a blessing but as a misfortune, the Marxist and social communist tradition saw it not as a misfortune but as a blessing, and one that should be generalized across the whole of society: the bright future was to be painted in the gloomy colors of labor and exploitation.

After this long but necessary premise, we approach the theme of our chapter: context and specificity. Let's begin from the context: Italy in the 1950s was a political desert, in which any genuine revolutionary perspective had been abandoned. The partisan resistance to fascism had become an icon: the mythicization of that experience was directly proportional to its depoliticization. The iconization of the Resistance in the popular imagination helped the Communist Party put an end to it in the reality of the class, in the same way as Napoleon's celebration of the French Revolution was the final nail in its coffin. The more that something is sanctified as heavenly, the more difficult it is to repeat it on earth.

The political desert of that period was visible in the factories. In 1955, the Communist Party–affiliated Italian Federation of Metalworkers (FIOM)[8] was defeated in the elections for FIAT's Internal Commission, which represented the workers' trade unions in the factory. It was both a shock to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and seen as a confirmation of its long-held and mistaken realism, in which the working class was considered to have lost all revolutionary potential. This led the party in a new direction: the pursuit of the middle classes and the "Italian road to socialism," which in the 1970s would become the search for the "historic compromise."[9] This created a vicious circle: the leaders of the PCI, who held that the working class was finished, asked the communist and unionist cadre what was going on in the factories, who told them that nothing was happening, which just confirmed what they already thought at the top, further reinforcing their strategy. The PCI's position, which had been built around its own interests, was a sort of Frankfurtism before its time. It wouldn't be long before it was widely accepted that the Western working class had inevitably become integrated into capitalism's iron cage. What's more, at that time, not even sociology, which in Italy was still pretty insignificant, was interested in the

Mario Mariotti, printed in Classe operaia, no. 2 (January 1964).

factory (with a few exceptions, including the work of Alessandro Pizzorno on the experience of Olivetti in Ivrea).[10]

However, from the point of view of the relations of production and the organization of work in Italy, the 1950s were particularly significant. Lagging behind other Western countries such as the United States and Germany, it was only in this period that Italy experienced the full development of Taylorism-Fordism.

Taylorism is a model for the organization of factory labor, Fordism is a model for the organization of workers in society. Taylorism-Fordism mapped out the coordinates of the factory and society in which workers lived and were exploited, which would be further developed in the welfare state politics of the following decades.

We must keep this bigger picture in mind in order to avoid falling into the idea that there was an inevitability to the birth and development of Italian political operaismo. Not only was there nothing that allowed it to be predicted, but it was also in some sense "untimely." We come back to this word, whose Nietzschean use we hinted at before: untimeliness is acting against time, on time, and for a time that is to come. Not outside time, but *within and against* time. Not an idealist action but a materialist one. There is no trace of utopia, of yearning for another possible world: it instead echoes Lenin's "We should dream!" in *What Is to Be Done?*, refusing to accept the time we are given, in order to instead construct our own time, an autonomous time, produced through struggle and opposition.

For the Italian communists the 1950s were also marked by international events, *in primis* their relationship with the Soviet Union. Important events include the 1953 workers' revolt in East Berlin, the Hungarian insurrection between October and November 1956, and, in February of the same year, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which Stalinism and its cult of personality were denounced.

This was heartbreaking for the Italian communists. But their formal de-Stalinization did not correspond to a real de-Stalinization, and the tanks in Budapest were a reminder of that: the PCI wholeheartedly defended them, despite the trauma felt at its base. Some militants saw more possibilities for action within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). Raniero Panzieri, a founding figure of *Quaderni rossi*, started out in the latter. Others moved to the PSI as exiles from the PCI, such as Alberto Asor Rosa in Rome, or from other groups, like Toni Negri in Veneto, who had started out with the young Catholics in FUCI (the Italian Catholic Federation of University Students).

However, in this period an antagonist and revolutionary political initiative that went beyond the institutions of the workers' movement was pretty hard to imagine. So much so that, in the following decade, the comrades of *Quaderni rossi* and *Classe operaia* were often verbally and even physically attacked when they went to factory gates without the mediation of the party or the union, addressing their leaflets directly to the workers.

Protest by Pirelli workers, 1969, Milan. Source: libcom.org

Obviously, the old minorities still existed, in particular the Bordigist and Trotskyist groups, characterized by their heavy critique of the course taken by the Communist Party, and ennobled by their opposition to Stalinism. These included militants who would later become important for operaismo, such as the Bordigist Danilo Montaldi from Cremona, the French Trotskyist journal *Socialisme ou barbarie*, and the already cited C. L. R. James, who also came from Trotskyism. These groups should be interpreted as symptoms of the fact that the communist movement was not entirely pacified. However, these communist "heresies"—save for the few odd heterodox exceptions such as those we have just mentioned—often ended up restoring Marxist dogmas rather than calling them into question. The critique of Stalin turned into a critique of anyone who strayed from the objective tracks of History,[11] and thus into an attack on subjectivism in the name of a traditional determinism. This was more or less the destiny and essence of these heresies, denouncing those who deviated from the straight and narrow, aiming to return to the authority of the sacred scripts.

We can find other symptoms of a critique of orthodox Marxism in this period, which are even more important for us because they make up a significant part of the breeding ground for that subjectivity that gave rise to Italian political operaismo. For example, Galvano Della Volpe—a thinker initially formed in the tradition of Gentile's idealism who then explicitly broke with him—taught in the faculty of literature and philosophy in Rome and had a strong influence on Mario Tronti, Alberto Asor Rosa, Gaspare de Caro, and Umberto Coldagelli, all of whom would later contribute to *Quaderni rossi* and *Classe operaia*.

