Editors
Editorial

In Djibril Diop Mambéty's 1992 dark comedy *Hyènes*, an extravagantly wealthy woman returns to her poor village seeking revenge. Her target is the man who humiliated her in her youth by getting her pregnant and abandoning her. It is not only death that she wants, but also justice. She will not murder the man by her own hand, as Charles Tonderai Mudede explains in this issue, but instead asks the village to mete out capital punishment, to murder him for his wrongdoing. In exchange, she will make the town wealthy. As the village reflects upon its principles, the people of the village begin buying things on credit. The wealthy woman will have her way not through the mechanism of justice, but through the mechanism of debt. If the film appears bleak for its conflation of money and justice, it is also a comedy about dividing them in the first place.

The paradoxical phrase "The King is dead, long live The King" originates in medieval Europe, where two divided bodies of the ruler reigned. One was eternal, embodying the principles and responsibilities of the role of ruler, and the other mortal—the human figure inhabiting the role. For Natasha Ginwala, there is a third body in this scheme, and it goes by the name corruption. Corruption is also a passageway between the responsibilities of the sovereign and the corporeal desires of human beings who come into contact with power. It sees an entire world inside the pious division and it goes to work at extracting a benefit from all that passes through this opening, undermining the sanctity of authority as well as the people who are subject to it. It is through this third body of the king that the informal sector or "back room" transforms from a dumping ground of undesirable elements and exchanges into an integral part of a society's basic structure.

In both physics and information theory, the term entropy describes a quantity of heat and energy loss that cannot be converted into mechanical work. For Ana Teixeira Pinto, the second law of thermodynamics is also a social idea that describes the waste or dissipation of labor integral to the supposed equilibrium of any thermodynamic system. As a social idea, entropy directs the poor or unemployed to perform those necessary tasks that do not reflect the ordering principles of society, but are nonetheless crucial to its functioning. In information theory, entropy denotes the element of noise in any signal, or chaos in any orderly system. If allowed to overtake the system, these elements would lead to catastrophe or death. Were they to be eliminated completely, the system would also die. Thermodynamic equilibrium is maintained by managing the constant presence of death within life and waste within work. This holds true for information ecologies, markets, and national bodies alike.

Thirty years ago, the "Neue Slowenische Kunst" (NSK) collective formed in Yugoslavia and gained a reputation for appropriating constructivist avant-garde signs and repressed Nazi and totalitarian iconography into their own form of hypermodernist Slovene national art. At its three decade anniversary, Boris Groys considers how the

collective's often hilarious mix of highly charged official and subversive ideological signs in Yugoslavia not only precisely targeted the contradictions of the official ideology at the time, but also advocated a universalist message within communism, as well as within and in spite of the era of modernity. Interestingly, for Groys, the universal message of their avant-garde ultra-nationalism at the end of the communist era extended almost seamlessly into the period of global capitalism with the formation of the NSK State, a passport-issuing entity "in time" with citizens but without a territory—a universal state.

The enormous challenge to universalist thinking today is often attributed to its capture by globalization's market ideology, where the planetary or human scale is only accessible by way of free flowing heteronymous signs. For Reza Negarestani, philosophy can break this stranglehold of heteronymy through its programmatic and functionalist deployment of thought and thinking as an already autonomous enterprise. By establishing and structuring realizable commitments towards their own ends and demands, philosophy still has the capacity to release a full-blown project of emancipation via the extreme rationality of thought's computability and capacity for abstraction. For Negarestani, thought itself is an ancient artificial intelligence whose resilience stems from its artificial capacity to reinvent itself.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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Julieta Aranda is an artist and an editor of *e-flux journal.*

Brian Kuan Wood is an editor of *e-flux journal.*

Anton Vidokle is an editor of e-flux journal and chief curator of the 14th Shanghai Biennale: Cosmos Cinema.

Ana Teixeira Pinto

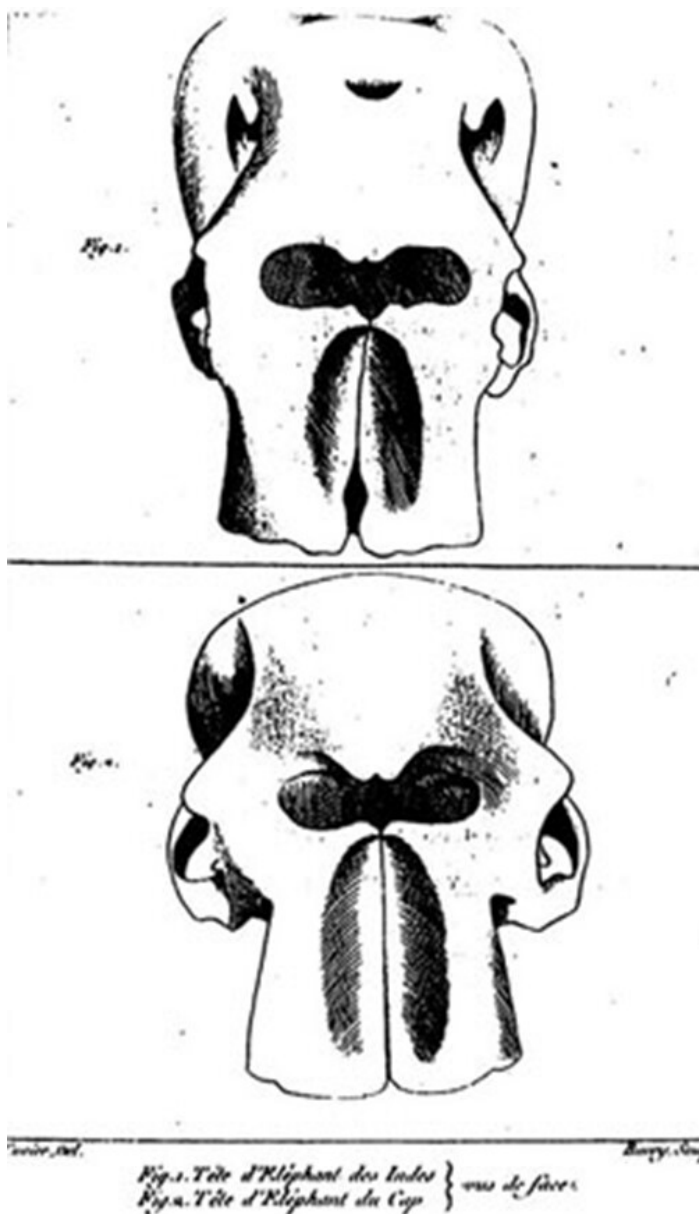# Death Wall: Extinction, Entropy, Singularity

In 1796, upon observing a vast array of elephant fossils, paleontologist George Cuvier noticed a puzzling fact: the fossilized mammoths of Europe and Siberia were different from living elephant species. None of the specimens in his collection corresponded to present-day African or Indian exemplars; they were all remains of fauna now extinct. At length, it dawned on him that another world might have preceded our own, a world whose existence had suddenly come to a halt, possibly "destroyed by some kind of catastrophe."[1] From that moment onwards Cuvier became an advocate of catastrophism, the geological school which claims that life has been subjected to sudden, yet periodic, violent natural events with fatal fallouts.