We could continue to follow the major and minor genealogies of what would later become operaismo (for example, citing the experience of Danilo Dolci in Sicily and his appeal to "go to the people," which was answered by several militants who would later become part of *Quaderni rossi* and *Classe operaia*, such as Mauro Gobbini and Negri).[12] But we will not do that here. We simply want to emphasize the character of the 1950s as a period of *transition*. However, we mustn't forget that it is only retrospectively that we are able to attribute a historicist and teleological character to that transition. In that period, on the surface we would have seen only dismay, chaos, and resignation. Reflecting on that together, we could say that the transition isn't sent to us by History but must be won by acting against History.

Protest by Pirelli workers, 1969, Milan. Source: libcom.org

We should now focus on the crucial common element that brings the future operaist militants together: fighting a sense of defeat, seeking out strength, putting the problem of a revolutionary rupture back on the agenda. Their biographies tell specific and different stories: there were those who, like the Roman comrades, largely came from the Communist Party group in the university and were searching for a different point of view, either in explicit rupture with the party or in order to push the party toward revolutionary positions; there were those who, like the Venetians, came from heterogeneous groups, from social Catholicism or the Socialist Party, and gathered in the struggle at Porto Marghera amid the rampant industrialization of the Northeast; there were others who, in Lombardy and Piedmont, felt—as Alquati said—"humiliated and insulted, marginalized and bitter," as a result of their proletarianization or lumpen-proletarianization following the end of the Second World War. "This downfall was soon felt by me as ambivalent: as a great everyday tragedy, but also as a further liberation."[13]

Even in their differences (here summarized in an extremely cursory way), these biographies demonstrate a rupture with the cult of victimhood that had always been a constitutive part of the Left and much of the social communist tradition. It was not passion for the oppressed that guided them, but the search for those who struggled against their conditions of oppression. It was not about laying low in resistance, but about building a plan for attack; not about pitying weakness but about identifying force. For the future operaist militants, this would also be a rupture with themselves, with their own subjectivities and personal histories. A rupture that opened the way to new encounters and new trajectories, to a history that would become collective.

X

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1
This is an edited excerpt from Gigi Roggero, *Italian Operaismo: Genealogy, History, Method* , trans. Clara Pope (MIT Press, 2023).

2
On the operaist concept of co-research, see Devi Sacchetto, Emiliana Armano, and Steve Wright, "Coresearch and Counter-Research: Romano Alquati's Itinerary Within and Beyond Italian Radical Political Thought," *Viewpoint*, September 27, 2013 https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/coresearch-and-counter-research-romano-alquatis-itinerary-within-and-beyond-italian-radical-political-thought/ .—Ed.

3
In order to distinguish Italian operaismo from other workerisms, the Italian word " *operaismo* " will be used throughout the text, with the anglicization "operaist" as its adjective. Those involved in operaismo will be referred to using the Italian word " *operaisti*." The word " *operaieta* " will remain in Italian, and describes the subjectivity of the figure around which the working class is politically recomposed.—Trans.

4
For further information on the German experience we recommend the book *La rivoluzione tedesca 1918–1919* , with a preface by Sergio Bologna, and Bologna's essay "Composizione di classe e teoria del partito alle origini del movimento consiliare" (Class composition and the theory of the party at the origins of the councilist movement) published in *Operai e stato*, which came out in 1972 as part of the series "Materiali Marxisti" published by Feltrinelli and edited by comrades at the Institute of Political Sciences in Padua.

5
Published in C. L. R. James, *You Don't Play with Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of CLR James* , ed. David Austin (AK Press, 2009).

6
On this we recommend Toni Negri's article "Lenin e i soviet nella rivoluzione" (Lenin and the soviets in the revolution), published in 1965 in the first edition of *Classe operaia* and tran slated as "The Factory of Strategy" in his book *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin* (Columbia University Press, 2014). In this book we also find the formula "organization is spontaneity reflecting upon itself," which closely echoes Romano Alquati's definition of "organized spontaneity," which he used to interpret the struggles in Turin at the beginning of the 1960s, and to which we will return later.

7
On this subject we recommend Rita di Leo's *L'esperimento profano* (Ediesse, 2012).

8
The Federazione Italiana Operai Metallurgici (FIOM) is the metalwork sector of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), the trade union linked to the Communist Party.

9
The 1973 historic compromise was a political alliance between the Communist Party and the Christian Democracy (DC) party, proposed by the secretary of the Communist Party, Enrico Berlinguer.—Ed.

10
Olivietti is a historic business based in Ivrea in the province of Turin, which started off by manufacturing typewriters. After the Second World War, businessman and intellectual Adriano Olivetti, bringing together elements of Fabianism and humanitarian and Christian socialism, developed the idea of a utopian community that would be both productive and harmonious, able to guarantee the development of society and the individual. His Movimento Comunità (Community Movement) stood for election and, more importantly, attracted many intellectuals, trade unionists, and experts who wanted to set up an innovative industry, based on the concept of a capitalism founded on technical progress and interclass harmony. While the Left, past and present, is lavish in its praise of the Olivettian "community," Alquati saw it as a mystification, revealing the antagonistic reality and organized conflict within it. This partly explains both his problems with the Left and why he is remembered as a lonely and isolated figure.

11
We begin the word "History" with a capital letter when it is understood as a necessary teleological progression, which for the apologists of the current system ended with the triumph of capital, and for Marxists will evolve into socialism and, ultimately, communism.

12
For more in-depth discussions on this topic, see Gigi Roggero, Guido Borio, and Francesca Pozzi, *Futuro anteriore* (DeriveApprodi, 2002).

13
See the interview with Alquati in *Futuro anteriore* . This, like the other interviews mentioned below, are all on the CD-ROM that comes with the book; some parts of the interviews were then published in *Gli operaisti*, edited by Gigi Roggero, Guido Borio, and Francesca Pozzi (DeriveApprodi, 2005).

Ben Ware

The Death Drive at the End of the World

Transience and Politics

In his 1915 essay "On Transience," Freud describes a "summer walk through a smiling countryside" in which he and two companions—a "taciturn friend" and a "young but already famous poet"—discuss the beauty of nature. While the young poet admires the pastoral scene that he encounters, he cannot take any "joy in it." For, as Freud explains:

> *He was disturbed by the thought that all this beauty was fated to extinction*, that it would vanish when winter came like all human beauty and all the beauty and splendour that men have created. All that he would otherwise have loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the transience that was its doom.[1]

Freud disputes the view of the pessimistic poet. The transience of things, he argues, *increases the pleasure that we take in them*; the fact that life and beauty, including the beauty of nature, are subject to time, decay, and (eventual) death is precisely the source of their "worth."

While all of these considerations appear utterly "incontestable" to the psychoanalyst, he notices that they make "no impression" on either of his companions, and he is thus moved to make the following diagnosis: "What spoilt their enjoyment of beauty must have been a revolt in their minds against mourning. Since the mind instinctively recoils from anything that is painful, they felt their enjoyment of beauty interfered with by thoughts of its transience."[2]

The despondency felt by the poet and the friend in the face of natural beauty is, for Freud, a kind of immature response. The young companions refuse to mourn; and this refusal constitutes a rebellion against transience and loss, both of which are constitutive of human reality.

Originally composed as a tribute to Goethe, "On Transience" was written fifteen months into World War I. According to one commentator, Freud strives in the text to "work through" the loss of his own illusions about self and world, performing an act of "psychic repair." But what illusions, exactly, has the war deprived Freud of? And where does this process of repair ultimately arrive at? The close of the essay is revealing:

> The war broke out and robbed the world of its beauties. It destroyed not only the beauty of the countryside through which it passed … and the works of art which it met with on its path … but it also shattered our pride in the achievements of our civilisation … It robbed us of much that we had loved …

John McColgan, Elk Bath, 2000. A wildfire on the East Fork of the Bitterroot River on the Sula Complex in the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana. License: Public Domain.

> and showed us how ephemeral were many things that we had regarded as changeless ...
>
> Mourning, however painful, comes to a spontaneous end. When it has renounced everything that has been lost, then it has consumed itself, and our libido is once more free ... to replace the lost objects by fresh ones, equally or still more precious. It is to be hoped that the same will be true of the losses caused by this war. When once the mourning is over, it will be found that our high opinion of the riches of civilisation has lost nothing from our discovery of their fragility. We shall build up again all that war has destroyed, and perhaps on firmer and more lasting ground.[3]

Of key theoretical importance here are the essay's final two points. First, that mourning arrives at a spontaneous and definite end, at which point libido is "free" to be reinvested into new objects. And second, that once the period of war mourning is over, the status quo will (hopefully) be restored, this time on firmer and more lasting ground. There is nothing here, then, to suggest that mourning might involve a *critical* remembering of what has been; that it might require an *ethical* reevaluation of the self; or that there might be certain losses (those incurred during a period of catastrophic world devastation, for example) that can only be "worked through" *publicly*, by means of a *collective reenvisioning of society as a whole*. In short, there is nothing resembling a *dialectics of mourning* in "On Transience."

To take Freud purely on his own terms, however, there would appear to be a glaring conflict between the main philosophical *claims* of his essay—that transience and loss are essential constituents of human reality; that the fleeting nature of things is internal to their value for us; that the ability to mourn successfully is a precondition for achieving any kind of psychic fulfilment—and what the essay's conclusion *actually* performs: a rhetorical move against loss; a rush towards restoration; a resolute defense of the permanence of bourgeois "civilisation" and its "values," albeit a permanence that now has to be achieved through repetition. At this point, it is difficult not be reminded of Adorno's barbed comment that appears in the first part of *Minima Moralia*, written towards the end of the Second World War: "The idea that after this war life will continue 'normally' or even that culture might be 'rebuilt'—as if the rebuilding of culture were not already its

Christopher R. W. Nevinson, The Doctor, 1916. License: Public Domain.

negation—this is simply idiotic."[4]

At the end of "On Transience," Freud would thus appear to demonstrate a painful "clinging to the object," a characteristic feature of his own description of melancholia. But here we might also make a more dialectical observation. According to Giorgio Agamben, the loss that is mourned in melancholia is itself a *fantasy*, designed to make an unobtainable or nonexistent object appear *as if* lost: "If the libido behaves *as if* a loss has occurred although *nothing* has in fact been lost, this is because the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed appears as lost, and what could never be possessed because it never perhaps existed may be appropriated insofar as it is lost."[5] What we therefore encounter in the conclusion of Freud's essay is, we might say, *a spectacle of mourning for a fictional object*—a "noble" bourgeois "civilisation"—which exists only insofar as it can treated *as if* it were lost. The political reality of what Freud mourns is, however, quite different, as Rosa Luxemburg makes luminously clear in her "Junius Pamphlet," written in the same year as "On Transience":

> Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping with filth—thus stands bourgeois society. And so it is. Not as we usually see it, pretty and chaste, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, ethics and culture. It shows itself in its true, naked form—as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity.[6]

Death Drive, Extinction, Entropy

As if Freud can't prevent himself from returning to the scene of extinction, the topic makes a grand metaphysical reentrance with his "speculative" theory of the death drive in his 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."[7]

For the sake of clarity, we might begin here by recapping the key points of Freud's thesis:

(i) The course of mental events is regulated by the *pleasure principle*, which aims towards maximizing pleasure—where pleasure is defined as a diminution of excitation.

(ii) The pleasure principle and its aim of keeping the quantity of mental excitation as low and as constant as possible appears, however, to be contradicted by the tendency of individuals to compulsively repeat certain unpleasurable (or traumatic) experiences.

(iii) How, then, to account for this *repetition compulsion*, which, as Freud says, when it acts "in opposition to the pleasure principle," often has "the appearance of some *demonic force* at work"?

(iv) First, repetition stands in place of *remembering*; and what is repeated is the moment of excitation related to the original trauma. Through repetition the subject aims to "bind" the unbound surplus excitation that produced the psychic wound, transforming it from a freely flowing state into a quiescent one.