Inspired by Cuvier's conjectures, Jean-Baptiste Xavier Cousin de Grainville introduced the trope of the last survivor on a dying Earth in what came to be called the "disaster genre," in his novel *Le Dernier Homme* (The Last Man, 1805). The book describes a future in which overpopulation has outstripped the planet's resources: on a ravaged and largely sterile planet mankind becomes unable to procreate. The last child to be born in Europe is urged to mate with the last fertile woman alive, yet God advises him otherwise. The story ends with the demise of humanity whilst the graves of the dead begin to open.

Le Dernier Homme is the first literary example of what we now know as a Malthusian catastrophe. Named after the English economist Thomas Malthus, who stated that the dangers of unabated demographic growth would preclude endless progress, a Malthusian catastrophe is any form of environmental collapse due to overconsumption.

Malthus introduced the principle of perpetual struggle, taking the form of competition for resources, into social exchange theory. His *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) also caught the attention of Charles Darwin, who extrapolated Malthus's ever-present struggle for survival to an evolutionary schema. Members of the same species would compete for survival, the ill-adapted would die out, whilst the ones with a genetic edge would prosper. The political economist was instrumental for Darwin's take on evolution, namely in the formulation of the two main principles the theory implies: a principle of fecundity, which leads to overabundant natality, and a principle of selection, which in effect culls the undesirable.[2]

Malthus was not in favor of social engineering. He saw natural competition as a divine incentive, inspiring men to be industrious, and he famously argued that "positive checks"—a euphemism for premature deaths—were needed to avert exponential growth, and that these checks were provided by hunger, disease, and war. Fittingly, he was among the first to espouse a punitive approach to poverty: he opposed the "poor laws"—a system of poor relief which anticipated the modern welfare state—on the grounds that they would allow the destitute to multiply beyond their means and place an undue burden on the state; and he and his followers defended the idea that

the notion of a linear temporality into the natural sciences.

In the nineteenth century, nature, "traditionally seen as cyclic or timeless, became increasingly temporal, or progressive," represented either as an upward motion (progress) or as a downward spiral (decay). It was this linear representation of time that "became synonymous with history."[4]

The future is a function of linear time. As Susan Buck-Morss notes, within history, time signifies social change and the uniqueness and irreversibility of political events. Nature is, in this sense, the opposite of history, for within nature, time signifies only cyclical repetition. Can nature have a history? From an evolutionary perspective, nature becomes history: a panorama of progress in which the passage of time is represented as an improvement. Yet nature and history are hard to fuse into a harmonizing whole. Within nature, the potential for extinction and oblivion remains in dialectical tension with the possibility of renewal and creation.[5] The notion of history, on the other hand, implies an arrow of time, a unidirectional movement which can only lead to one of two outcomes: harmony or tragedy. Either social change will lead to a state of perpetual equilibrium, or collapse will ensue.

Elephant skulls from Sri Lanka (top), south of the Indian mainland, and South Africa (bottom), engraved from Cuvier's drawings, were published in 1799.

A mother and her children work at assembling match-boxes at home, c. 1900.

workers wages could never exceed the cost of subsistence long-term. Though Darwin did not assign moral value to evolution, Herbert Spencer, who popularized social Darwinism and coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," also considered the division of labor in the political economy to be "the social analog of physiological divergence and speciation in biology."[3]

Unlike Darwin, Cuvier did not believe species could evolve. For him, organisms were integrated wholes whose parts couldn't be selectively modified–he spoke only of extinction and creation. However, having established extinction as a scientific fact, he unwittingly introduced

Communism is an answer to the problem of equilibrium: the communist society to come entails a return to the primitive communism of the distant past, coupled with a much higher stage of technological development; but so is Adam Smith's description of free-market interaction as a horizontal, self-regulating order in which supply and demand reach equilibrium at the "natural price," and Fukuyama's notion of the "end of history" in which an iterative liberal economy appears as the final form of human government. All of the above lead to an exit from

the turmoil of the historical process. But the stationary state achieved by the natural price (the price for a good or service that is equivalent to the cost of production) was closely linked to what became known as a Malthusian equilibrium—a stationary state "maintained by the opposing forces of reproduction and starvation"[6]–just as Adam Smith's twin blades of "supply" and "demand" are the economic analog for Darwin's concepts of "fecundity" and "selection," and for the dual principles of "work" and "waste" in William Thomson's formulation of the second law of thermodynamics, concerning the dissipation of energy, i.e., entropy.

In Newtonian physics all mechanical forces are time-reversible. At the molecular level, there is no preferred direction in time, and in classical dynamics, motion is "the sole parameter of change."[7] The first law of thermodynamics states that within a closed system the sum of energy is conserved throughout its transformations; the sum of energy in the universe is thus constant. The first law–the law of energy conservation–marks the continuity between classical mechanics and thermodynamics.[8]
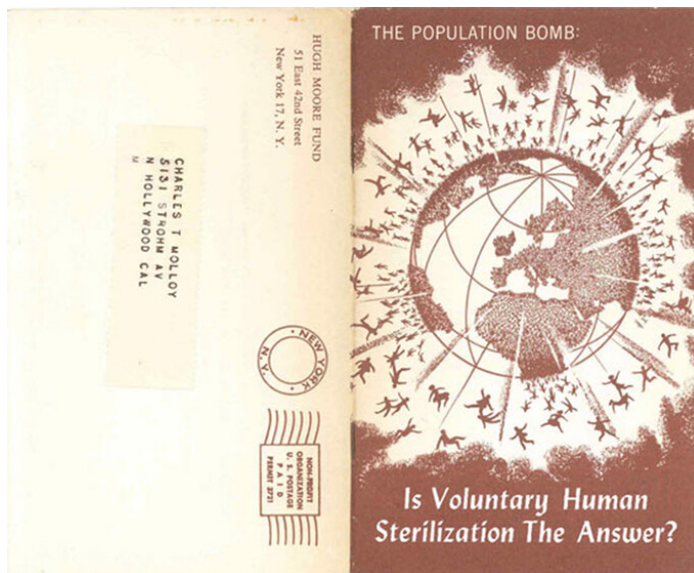
A pamphlet published by the Hugh Moore Foundation promoted urgent action on "the population problem."

The second law of thermodynamics, however, introduces an irreversible time-arrow into physics, just as evolution had done for biology.