(v) Importantly, however, the trauma that drives repetition is not—or not simply—something that has been consciously lived through. Rather, it is something that lies beyond the limits of possible experience: the trace of a primordial loss, which, in Freud's speculative theory, is the interruption of an original inorganic state.

(vi) A *drive*, then, "is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier [i.e. inanimate] state of things"; it is "a kind of organic elasticity" that pulls the subject back towards the inorganic state that it once knew. In its clearest form, this hypothesis is stated as follows: " *The aim of all life is death*" because " *inanimate things existed before living ones.*"

Francis Bacon, Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, 1944. License: Public Domain.

(vii) Paradoxically, then, in the final analysis the pleasure principle and the death drive turn out to operate according to the same logic: while the former serves the purpose of "reducing tensions," aiming at a zero-level of mental excitation, the latter marks the tendency of all life to return to the zero-point of the inanimate, a state of final repose.

To the extent that the death drive in Freud's theory tends towards the absolute zero-level of inorganicity, it might be read as a metabiological extension of the second law of thermodynamics, the so-called entropy principle.

The physicist Rudolph Clausius first coined the term "entropy" in 1865. Clausius formulates the two laws of thermodynamics as follows: "The energy of the universe is constant"; and "the entropy of the universe tends to a maximum." What entropy measures is the level of *disorder* or *randomness* within a given system—that is, how much energy is "disorganized" or beyond "use." According to the second law, within any isolated system energy moves inexorably in the direction of increasing entropy.

Commenting on the second law, the character Sally (Judy Davis) in Woody Allen's film *Husbands and Wives* says: "It's the second law of thermodynamics: Sooner or later everything turns to shit." This witticism turns out to be surprisingly accurate. When an isolated system reaches a point of maximum entropy, this is a state of *thermodynamic equilibrium*. In equilibrium we arrive at the so-called heat death of the universe: a state of affairs in which all usable energy has been expended and the system dies. This state of cosmological exhaustion is brilliantly captured by the poet Byron in the opening lines of his 1816 work "Darkness," as if the poet had already discovered the second law half a century before its official scientific formulation:

> I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
> The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
> Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
> Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
> Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air …
> The world was void.[8]

The entropy thesis might thus be thought of as the law of a universal death drive, as foretelling both earthly and cosmic extinction. The second law's message of ultimate fatality no doubt goes some way towards explaining its enduring appeal for a certain strand of postwar pessimistic thought. In an extraordinary passage that appears towards the end of his 1955 memoir *Tristes Tropiques*, the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss transforms the entropy thesis into a discourse about the inevitable disintegration of human civilization:

> The world began without man and will end without him. But far from being opposed to universal decline, [man] himself appears as perhaps the most effective agent working towards the disintegration of the original order of things and hurrying on powerfully organized matter towards ever greater inertia, an inertia which one day will be final … Thus it is that civilization, taken as a whole, can be described as an extraordinarily complex mechanism, which we might

Antoine Wiertz, The Premature Burial, 1854. License: Public Domain.

> be tempted to see as offering an opportunity of survival for the human world, if its function were not to produce what physicists call entropy, that is inertia.[9]

While Lévi-Strauss's pessimistic entropology sees culture itself as necessarily death driven, Norbert Weiner, in his study *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, formulates a cognitivist version of the same hypothesis, applying the entropy law (somewhat bizarrely) to the human brain:

> We may be facing one of those limitations of nature in which highly specialised organs reach a level of declining efficiency and ultimately lead to the extinction of the species. The human brain may be as far along on its road to this destructive specialisation as the great nose horns of the last of the titanotheres.[10]

At this point, some political and historical framing is in order. Science, like philosophy, is its own time apprehended in thought. According to George Caffentzis, "Physics is not only about Nature and applied just to technology: its essential function is to provide models of capitalist work." More than just a scientific law, then, the entropy principle betrays Victorian capitalism's anxieties about its own extinction. For Caffentzis, "the second law announces the apocalypse characteristic of productivity-craving capital: heat death. Each cycle of work increases the unavailability of energy for work."[11]

It is no surprise, therefore, that thermodynamics (the study of energy, primarily in regard to heat and work) becomes *the* science after the revolutions of 1848. It is also no surprise that the first formulation of the second law emerges directly out of the study of "inefficient" capitalist machines. Observing the waste of mechanical energy in steam engines, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) concludes that (i) there is in the material world a universal tendency towards the dissipation of energy; that (ii) any restoration

of mechanical energy is impossible; and that (iii) within a finite period of time the earth will be "unfit for human habitation," thereby returning to an earlier state of thermal equilibrium.[12] This leap from engine technology to cosmology, from non-perfect machines to a non-mystical apocalypse, introduces into early modernist science a double notion of time: time conceived as the eternally repetitive process of capitalist production and accumulation; and time conceived under the mythic sign of predestination— *all life* as mere being-towards-universal-death.

Dialectics of the Death Drive

The question facing us now is how to read Freud's notion of the death *dialectically* against this background. While the second law expresses the irreversible tendency of all closed systems towards exhaustion and death, Freud speaks of the universal endeavor of all living things to return to the quiescence of the inanimate; and in this respect, as Michel Serres points out, Freud clearly "aligns himself" with the "findings" of thermodynamics.[13] But here it might be better to say, picking up a line of thought in Althusser, that Freud has to think of his discovery in " *imported concepts*"—in this case, concepts borrowed from the physics of his time, which cannot help but bear the trace of "the ideological world in which they swim."[14]

To think of the death drive in relation to the entropy principle is, however, to run up against an immediate problem: a blind spot in Freud's own thinking. This is, quite simply, that the death drive cannot help but work against itself, resisting its own goal. If, on the one hand, the death drive aims at achieving a state of equilibrium or quiescence, then, on the other hand, the drives themselves are generators of internal tensions that permanently prevent the psyche from achieving a state of absolute rest. In this respect, the death drive turns out to be a kind of " *self-defeating mechanism*," and as such an *anti-entropic* force .[15]

We can see this very clearly if we return to the so-called compulsion to repeat. According to Freud, the subject is driven to relive particular traumas in order that the psyche might "master" the experience of overwhelming pain, "bind" the surplus of excitation, and reinstate the "authority" of the pleasure principle. It is through repetition, on Freud's account, that the subject is able to bring about a reduction of psychic tensions. But the problem with this strategy is that it simply doesn't work. In fact it *exacerbates* the very disquietude which it aims to remedy. As Adrian Johnston neatly observes:

> Reliving the nightmares of traumas again and again doesn't end up gradually dissipating … the horrible, terrifying maelstrom of negative effects they arouse. Instead, the … labours of repetition … have the effect of repeatedly re-traumatising the psyche … Obviously, this strategy for coping with trauma is a failing one. And yet, the psyche gets stuck stubbornly pursuing it nonetheless.[16]

The subject's compulsion to repeat is thus always a failed attempt at recovery; and it is a failed attempt because the trauma being repeated is itself a repetition of *another trauma*. This other trauma is not the infantile trauma of birth or helplessness, but rather the fundamental negativity (the void or gap) at the core of subjectivity itself.

We can thus arrive at a first conclusion. To speak of the death drive is not to evoke some mysterious force aimed at death and destruction; it is not, as it so often figures in the popular imagination, a thrust towards war, aggression, and ecocide. Rather, the death drive is connected to the compulsion to repeat, to a condition of *stuckness*. But it is repetition—stuckness—of a specific kind: it signals those breaks and interruptions in the "normal" psychic economy where the pleasure principle fails to assert its dominance; it denotes those points of excess that mark the subject's (all-too-human) failure to arrive at a state of inertial equilibrium. In this respect, the death drive can be seen as *split*: on the one hand, its *goal* is the absolute zero of libidinal-affective quiescence; on the other hand, its *aim* is endless repetition, which, far from eliminating excitation, actively produces it. The drive thus repeats the failure to reach its own goal; and yet in so doing it also repeats the *enjoyment* which this negative-repetitive process necessarily generates.

Concisely put, then, what is death-like about the death drive is, paradoxically, its *undeadness*: its blind persistence, its inability to ever let up. The drive repeats endlessly, as a kind of acephalous force; and it does so in order to enjoy. As Lacan comments in Seminar XVII, "What necessitates repetition is *jouissance*"—jouissance is what drives repetition.[17] But here we need to be specific. First, what gets repeated, and what enjoyment sticks to, are signifiers.[18] Repetition is thus fundamentally the repetition—the *insistence*— of speech.

We get a clear example of the enjoyment of repetition in Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, in the looped repartee that takes place between the blind Master Hamm and his long-suffering domestic servant, Clov. At one point in the action, Clov states, "All life long the same questions, the same answers," to which Hamm responds, "I love the old questions … Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" When Clov later asks, "What is there to keep me here?" Hamm's reply is simple and direct: "The dialogue." What *Endgame* thus dramatizes is (among other things) the impossibility of escaping ourselves as subjects who incessantly enjoy the form of life that is speaking—a form of life, we might add, that appears to grow *more enjoyable* the more absurd and repetitious it

In 2013, Tim Cannon, "cyborg" and Grindhouse Wetware co-founder, infamously had a Circadia 1.0 implanted in his arm without professional medical assistance.

becomes. As Stanley Cavell writes (four decades before the arrival of Twitter): "We have to talk, whether we have something to say or not; and the less we want to say and hear the more wilfully we talk and are subjected to talk."[19]

The second point to make about repetition is that it is never simply a reproduction of the same; instead, it engenders difference. Repetition, as Lacan remarks, "is turned towards the ludic, which finds its dimension in [the] new," opening onto "the most radical diversity."[20] This connection between repetition, creativity, and difference leads us back to Freud; and not simply to his famous example of the *fort/da* game, but also to his point that what the subject wants is to *die in its own fashion*, to navigate its own unique path to death. This desire, we should be clear, is not an impulse to self-annihilation, but rather a desire for *singularity*: a wish to *die differently,* which is to say, a wish to *keep repeating and enjoying one's own symptom*, *in one's own way*, right up until the very end. Taken in this sense, the death drive entails a crucial ethical dimension: it is what allows the subject to free itself from the entropy that it otherwise cannot help producing; it is the very *excess of life* which makes it possible for the subject to proclaim: "I did it my way."[21]

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In what ways does the death drive become visible today, in an era of converging catastrophes? How does it express itself when the biological foundation on which capital rests has been pushed towards the brink, and when the social bond appears to have been utterly severed?

We might turn here to two examples, two specific *modalities* of the contemporary death drive. First, anti-natalism: the view that the human species is morally obligated to bring about its own extinction by refusing to procreate. The ecological variant of this position argues that voluntary human extinction is necessary in order for nature to flourish once again. And second, de-extinction: not, in this case, the resurrection of extinct species, but rather the revival of certain organs of social, historical, and political imagination.

Anti-natalism: Undialectical Pessimism

In Margaret Atwood's 1981 novel *Bodily Harm*, the protagonist, Rennie, recalls a piece of graffiti she had once seen written on a toilet wall: "Life is just another sexually transmitted social disease."[22] This sentiment perfectly encapsulates the worldview of the philosopher-detective Rustin ("Rust") Cohle, whose character appears in season one of the HBO drama *True Detective* (2014). In episode one, Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and his partner Martin ("Marty") Hart (Woody Harrelson) are driving through a desolate Louisiana landscape, trying to solve a horrific murder case, when Cohle is asked by Hart to explain his philosophical beliefs. Cohle's response, almost comic in its tragic seriousness, evokes the ghosts of Schopenhauer and Emil Cioran:

> I think human consciousness is a tragic misstep in human evolution. We became too self-aware; nature created an aspect of nature separate from itself. We are creatures that should not exist by natural law ... I think the honorable thing for our species to do is deny our programming, stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction, one last midnight, brothers and sisters, opting out of a raw deal.[23]

Cohle is here *absolutely anti-natal*: humanity should cease procreating and bring about its own extinction. But it is not only that human beings should "opt out" of the raw deal—we might say, the *ordeal*—that is life, but rather that it would be better for them not to have come into existence in the first place. The world, as Cohle says, is just "a giant gutter in outer space ... Think of the hubris it must take to yank a soul out of nonexistence into this ... meat, to force a life into this ... thresher." If one does have the misfortune of being born, then the best that can happen is a swift and early death: "The trouble with dying later is you've already grown up. The damage is done. It's too late."