While studying the cycle of a steam engine's operation, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) came to the conclusion that whereas work may be completely converted into heat, the reverse does not hold true: in the process of harvesting heat back onto the production cycle, there is always a remainder, some percentage which remains as

heat, and is thus lost for industry. This observation led Thomson to conclude that there was a universal tendency for mechanical energy to dissipate, which he saw as an irreversible process leading to an inevitable "increment of inefficiency."[9]

This was a seemingly trivial conclusion, concerning a practical–engineering–problem about the optimization of the production process. Thomson, however, extrapolated his findings to a universal process entailing the dramatic conclusion that the universe would inexorably meet its end in what Hermann Helmholtz came to call a "heat death":

> 1. There is at present in the material world a universal tendency to the dissipation of mechanical energy.
>
> 2. Any restoration of mechanical energy, without more than an equivalent of dissipation, is impossible in inanimate material processes, and is probably never effected by means of organized matter, either endowed with vegetable life or subject to the will of an animated creature.
>
> 3. *Within a finite period of time past, the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at present constituted,* unless operations have been, or are to be performed, which are impossible under the laws to which the known operations going on at present in the material world are subject.[10]

The term "entropy" was introduced in 1865 by Rudolf Clausius, who had noticed that a certain ratio was constant in reversible heat cycles–the ratio of heat exchanged to absolute temperature–which he thought must correspond to a real, physical quantity. He termed this quantity "entropy." In thermodynamics, entropy provides a measure of the energy unavailable for work: entropy is a negative kind of quantity, the opposite of available energy.

In the physical sciences entropy is the only movement that seems to imply a particular direction, something like an arrow of time. As energy is more easily lost than obtained, all isolated systems will eventually deteriorate and start to break apart: in a closed system, available energy can never increase. According to the second law of thermodynamics—the law concerning the dissipation of mechanical energy–the entropy of the universe tends to a maximum. In the scientific description of physics, this is when the universe reaches thermodynamic equilibrium. In other words: in a energy-depleted universe, unfit for the habitation of man as at present constituted, "the stable state of a living organism is to be dead."[11]

To quote Bruce Clarke, "energy had no sooner been delivered to the world of science as a primary physical concept on a par with matter than it was shadowed by its evil twin entropy, the demonic underside of energy's divine potency."[12] While railroads and steamships carried the promise of unlimited economic expansion, this seemingly unbridled industrial development went hand in hand with deteriorating social conditions for the urban masses, marked by poverty, malnutrition, delinquency, and disease. Although William Thomson did not develop the analogy between the degraded state of the laboring poor and the deterioration of energy under the actions of a mechanical engine, the second law of thermodynamics is an apt social metaphor: "Production of work rides on the back of wasting the sources of work, the workers."[13]

The Aitik open pit mine, currently 430 meters deep, is located about 60 km north of the Arctic Circle in Northern Sweden.

Consensus is an inherent feature in scientific discourse; it naturally derives from the intersubjective experience forged by scientific objectivism. But one could also say that what appears as scientific objectivity is always made of finely congealed subjectivity. Entropy, the key concept of the second law, is an empirical description––not every conserved ratio corresponds to a real, physical quantity, and to be clear, " *no* known formulation [of entropy] applies to *all* possible thermodynamic regimes."[14] Conjectures about catastrophic extinction betray an anxiety about the life cycle of industrial products and the boom-and-bust structure of budding financial markets. Whereas energy functions as an analog for the commodity, entropy could be construed as the obverse of the market economy: value is lost, not gained, throughout the sum total of its transactions.[15]

As Eugene McCarraher notes, capitalism is an eschatological tale as well as a form of political economy, offering its own story of human fulfillment. For capitalist eschatology, salvation implies inclusion in a worldwide

marketplace.[16] Below the threshold of consciousness, however, darker visions are at play. The extraction of labor from the swelling ranks of the proletariat is predicated on the production of a surplus workforce (unemployed and underemployed). Simply put, just as there is a certain percentage of heat that cannot be redeemed back to production, there is a certain percentage of the population that cannot be redeemed back to the social. The accumulation of such a remainder–a festering underclass, or the so-called "social problem"–would threaten to, at any moment, burst into an orgy of violence able to engulf the whole of society. The triangulation of energy, capital, and catastrophe in Victorian science, together with the "heat death" of the universe and other fantasies of thermodynamic apocalypse, distort and displace the harsh realities of material history, ultimately functioning as an engine for metaphorical substitution which masks fears of social instability, degeneracy, and upheaval.

The distinction between linear and cyclic time which Victorian science introduced into biology (evolution) and thermodynamics (entropy) was itself predicated on the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Productive labor was labor invested in industry, whose end result was a product or commodity. Unproductive labor was labor which did not generate a product, typically domestic labor.[17] Only productive labor was remunerated, while unproductive labor was simply appropriated, pointing to a hidden gender dimension which presided over the organization of social roles. Progress made by improving the means of production masks a state of stasis or decline at the level of the relations of production. But it is harder to conceive of these disjunctive motions than to reduce the whole of the social to the simple formulaic clarity of an integrated temporality.

In the 1940s, entropy was grafted onto information theory, after the physicist Erwin Schrödinger reconceptualized it as a measure of disorder. Thomson's twin blades of "work" and "waste" reappear as "signal" and "noise," while information—heretofore a concept with a vague meaning—was recast as the negation of entropy (negentropy). As biological and computational systems were treated as informationally equivalent, organisms came to be described as thermodynamic systems that extract "orderliness" from their environment in order to counteract increasing entropy. But this reasoning entailed a curious conclusion: the fundamental divide between living and nonliving is not to be found between organisms and mechanisms, but between order and chaos. As Norbert Wiener would put it, entropy is "nature's tendency to degrade the organized and destroy the meaningful"[18]; the negation of order is the negation of life. Echoing fears of communist contagion and the urge to halt the Red Tide, Wiener would later describe a chaotic, deteriorating universe in which small enclaves of orderly life, increasingly under siege, fight against all odds to preserve order and increase organization.[19]

Whereas thermodynamic entropy is typically measured in

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This image from Dr. Cyclops (1940), a science fiction film starring Janice Logan, was appropriated for anti-communist propaganda c. 1953. The added caption read: "If Russia and the Communists should win the next world war, many American men would be sterilized. In case the Communists should conquer, our women would be helpless beneath the boots of the Asiatic Russians."

joules, to measure informational entropy an arbitrary convention must be imposed, of which no unit of measure was ever specified.[20] When Claude Shannon's "Mathematical Theory of Communication" was translated into Russian and French, the editors, seeking to maintain "communications engineering as an ideologically neutral technical field," poured over his writings to purge the text of all "anthropomorphic" terminology, such as the controversial usage of the term "entropy."[21] The continuity between thermodynamic entropy and information as the negation of entropy in information theory is simply a matter of analogy–a "purely superficial similarity of mathematical formulae."[22] Metaphorical flights notwithstanding, by suggesting that "everything in the universe can be modelled into a system of information," cybernetics and information theory entailed a "powerful metaphysics, whose essence ... always remained elusive."[23]

The time-honored answer to the question concerning existence and the human condition is that humanity, born into an indifferent world, always creates a vast array of aspirational endeavors with the aim of surpassing its base condition. Hegel presupposed the successive dissolution of aesthetic forms into the higher form of History, the absolute limit, which signals the moment when reason finds its completion and Mind and Matter are fused into a harmonizing whole. Once nature disappears everything becomes a human sign: that's what we call the Anthropocene or the technosphere. But whereas Hegel believed that the labor of reason transformed nature into man's manifest image (i.e. into culture), in the Anthropocene material culture appears as a negative totality–according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, a "negative universal" that "arises from a shared sense of a catastrophe."[24]

As Susan Buck-Morss noted while commenting on Walter Benjamin, "when temporality is conceived under the mythic sign of predetermination, people are convinced that the present course of events cannot be resisted."[25] The theories that have emerged in recent years—most notably speculative realism and object-oriented ontology—do not have an adequate grasp on the social. By limiting its scope of inquiry to questions of ontology and whether or not we can have access to the external world, these new strains of philosophical realism have ceased to think about social categories, electing as sole concerns questions of survival and extinction.[26]

The diffuse world which emerges out of the conflation of globally consolidated financial vectors with the opacity of cyber-surveillance, underground economies, supranational cartels, corporate conglomerates, and clandestine insurgency is sublated into an evolutionary (or devolutionary) schema, whose future emerges simply as either ecological catastrophe or technological singularity. Whereas the former is, roughly put, the actualization of a Malthusian catastrophe on a planetary scale, for the latter carbon-based life will soon become altogether obsolete.