This line of thinking has a rich intellectual history. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, lamenting the hero's tragic fate, Sophocles has the chorus pronounce the famous and frightening lines:

> Not to be born is best
> by far: the next-best course,
> once born, is double-quick
> return to source.[24]

This tragic Sophoclean maxim also plays a key role for Nietzsche. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche recounts the story of King Midas, who confronts the wise Silenus, companion of Dionysus, and asks him: What is the best and most desirable thing for humankind? Silenus responds with a "shrill laugh" before uttering the following words:

> Wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to be, to be *nothing*. However, the second-best thing for you is to die soon.[25]

The pronouncement of the Sophoclean chorus finds its way into Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), where it is given a particular comic twist: "Never to be born is the best thing for mortal men. 'But,' adds the philosophical comment [in *Fliegende Blätter*,] 'this happens to scarcely one person in a hundred thousand.'"[26] Freud's proto-Beckettian witticism lands nicely; the somber words of Sophocles are well met by the satirical reply.[27] But Freud himself goes on to spoil the joke. Sounding like an uptight analytical philosopher, he says that the initial proposition, the pronouncement of the chorus, is ultimately "nonsense," and that this nonsense is precisely what is illuminated by the silly punchline. As Freud explains,

> the addition is attached to the original statement as an indisputably correct limitation, and is thus able to open our eyes to the fact that this solemnly accepted piece of wisdom is itself not much better than a piece of nonsense. *Anyone who is not born is not a mortal man at all, and there is no good and no best for him*.[28]

Freud appears to completely miss the point: of course the never-existent are not in a position to proclaim that "the best" has happened to them, but this isn't what Sophocles's chorus is getting at. Rather, what its verse conveys is that coming into existence is always bad for those who suffer this fate. Consequently, although we might not be able to say of the never-existent that never existing is best for them, we *can* say—rightly or wrongly—of the existent that existence is bad for them and thus that it would have been better *never to have been born*. Understood in this way, life itself comes to be seen as a kind of tragic accident, a great ontological mistake. As Aaron Schuster neatly formulates it: "The human being is the sick animal that does not live its life but lives its failure not to be born."[29]

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As we saw in the case of Rust Cohle, the anti-natalist position attempts to provide one answer to the question of what is to be done when life is understood as a disease, as nothing but a futile squandering of organic material. No human life, according to this position, is ever worth the harm; even the most fortunate would be better off had they never existed. In any life, the quanta of pain always exceeds the quanta of pleasure, and therefore the only solution, according to the negative utilitarian logic that anti-natalism applies, is to refrain from bringing any new life into the world.[30] The goal here, then, is a controlled extinction of the human species: by desisting from procreation we would eradicate suffering and eventually arrive at Schopenhauer's vision of a "crystalline state" or lifeless world.[31] In the words of the philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe: "Know yourself—be infertile, and let the earth be silent after you."[32]

Might it be possible to understand this position as a kind of *enlightened pessimism*? Could we not say, as Horkheimer says of Schopenhauer, that anti-natalism speaks "the truth," that in renouncing optimism it sees existence *as it really is*? Our answer here should be a resolute no—although our objection will no doubt sound somewhat counterintuitive: *The problem with anti-natalism is not that its pessimism is too radical, but rather that its pessimism isn't radical enough*.

The equation of existence with universal suffering is a false totalization. While anti-natalism harps on the pains of existence—nausea, boredom, melancholia, loneliness, chronic disease, bereavement—it has nothing to say about how human misery is unequally distributed along lines of class, race, and gender; or how it might be exacerbated by such trifling matters as the relentless exploitation of labor or the continued expansion of a permanent war economy. While anti-natalism is thus relentlessly pessimistic about "life," it is eerily silent about the profit system that is responsible for specific kinds of life-making. Its ideological starting point is to present reified human relations as the *natural condition*: life *just is* a business that does not cover its costs.

But the problems with anti-natalism go further still. In addition to its apolitical pathology, it is also blind to the dialectics of human desire. According to the anti-natalist, the human subject is incapable of attaining any real and lasting pleasure or happiness, and this makes life an ultimately worthless enterprise. But the thing about pleasure and happiness is that they are rarely what they seem. In Beckett's *Endgame*, for example, Hamm (a kind of anti-natalist figure himself) opens with the line: "Me to play ... Can there be misery loftier than mine?" This is a wonderfully ambiguous formulation: on the one hand, Hamm is asking whether it's possible for anyone to suffer as much as him; on the other hand, he is announcing the absolute superiority of his own suffering—a superiority which he clearly *enjoys*.

Proving that the human subject always has an eccentric relationship with its own jouissance, Hamm spends most of the play engaged in a discourse of despair ("I'll tell you the combination of the larder if you promise to finish me off"), only to find that his unhappiness is precisely the source of his enjoyment. Unhappiness, we might say, always has a hole in it; and it is through this hole that happiness and enjoyment emerge as a kind of libidinal leakage or affective ooze.