A term originally used by John van Neumann, later popularized by Vernor Vinge in the 1990s, the notion of a coming technological singularity posits that there is no necessary identity between mankind and Mind (also known as Reason or Spirit but more accurately defined as the processing of formal symbols and logical inferences), just a temporary correlation, soon to be overhauled by a qualitative leap in technological development.

The sources of the theory can be traced back to the 1950s. Equating the ontology of Mind with the functionality of programming, cognitivism (an offshoot of cybernetics) began to describe mental functions as information processing models, operating under the assumption that the brain is analogous to computer hardware and that the mind is analogous to computer software. Molecular and evolutionary biology also treat genetic information as an essential code, the body being but its carrier, while science fiction brims with fantasies of personal

Steven Spielberg's A.I. Artificial Intelligence (2001) is based on Brian Aldiss's short story "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long."

immortality as informational code. But the logical corollary of the idea that brain functions can be decoupled from the brain is the belief that it is only a matter of time until Mind sheds its human surrogate and embraces the higher evolutionary promise of AI.

Endowing technological forms with a similar but higher form of consciousness to that found in individual men, the coming singularity represents the ultimate subsumption of the historical onto the logical. But whilst reason labors to convert noise into signal, humans irretrievably fall on the side of waste. In short: humanity will soon cease to be the optimal vehicle for Mind's comprehension of its own essence. For singularity theorists, the universal subject of capitalism is the machine; and technology, not class struggle, is the motor of history.

But the question concerning technology cannot be answered by technology: socioeconomic conditions always determine the forms and functions technology undertakes, which potential usages are developed and which fall through the crevices of history. The algorithmic architectures of deep learning are geared towards commercially trivial purposes, and within an economy no longer predicated on production, capital accumulation has emancipated itself from technological development. Likewise, the machine that operates the distinction between science and non-science is not a scientific construction, it's a institutional one.

Subjectivity without political history is just fantasy. Visions of machinic becoming, as well as phantasms of ecological panic and apotheotic extinction, dabble in–to paraphrase Fredric Jameson—the "thematization of the reified features of a much more complicated social totality."[27] Rather than seeing social systems as open to restructuring and reconstruction, apocalyptical strains of thinking always seem to presuppose "some structural permanence to capitalism," its "identity threatened only by extrinsic factors."[28]

Capitalism will not fold, all at once. There is, however, an uncanny continuity between Malthus's insistence on having workers earn less than a living wage and the Chicago school's policies, be it through the implementation of "sacrifice zones" or allowing just enough unemployment in the economy to prevent inflation from rising above a given target figure (NAIRU).[29] The notion of an oblivious universe where life is born into extinction is its allegorical correlate, a social anxiety elevated into a theory. Because we can hardly afford to live, we imagine that life itself will wither. Rather more difficult is to conceptualize a radically different mode of production, and how to represent the sociopolitical transition required to take us there.

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Ana Teixeira Pinto is a writer from Lisbon currently living in Berlin. She is currently a lecturer at the UdK (Universität der Kunste) Berlin and her writings have appeared in publications such as *e-flux journal,* Art-Agenda, Mousse, Frieze/de, Domus, Inaesthetics, Manifesta Journal, and *Texte zur Kunst.*

1
From a 1796 paper by Georges
Cuvier on living and fossil
elephants, presented before the
National Institute of Sciences and
Arts in Paris.

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Energy to Information:
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ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda
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3
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4
Ibid., 41.

5
Susan Buck-Morss, *The
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MA: MIT Press, 1999), 58.

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and Culture," 45.

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Thermodynamics to Virtuality," in
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William Thomson, "On a Universal
Tendency in Nature to the
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David Mindell, Jérôme Segal, and
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Union," in *Science and Ideology:
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22
In the words of Shannon's
Russian editor, quoted in ibid.

23
Ibid.

24
Daniel Hartley, "Against the
Anthropocene," quoted in http://s
alvage.zone/in-print/against-the-
anthropocene/ .

25
Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of
Seeing* , 79.

26
In his recent book *Nihil Unbound*,
Ray Brassier states that
extinction is the inexorable fate of
existence: "The earth will be
incinerated by the sun 4 billion
years hence; all the stars in the
universe will stop shining in 100
trillion years; and eventually, one
trillion, trillion, trillion years from
now, all matter in the cosmos will
disintegrate."

27
Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics
of Singularity," *New Left Review*
92 (March–April 2015).

28
Ibid.

29
"Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate
of Unemployment," that is, the
level of unemployment below
which inflation rises.

One of comedian George Carlin's (1937–2008) seminal monologues was his 1986 riff on *stuff*: "That's all the meaning of life is: trying to find a place to put your stuff. That's all your house is, is a pile of stuff with a cover on it." And to paraphrase: "Someone else's stuff is actually shit, whereas your own shit isn't shit at all, it's *stuff*." I'm made aware of this every time family members visit my house and see the art I collect. I see those very words etched onto their retinas, and I can imagine the conversations they're having in the car driving away: "Do you think maybe all that art stuff he collects is a cry for help?"

Duane Hanson, Supermarket Lady, 1969–70.

Douglas Coupland

Stuffed: How Hoarding and Collecting Is the Stuff of Life and Death

"That art stuff of his? It's not stuff; it's shit."

"But it's *art* shit. I think it might be worth something. It's the art world. They have no rules. They can turn a piece of air into a million dollars if they want to."

"So, maybe it's not shit after all."

"Nah. Let's not get too cosmic. It's shit. Art shit."

Ahhh, families.

* * *

In April I wrote about links between hoarding and collecting in the *FT Weekend* magazine. The piece recoded art collecting and art fair behavior as possibly being subdued forms of hoarding. Basically: Where does collecting end and hoarding begin? One thing the piece

didn't ask was: What are the clinical roots of obsessive hoarding? (Which is now a recognized condition in the *DSM-5*.) One thing psychologists agree on is that hoarding is grounded in deep loss. First there needs to be a preexisting hoarding proclivity (not uncommon with our hunter-gatherer heritage.) If someone with a proclivity experiences a quick and catastrophic loss—often the death of a close relative, frequently in car accidents—one need wait approximately eighteen to twenty-four months before hoarding kicks in. Reality TV shows on hoarding (A&E's *Hoarders*; TLC's *Hoarding: Buried Alive*) would have us believe that given dozens of helpers and a trained therapist, hoarders are often cured by the end of the TV episode. The truth, though, is that there's really no cure for hoarding. Once it's there, it's pretty much there to stay.

On these same TV shows, a voiceover regularly tells us that hoarding behavior is unsanitary and unsafe. This is correct. A few years back, a family friend—a big-game taxidermist who ended up making more money renting out mounted animals to TV and film shoots than he did with his trade—was killed in an electrical fire that began in his basement. He ran into his basement trying to put it out, got trapped, and quickly died of smoke inhalation. His retail storefront had always been immensely dense with hides, heads, and antlers. Nobody was surprised to learn his house had been equally as dense, but it was odd to think of his pack-ratting as being possibly medical.

Models walk down the aisles of a catwalk turned supermarket at Chanel's Autumn-Winter 2014/2015 show, in Paris.

One of the borderline ghoulish (and best) parts of watching TV shows about hoarding is seeing the expressions on the faces of hoarders once they realize that the intervention is for real. Your relatives are everywhere poking out from behind mounds of pizza boxes and mildewed second-hand Raggedy Ann dolls. There's a huge empty blue skiff in the driveway waiting to feast on all of your stuff, and it's surrounded by a dozen gym-toned refuse movers. There's a blond woman who

looks like J. K. Rowling (1965–) asking you how you feel about an oil-stained Velveeta box you ate on the morning the Challenger exploded.

This is actually happening to me—everyone is watching me.

Until then it's usually quite friendly, and in some cases hours can pass, and some deaccessioning progress is made, but then comes something—usually something utterly useless (Jif peanut butter jar, circa 1988, contents used but jar not cleaned or rinsed) and the hoarder chokes—it's in the eyes: a) *I may need that jar at some point down the road*, and b) *This intervention is over*. From there it's only a matter of how much of a meltdown it's going to be, and how ornery the hoarder needs to be to eject everyone from his or her house.

Needless to say, one feels a tingle of superiority knowing that one would never *ever* have one's inner life come to a grinding halt over throwing out a twenty-seven-year-old unrinsed jar of peanut butter. But if it wasn't that jar of Jif, what would it be that made someone— *you*—choke? Losing the nineteenth-century rocking chair? That small David Salle (1952–) canvas? And wait—how did a jar of Jif ever become the shorthand for life and its losses? Is that what the Brillo boxes were all about? How does a Christie's evening postwar contemporary art sale become a magic-wanding spectacle where, instead of peanut butter jars, bits of wood and paint are converted from shit into stuff? How do objects triumph and become surrogates for life?

* * *

I think it was Bruno Bischofberger (1940–) who said that the problem with the way Andy Warhol (1928–1987) collected art was that he always went for lots of medium-good stuff instead of getting the one or two truly good works. Warhol (the hoarder's hoarder) would probably have agreed, but I doubt this insight would have affected his accumulation strategies.

A publisher I worked with in the 1990s has a living room wall twelve-deep with Gerhard Richter (1932–) canvases. God knows how many he has now, but however many it is, it will *never* be enough.

A few years back I visited a friend of a friend in Portland with a pretty amazing collection of post-1960 American work. He went to the kitchen, and when he came back he saw me staring into the center of a really good crushed John Chamberlain (1927–2011).

"What are you staring at?"

"The dust."

"What do you mean?"

"Inside this piece, there's no dust on the outside bits, but it's really thick in the middle."

He looked. "I think that's as far in as the housekeeper's arms can reach."

"Your housekeeper Windexes your art?"

I saw his face collapse. Thousands of dollars later I believe the piece was professionally cleaned with carbon tetrachloride dry-cleaning solution at immense cost. It reminded me of reading about Leo Castelli (1907–1999), who wasn't allowed to have regular housekeeping staff in his apartment. In order to keep his insurance he had to have MFA students work as his housekeepers. I wonder if they're now making MFA Roombas.

Klaus Biesenbach poses for German GQ in his New York apartment. Photo: Floto + Warner.

* * *

I think it's perhaps also important to note that most curators almost never collect anything—yes, all those magazine spreads with the large empty white apartments—and if you ever ask a minimalist curator what they collect, they often make that pained face which is actually quite similar to the Jif jar lover upon the moment of possible surrender. *But you don't understand, I have no choice in this matter. You merely see an empty apartment, but for me this apartment is full of nothingness. That's correct: I hoard space.* A friend of mine is a manufacturer and seller of modernist furniture. Five years ago he built a new showroom, and he was so in love with how empty it was, he kept it unused for a year as a private meditation space.

Most writers I've met, especially during the embryonic

phase of writing a novel, stop reading other writers' books because it's so easy for someone else's style to osmotically leak into your own. I wonder if that's why curators are so often minimalists: there's nothing to leak into their brains and sway their point of view, which is perhaps how they maintain a supernatural power to be part of the process that turns air into millions of dollars.

On the other hand, most art dealers are deeply into all forms of collecting, as if our world is just a perpetual Wild West of shopping. I once visited a collector specializing in nineteenth-century North American West Coast works who had an almost parodically dull house in a suburb at what he called "street level." But beneath this boring tract home were, at the very least, thousands of works arranged as though in a natural history museum.

Designer Jonathan Adler (1966–) says your house should be an antidepressant. I agree. And so does the art world. When a curator comes home and finds nothingness, they get a minimalist high. When a dealer comes home and finds five Ellsworth Kellys leaning against a wall, they're also high in much the same way. Wikipedia tells us that "hoarding behavior is often severe because hoarders do not recognize it as a problem. It is much harder for behavioral therapy to successfully treat compulsive hoarders with poor insight about the disorder." Art collectors, on the other hand, are seen as admirable and sexy. There's little chance of them seeing themselves as in need of an intervention. Perhaps the art collecting equivalent of voluntarily getting rid of the Jif jar is flipping a few works.

* * *

I have a friend named Larry who collects beer cans, but his wife has a dictum: *no beer cans may cross the doorsill of his collecting room*. Larry then made a beer can holder that attaches itself to any surface, ceilings included. He then patented his holder and started selling them commercially. His is a capitalism feel-good story which highlights another dark side of hoarding and collecting: our failures and successes in regards to how we accumulate things are viewed almost entirely through a capitalist lens. *How much did you get for it?* I'm uncertain what Marx said about art collectors (if anything), but it probably wasn't kind. Some people collect art that's purely political, or purely conflict-based, or highly pedigreed by theory, but I wonder if they're just trying to sidestep out of the spotlight of the art economy's vulgarity. But wait—did they magically win their collection in a card game? Did their collection arrive for free at their doorstep from Santa Claus? No, it had to be purchased with money, and it's at this level where the dance between academia, museums, and collectors turns into a beyond-awkward junior high school prom. I tried explaining a Tom Friedman (1965–) work to my brother. Its title is *A Curse*, and the work consists of a plinth over which a witch has placed a curse. I told my brother it might easily be worth a million dollars,

Andy Warhol shops at Gristedes supermarket near his 47th street Silver Factory in New York City in 1965. Photo: Bob Adelman/Magnum Photos

whereupon his eyes became the collective eyes of the Paris Commune, aching to sharpen the guillotine's blades and then invade, conquer, and slay Frieze.