This is precisely what anti-natalism cannot grasp, or perhaps does not want to know. It does not see that pessimism is the fixed point around which its own enjoyment circulates. This brings us back to the death drive, to the excess of life, what is in life more than life itself. What singularizes the anti-natalist, what provides them with a specific way of going on, *just is* the view that the best is not to be born and that our ethical purpose now is to bring about the extinction of the species by refusing to procreate. This is a life that sets itself against life, that carries death at its very core; but it is *a life*, nevertheless. If, strictly speaking, the anti-natalist should seek to return to source as quickly as possible, then why, we might ask, do they carry on living? Is it not because the surplus satisfaction found in their own bleak worldview is itself a precious treasure that they wish to protect at all costs?

Ecological Anti-natalism: A False Exit from Catastrophe

If pessimistic abolitionism—the variety of anti-natalism we have just been discussing—sees existence as bad primarily for the person who exists, then ecological anti-natalism views human existence as *bad for nature*. At the beginning of Nina Paley's 2002 short film *Thank You For Not Breeding*, Les U. Knight, founder of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (VHEMT), argues that the recovery of the earth's biosphere depends upon the human species being allowed to die out. In the same film, Reverend Chris Korda, leader of the Church of Euthanasia, says that "we are treating the earth like a cigar, we are smoking it ... and at some point there is going to be nothing left but ash." The Church has one commandment, "Thou Shall not Procreate," and it promotes four "pillars": suicide, abortion, sodomy (defined as any nonreproductive sexual act), and cannibalism (for those who insist on eating meat). The main slogan employed by the Church is: Save the Planet, Kill Yourself.[33]

This kind of death activism finds its most systematic articulation in Patricia MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto* (2020). According to MacCormack, "the death of the human is a necessity for all life to flourish." As the world groans "under the weight of the parasitic pestilence of human life," human extinction presents itself not only as a logical solution, but also as an ethical one:

> The death of the human species is the most life-affirming event that could liberate the natural world from oppression … Our death would be an act of affirmative ethics which would far exceed any localised acts of compassion because those acts would be bound by human contracts, social laws and the prevalent status of beings.

Bringing about the end of the "anthropocentric world" through self-extinction, refusing notions of futurity grounded on the idea of the "special child," is, for MacCormack, "a form of secular ecstasy": it "opens up the void that is a voluminous everything and wants for nothing."[34]

this dark Spinozian ecological anti-natalism with Lee Edelman's polemical *No Future* thesis published in 2004. For Edelman, contemporary social relations are organized by the imperatives of "reproductive futurism," in which the image of the child serves as the "horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention." The child, he argues, "has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust." What would it mean, then, to refuse the child "as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value"? How might one say no to "the fascism of the baby's face"?[35] Edelman suggests an anti-natal, antisocial, future-negating *queerness*: one involving an unconditional fidelity to jouissance and the death drive.[36]

Edelman's ostensibly radical theory is, however,

A mummy from Guanajuato. License: Public Domain.

There is an interesting unity-in-difference that connects

problematic in at least two respects. First, playing fast and

loose with Lacan's ideas, Edelman conceives of the death drive as *pure negativity*: a negativity which opposes "every form of social viability" and undoes *all ideas of the future*. If such a reading is crudely undialectical—blind to the death drive's generative potential—then this theoretical misstep also has political consequences. For if the death drive, embodied in Edelman's figure of the "sinthomosexual," really does take delight in exclaiming "fuck off" in the face of the future,[37] then this begins to sound like rather strange polemics at a moment when the human species has, in Thom van Dooren's phrase, arrived at "the edge of extinction." This situation already produces a new temporal landscape beyond the fantasy of reproductive futurism, one characterized by what van Dooren calls "a slow unravelling of intimately entangled ways of life that begins long before the death of the last individual and continues to ripple forward long afterward, drawing in living beings in a range of different ways."[38] No future indeed.

Edelman's articulation of queer negativity bears a curious resemblance to Marx's famous description of capitalism in the 1848 *Manifesto*: "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty … All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away … All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned."[39] This leads us directly to the second problem with Edelman's polemic. For him, liberation from futurism consists in voiding "every notion of the general good," refusing "any backdoor hope for dialectical access to meaning," and relinquishing the cruel optimism that attaches to all political projects.[40] It is precisely here, then, that a further connection to ecological anti-natalism becomes clear. Neither position can think how things might be *beyond* the future as mere *replication of the present*; both positions, in their different ways, have absorbed (and been absorbed by) the infamous neoliberal slogan: "There is no alternative." Symptoms of the revival of the "end of history" narrative, and lacking any political proposal beyond pitting a minoritarian vanguard against the mass of normie "breeders," both philosophies thus offer only a *nihilistic negativity*: a negativity that ultimately mirrors the auto-destructiveness of capitalism itself.

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It might be said that only those who have a future in the first place have the luxury of flirting with the idea of rejecting it. Those reduced to *nothing* by the profit system are highly unlikely to desire the liquidation of the future or indeed the wholesale extinction of the human species—although they might well be up for killing their boss and stealing his car. While queer negativity and ecological anti-natalism might remind us of the emptiness of the bourgeois dictum that "life is good, in spite of all," they nevertheless leave us politically short-changed: locking us in to a dull presentism in which the possibility of alternative collective futures remains eternally repressed.

Returning specifically to ecological anti-natalism, we might ask, in a final cranking of the philosophical gears, what *actually* grounds the desire for human auto-extinction? What ideas motivate the wish for this particular kind of radical sacrifice? The first thing to say here is that the ecological anti-natalist appears to be suffering from the specific Western pathology that is *species shame*, linked, in this specific case, to the hypothesized advent of a new geological epoch wherein the effects of "human civilization" are said to have completely altered the planet's ecosystems. Thus understood, voluntary human extinction is a response to the arrival of the so-called Anthropocene, a kind of necessary self-punishment for what is perceived to be exploitative, eco-phobic humanity, the destructive *anthropos*.