* * *

The collecting of stuff—slightly out-of-the-ordinary stuff—is different now than it was in the twentieth century. eBay, Craigslist, and Etsy have gutted thrift and antique stores across North America of all their good stuff, and in Paris, the Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen is but a shadow of its former self. eBay itself, once groaning with low-hanging fruit being sold by the clueless, is now a suburban shopping center with the occasional semi-okay vintage thingy still floating around. This same sense of sparseness is felt in the museum world, where the slashing of programming budgets remains the norm. In addition, too much globalized money and not enough places to stash it has made pretty much anything that is genuinely good far too pricey for the 99 percent. The good stuff is always gone, and all the stuff that's left is shit. You don't stand a chance against moneyed, technologically advanced collectors who have some magic software that allows them to buy that Jean Prouvé stool three-millionths

of a second ahead of you. Thank you, internet.

On YouTube, you'll find anti-hoarding videos that coach overcollectors to get rid of any object that doesn't bring them joy. But perhaps this is contrary to human nature. In Australia last month I asked if I could visit that secret stone alcove where the last three remaining specimens of the world's rarest tree are kept hidden.

"Why would you want to do that?"

"I want to get one before someone else gets it."

That's human collecting behavior.

* * *

I sometimes wonder if there's a way to collect stuff without tapping into collecting's dark, hoardy side. I got to thinking that if visual art is largely about space, then writing is largely about time—so then maybe people collect books differently than they do art.

Do they?

13

An example of religious hoarding, The Chapel of Bones, Alcantarilha, in Portugal, is ornamented with more than 1,500 human skeletons, the only exception being a sculpture with the figure of a crucified Christ dated from the 16th century.

No, they don't. Book hoarding tends to be just as intense as art hoarding, if not worse. It's called "bibliomania," and like generic hoarding, it is a recognized psychological problem. Enter Wikipedia once again: "Bibliomania is a disorder involving the collecting or hoarding of books to the point where social relations or health are damaged. It is one of several psychological disorders associated with books, such as 'bibliophagy' (book eating) or 'bibliokleptomania' (book thievery.)"

Bibliomania, though, is almost universally viewed as quirky and cute, the way "kunstmania" (my coinage) is seen as glamorous and cool in a Bond villain kind of way. *Oh those booksellers sure are nutty!* And they *are* nutty—pretty much all bookstore owners recognize that the profession brings with it a unique form of squirreliness. The best booksellers, the antiquarian sellers especially, are those sellers who genuinely don't actually want to sell you the book. You have to audition for its ownership, and should they sell you the book, you can see the pain on their face as the cash machine bleeps.

I once worked weekends in a bookstore. There was this guy who'd been coming in for years and all the other sellers made cooing noises whenever he showed up for three hours every Sunday for some passionate browsing. "Now *there's* someone who really loves books—a real book lover." And then one Sunday afternoon a *New York Times Atlas* fell out of his raincoat as he was exiting the store. Police later found thousands of stolen books in this bibliokleptomaniac's apartment.

As for bibliophagy, I chuckled when I learned of the term while writing this and then was chilled when I realized I'm a bibliophagist myself ...

* * *

Back in the early 2000s, my then agent, Eric in New York, was one of the first people I knew to overharvest music into an iTunes playlist. In 2002 it seemed amazing that a person could have 1.92 days (!) of music on their playlist. These days it's not uncommon to find people with almost a solid year's worth of playlisted music, if not far more.

In high school everybody used plastic Dairyland milk

14

Left: Douglas Coupland, School Spirit, 2006. Each hornet's nest form is made from one French-language and one English-language copy of the Douglas Coupland/Pierre Huyghe collaborative book School Spirit (Editions Disvoir, 2005) that has been chewed by Coupland. Center: Douglas Coupland (1961–), The Soviet Union, 2014. Hornet and wasps nests with branches cryogenically frozen for forty-eight hours and then bound together with stovewire Right:Douglas Coupland (1961–), Generation X, 2005. Coupland's 1991 novel, Generation X, chewed up by Coupland and spun into a hornets nest form.

In Hoarding: Behind Closed Doors, Disney Claire poses by her collection of Disney toys.

crates to store their records. They were just the right size for 33 1/3 LPs, and Dairyland was able to have their logo inside everyone's house in the most wonderful way—attached to the music loved by the owner. And then Dairyland changed the dimensions of the crates so that they'd no longer hold vinyl. I'm still mad at them, not because I wanted crates for myself (I've never been a big vinyl aficionado), but rather because they took such a major plus and turned it into a big minus. Idiots. Vinyl collectors are among the most reverent of all collecting communities. Those milk crates would have lasted peoples' entire *lives*.

Music is weird because it's not really space, but it's not quite time either. This got me thinking that okay, yes, visual art is mostly about space, whereas writing is largely about time. But what would a hybrid time/space creative form be? The answer is: film. Do people hoard film?

Actually, they do. My sister-in-law's cousin is a movie hoarder who has possibly millions of hours of torrented movies snoozing on his hard drives, movies he could never watch in ten lifetimes. "Don, let me get this straight: You speak no German and yet you have five German-language screening versions of *Sister Act Two* starring Whoopi Goldberg (1955–)?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

I think the human relationship with time perception has altered quite a bit since 2000, and film seems to be one venue where this is fully evidenced. The internet has a tendency to shred attention spans while it fire-hoses insane amounts of film on humanity, making film hoarding as easy as newspaper hoarding was back in the 1950s. Even easier.

In the art world, our collectively morphing sense of time perception became truly noticeable back in 2010 with *The Clock* by Christian Marclay (1955–), which in many peoples' minds deserved the Best Picture Oscar for that year. At the 2015 Oscars, the only two real contenders for Best Picture were *Boyhood* by Richard Linklater (1960–) and *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* by Alejandro González Iñárritu (1963–). In both films the star was, as Linklater put it, *time*. In *Boyhood* we saw the magic of a dozen years of continuous time. In *Birdman* we saw the magic of one continuous take. As a species we seem to have now fetishized continuity. We're nostalgic for real time's flow, and we hoard movies and videos and GIFs and clips and anything else that moves and has sound, knowing it's never ever going to be touched. In a weird way, it's like the minimalist apartment of, say, curator Klaus Biesenbach (1967–), where no objects are visible, and what is present is virtual—in the case of Biesenbach, ideas; in the case of my sister-in-law's cousin Don, twenty-nine million hours of crap film.

In *Men in Black*, Tommy Lee Jones (1944–) learns of an alien technology and says, "Great. Now I'm going to have

The Collyer Brothers' house in Harlem is emptied out in 1947 after both of the brothers are found dead under their hoarded material.

to buy *The White Album* again." In my case, it's *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, which I've now bought twice on vinyl, once on cassette, once on CD, and twice on iTunes. There's surely some geek in California dreaming up some new way of making me buy it all over again. By now don't I get some kind of metadata tag attached to me saying, "This guy's already paid his dues on this one"?