But here we might give this reading something of a twist, tilting it back in the direction of the death drive. As Adorno comments in one of his late lectures on metaphysics: "The terror of death today is largely the terror of seeing how much the living resemble it." He continues: "There has been a change in the rock strata of experience … Death no longer accords with the life of any individual … There is no longer an epic or a biblical death … The reconciliation of life, as something rounded and closed in itself, with death, is no longer possible today."[41] Against this background, might we not say ecological anti-natalism is not—or not simply—concerned with liberating nonhuman nature, but rather with pursuing a *literal* attempt to *die differently*, to *die heroically*, to die as if *the sickness has been worth living through after all*? If, as Adorno puts it, "the individual today no longer exists and death is thus the annihilation of nothing," might not human auto-extinction be a desire to *die again, to die better*, as Alenka Zupančič puts it in a wonderful paraphrase of Beckett?[42]

The paradox here, of course, is that the anti-natalist turns out to be acting just as affirmatively as any other worldly human subject—perhaps even more so. The affirmation of species annihilation is just as "heroic" as any form of tech-utopianism that claims that it, too, can solve all of nature's problems

There is, finally, something rather comic about all of this. For what all the talk of death and self-extinction overlooks is the fact that we are, in one sense, yet to be *fully born*: still living in prehistory, as Marx famously puts it. As Adorno comments in his 1962 lecture "Progress": "We cannot assume that humanity already exists … Progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place, *whose prospect opens up only in the face of its own extinction*."[43]

The realization of this prospect involves a particular kind of de-extinction: a revival of the organs of historical and social imagination, and a shift into the zone of politics proper. Such a shift hinges upon the recognition that only the negation of *this world*—a world of serial and

interconnected catastrophes—ends the prospect of the end of *the world*—understood here not as a sudden death, but rather as an incremental decay, the slow unravelling of intimately entangled forms of life. As Ernst Bloch points out: "The true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical."[44] To terminate the threat of the end (as the biological end of all things) will therefore mean beginning again at the end (of prehistory): abolishing a mode of political and economic life which seeks to tether us all—the yet to be born—to a sick but undying present.

X

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1
Sigmund Freud, "On Transience," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* , vol. 14, ed. and trans. James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1957), 305. Emphasis in original.

2
Freud, "On Transience," 305.

3
Freud, "On Transience," 306.

4
Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (Verso, 2005), 55. Translation slightly modified.

5
Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Words and Phantasm in Western Culture* , trans. Robert L. Martinez (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20. Emphasis in original.

6
Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet, Pt. 1: The Crisis in German Social Democracy," in *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* , ed. Dick Howard (Monthly Review Press, 1971), 324.

7
Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *Standard Edition* , vol. 18 (Hogarth Press, 1955).

8
Lord Byron, *Poetical Works* (Oxford University Press, 1945), 95.

9
Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Penguin, 2011), 413.

10
Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* (MIT Press, 2013), 154.

11
George Caffentzis, *Letters of Fire and Blood: Work, Machines, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (PM Press, 2013), 13, 14, 12.

12
William Thomson, "On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy" (1852), cited in Crosbie Smith and M. Norbert Wise, *Energy and Empire: A Biographical Study of Lord Kelvin* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 499–500.

13
Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 72.

14
Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (Verso, 2008), 149. Emphasis in original.

15
Adrian Johnston, *Time Drive: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Northwestern University Press, 2005), 183. Emphasis in original.

16
Adrian Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan and Negativity Materialized," in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic* , ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (Columbia University Press, 2011), 160.

17
Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Book XVII)* , ed. Ja cques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (Norton, 2007), 45.

18
For Lacan, the signifier is the basic unit of language. When Lacan speaks of signifiers he is usually referring simply to "words," although the two terms are not, strictly speaking, equivalent. For a useful definition, see the entry "Signifier (*significant*)" in Dylan Evans, *A Dic tionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1996), 186–87.

19
Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge University press, 1976), 161.

20
Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* , ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (Routledge, 2018), 61.

21
See Eric Santner, who here draws deliberately on the lyrics of the song made famous by Frank Sinatra, and, we should add, The Sex Pistols. Santner, *Untying Things Together: Philosophy, Literature, and a Life in Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 194.

22
Margaret Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (Emblem, 2010), 181.

23
The ideas put forward in Cohle's speech also have clear connections with ideas found in Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*

(Penguin, 2018).

24
Sophocles, *Four Tragedies*, trans. Oliver Taplin (Oxford University Press, 2015), 272.

25
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* , trans. Ronald Spiers (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23. Emphasis in original.

26
Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 8 (Hogarth Press, 1960), 57.

27
See Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 87.

28
Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 8, 57. Emphasis in original.

29
Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis* (MIT Press, 2016), 15.

30
This is, in essence, the argument of David Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). For an overview of anti-natalist arguments, see Ken Coats, *Anti-Natalism: Rejectionist Philosophy from Buddhism to Benatar* (Design Publishing, 2014).

31
Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism* , trans. T. Bailey Saunders (Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), 14.

32
Peter Wessel Zapffe, "The Last Messiah," *Philosophy Now*, no. 45 (March–April 2004). Translation slightly amended.

33
"A Brief History of the Church of Euthanasia," churchofeuthanasia.org https://www.churchofeuthanasia.org/history.html .

34
Patricia MacCormack, *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the Age of the Anthropocene* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 140, 162, 141, 10, 9.

35
Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004), 2, 3, 11, 4, 75.

36
The figure who embodies this radical negativity is the "sinthomosexual," a neologism which Edelman adapts from Lacan's notion of the *sinthome*, the unanalysable kernel of the subject which binds together the three registers of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic.

37
Edelman, *No Future*, 29. It is perhaps not insignificant to note that Edelman's hostility is, at times, explicitly directly at working-class female children: "Fuck Annie, fuck the waif in *Les Mis* " (29).

38
Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 12.

39
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), 223.

40
Edelman, *No Future*, 6.

41
Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems* , trans. Edmund Jephcott (Polity Press, 2001), 136.

42
Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 136; Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (MIT Press, 2017), 106.

43
Theodor Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 144. Emphasis in original.

44
Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx* (Verso, 2018), 44.