* * *

Other than actually dying, there is one thing that genuinely stops hoarding: the thanatophobia one feels at the thought of death approaching. One is forced to contemplate what will be written on one's gravestone:

born
accumulated a bunch of cool stuff
died

This epitaph isn't creepy, it's just boring. So how do you manipulate your loot meaningfully while the clock ticks and ticks and ticks? With artists, dealing with stuff at the end of life becomes complicated. I find it interesting that, say, Constantin Brâncuşi (1876–1957) didn't want to sell

his work in his final years. He could afford not to, and he wanted to be surrounded by his own stuff. He wanted to live inside it, and it's no coincidence that when he died he wanted his studio kept *frozen in time* at that moment. Reece Mews, the studio of Francis Bacon (1909–1992), with its tens of thousands of paint tubes, was the world's most glamorous toxic heavy metals waste dump. And one can't help but wonder about Andy Warhol, with his townhouse stuffed with unopened bags of candy, cookie jars, jewels, and Duane Reade concealer. Did he ever open up the doors of the rooms in his townhouse once they were full? Did he stop and stare at the doors, shiver, and then walk away?

In December of 2013 I saw a magnificent show at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, "Turner, Monet Twombly: Later Paintings." It featured works done in the final decade of the lives of John Turner (1873–1938), Claude Monet (1840–1926), and Cy Twombly (1928–2011). To quote the museum's website, the show focused on these artists' "later work, examining not only the art historical links and affinities between them, but also the common characteristics of and motivations underlying their late style."

The paintings in the show were remarkable in and of themselves, yet what they collectively foregrounded was a sense of whiteness, a sense of glowing—an undeniable sense of the light that comes at the end of the tunnel. Overt content became less important, and the act of cognitive disassociation from the everyday world was palpable. As the museum catalog further states, "Their late work has a looseness and an intensity that comes from the confidence of age, when notions of finish and completion are modified." A delicate way of phrasing things.

The works at the Museet depicted, in their way, anti-hoarding—a surrendering of life's material trappings. It was a liberating show that gave the viewer peace. It let you know that maybe you should let go of many things in your life before its nearly over, when suddenly your *stuff* isn't as important as it was cracked up to be. (If you ask anyone over fifty what they'd rather have more of, time or money, they'll almost always say time.)

An obvious question here at the end: Is it that art supercollectors, as well as bibliomaniacs, have experienced losses of a scope so great that they defy processing? Are these collectors merely sublimating misfiring grief via overcollecting? A reasonable enough question, but why limit it to collecting art or books? People collect anything and everything. And look at Darwin. Back in the days of caves, if someone close to you died or got killed, chances are your life was going to be much more difficult for the foreseeable future, so you'd better start gathering as many roots and berries as you can. Collecting as a response to sudden loss makes total sense. But also back then, if you somehow lived to thirty-five, you were the grand old man or dame of the cave, with very little time left

Karsten Bott, One of Each, 1993, Installation at the Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz, Austria, 1993, 10 x 30 m.

on the clock. Divvying up your arrowheads and pelts made a lot of sense—and you best do it before your cave mate descendants plop you onto an iceberg and send you out into the floes.

I get the impression that collecting and hoarding seem to be about the loss of others, while philanthropy and deaccessioning are more about the impending loss of self. (Whoever dies with the most toys actually loses.)

Maybe collecting isn't a sickness, and maybe hoarding is actually a valid impulse that, when viewed differently, might be fixable through redirection tactics. Humanity must be doing something right, because we're still here—which means there's obviously a sensible way to collect berries and roots; there's probably also a sensible way to collect art and books (and owl figurines and unicycles and dildos and Beanie Babies and ...) The people who freak me out the most are the people who don't collect anything at all. *Huh?* I don't mean minimalists. I mean people who simply don't collect *anything*. You go to their houses or apartments and they have furniture and so forth but there's nothing visible in aggregate: no bookshelves, no wall of framed family photos ... there's just one of everything. It's shocking.

"You mean you don't collect anything?"

"No."

"There must be something. Sugar packets? Hotel soaps? Fridge magnets? Pipe cleaners?"

"No."

"... Internet porn? Kitten videos?"

"No."

"What the hell is wrong with you!"

"What do you mean?"

"If this was ten thousand years ago and we all lived in a cave, you'd be an absolutely terrible cave mate. You'd be useless at foraging for roots and berries, and if you went hunting you'd only have one arrowhead, so if you lost it, you'd starve."

"Where is this coming from, Doug?"

"Forget it. Let's go gallery hopping *right now*."

X

Douglas Coupland is an author and artist based out of Vancouver and Paris. A survey show of his post-2000 visual work recently finished at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian art, both in Toronto. His new exhibition, *Bit Rot,* will open at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art on September 9, 2015. He is currently artist in residence at the Google Cultural Institute in Paris.

The official announcement that Casa Daros, the cultural institution of the Daros Latin America Collection, is closing in Rio de Janeiro as of December 2015 came as a big surprise to Latin American cultural circles. The ambitious project insofar as it concerned exhibitions only lasted two years. The argument invoked in a press conference is a lack of financial means to keep the project running. After an investment of sixteen million reais in 2006 (roughly $8 million USD) to buy the building, and then sixty-seven million reais (roughly $21.5 million USD) to restore it, one would presume that somebody would have run through the budget for sustaining such an ambitious project.[1] The loss for Latin American culture is grave, because Casa Daros promised to be a continental cultural center that would transcend Latin America's nationalist fragmentation and become an international reference point. There are many reasons why I'm sorry about the disappearance of Casa Daros,[2] but here I'm interested in understanding its loss as a cultural symptom and how this symptom connects with general issues concerning the fickleness of philanthropic institutions. The more modest plan now is to circulate and lend works from its 1200-piece collection to other venues. The Daros Collection stands out among its peers because it assembled whole bodies of work by artists, rather than single representative examples.

Luis Camnitzer

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

Casa Daros announced it was closing in 2015 after only two years of operation in Rio de Janeiro.

Patronage systems have always brought the promotion of cultural activities at least partially into the hands of private initiative. In theory this split helps balance the influence of official government policies with a broader range of interests in culture. The role of government in cultural matters in capitalist countries, however, has been steadily declining, and philanthropic and nonprofit organizations have been progressively taking over public duties. The reliance on philanthropy in the US, for example, has been

Marinus van Reymerswaele, The Tax Collectors, c. 1540. Oil on panel, 94 x 77 cm.

Due to the Koch Brothers' role in funding climate change denial, Greenpeace protests in front of the David H. Koch theater, formally known as the New York State Theater. Photo: Michael Nagle.

so long-standing and extreme that the absence of government is rarely questioned unless some fraudulent activity by private institutions becomes known to the public. The US is one of the few countries where culture is not dignified with its own ministry, and where it's taken for granted that the private sector should assume the responsibility. The rewards are straightforward. Private donors get an organization or a building named after them long before their death. Corporations use cultural largesse for public relations and advertising. Governments, in turn, help them with tax exemptions (a benefit, it should be noted, that Daros waived in Brazil, as do other organizations on occasion) and, in exchange, save on operating costs and the stresses of controversial decisions. In principle this would appear to be a perfect and impeccable deal that benefits everybody, including the collective culture it promises to serve.

Though often confused, there is a difference between altruism and philanthropy. Altruism is totally ego-distant and only focused on charitable effect. Meanwhile, philanthropy—although it may have an altruistic component—tends to include other agendas. Philanthropy may be a tool for indemnification or restitution of ill-acquired wealth, a way to correct inequality in income distribution, a correction of government ineptness, a help in community building, or a combination thereof.[3] But it is often part of larger political agendas, sometimes directed by government policies, but at other times designed to change those policies.[4]More often then not, philanthropic projects bear and promote the names of their funders. Daros is an arbitrary name and an exception to this, and many nonprofit organizations pursuing altruistic goals have the good taste to remain depersonalized. It is customary, though, for private patrons to have their names prominently displayed, whether in hospital elevators, on benches, or as the title of whole building wings, museums, or other prominent cultural sites. At the Lincoln Center in

New York, the original Philharmonic Hall was rechristened "Avery Fisher Hall" in 1973 thanks to a $10.5 million donation from Mr. Fisher. But in 2015, the name was changed to "David Geffen Hall" after Mr. Geffen donated $100 million (of which $15 million went to the Fishers to buy out their naming rights). The other $85 million is exempted from taxes; thus, something close to $30 million will not be used to fund government services. Since much US government money is spent on weaponry and other war expenses, this sounds okay. But in other countries, it wouldn't be okay. The land on which Lincoln Center stands is owned by New York City, but the whole musical enterprise—which was started by John D. Rockefeller—is private. Same-day standing-room tickets for the Metropolitan Opera cost around $25, which may not cover production expenses, but it does not provide a public service to those who can't afford it, either. Meanwhile, in the same compound, the New York State Theater, built by the state of New York and owned by New York City, became the David H. Koch Theater in 2008 and will remain so until 2058. Koch paid $100 million dollars for this. The Koch family also has the right of first refusal for any later attempt to rename the building. This overview is from the macro view of money.

From the micro view: when it comes to artists who receive a fellowship because they are recognized for their achievements and merits—in other words, for their contribution to public culture—the tax exemption in the US is granted to the giver, not the receiver. The receiver's money (unless dedicated to tuition at an accredited institution) is taxable income. When a museum acquires an artwork with the help of a patron, there's usually a 20 percent discount on the sale price. This means that the philanthropic act is not only exercised by the donor, but also by the seller; the artist and the gallery each donate ten percent of the sale amount. The donor gains social prestige and a mention in the signage when the work is exhibited, as recognition for his or her generosity. The artist hopefully gains visibility and, possibly, a bump in his or her market price. The artist's part in the philanthropy is not tax deductible. When nonprofit institutions invite artists to speak, they usually only offer a "symbolic amount" as an honorarium. "Symbolic" is a euphemism for "we know you are worth much more, but we cannot afford to pay that." The difference between the amount the artist is worth and the amount that he or she is actually paid is the philanthropy exercised by the artist, which is not tax deductible either. When calculating preparation and travel time, what remains of the honorarium after taxes is close to minimum wage. Fortunately for culture and education, as artists we feel like missionaries and don't mind helping and supporting struggling nonprofit organizations. Harvard and MoMA come to mind as recent examples.

The promise of potential gains is what museums like to use as leverage. Since the benefits don't necessarily turn out to be true, the discount becomes forced philanthropy, and therefore exploitative. Philanthropic organizations that
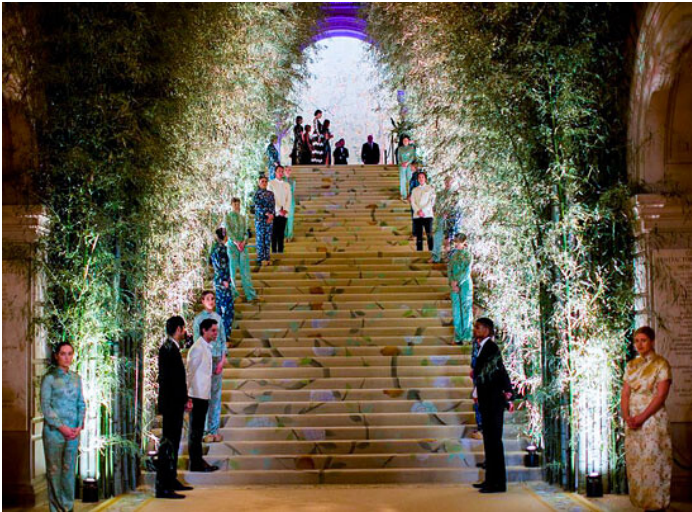
Workers stand at the sides of the entrance hall of the 2015 Met Gala.

Diners eat in the Ronald O. Perelman Rotunda during the 2012 Guggenheim Gala.

set up events for worthy causes also use the argument of increased visibility (and moral standing) to extract gifts from artists. Forced philanthropy at the individual level is nothing new and, depending on how one interprets it, may be seen as the basis for exploitation in general. Tipping is an example. Initially a gratuity to reward efficiency and politeness beyond the call of duty, tipping in the US has become a form of mandatory altruism that started at 15 percent of the bill but has more recently risen to 20 percent. Under the guise of benevolence, customers are forced to make up for the employer's unwillingness to pay even minimum wage.

Waiters, just as adjunct faculty in academia, are considered self-employed and therefore responsible for their own benefits. Some day, when the remaining ethical hurdles that prevent buying good grades are overcome, students may start tipping their instructors. Artists, however, are in a different category, since they are vendors and don't offer services. Art practice is a combination of self-employment, entrepreneurial initiative, creative research, and labor. Unless the artist is very successful, this normally adds up to the first step in self-exploitation. Culture is thus outsourced to individual initiative and work. It's a mystery that the number of artists in the population keeps growing.

While corporations may technically represent national or state interests, they can also distort these interests by prioritizing their own and by exercising hidden forms of censorship through their sponsorship.[5] Fund-raising "gala dinners"—ceremonies where, at great expense, the oligarch class mingles with the political class—are one of the self-selecting arenas where ideas and funds meet and celebrate each other. For ethical reasons, it's expected that the dinner expenses never exceed the already staggering figure of one third of the funds raised.[6] Curiously, the net return an artist receives after commissions and taxes doesn't usually exceed one third

of the sale price either.

All this doesn't mean that philanthropy is innately wrong or that it should be abolished. Too often, governments are crowded with philistines or incompetent individuals and, while it often shares the same ills, the private sector at least tends to attract and reward qualified technocrats with better salaries. The disadvantage, however, is that when philanthropy takes over government functions, it doesn't have to fulfill the requirements of accountability and transparency one expects from the public sector. This leaves the door open to uncontrolled capriciousness. While a democratic government may (in theory) be voted out for dropping a project considered necessary by the people, a private philanthropist may, without any public accountability, stop funding something out of boredom, a shift in interests, or, as in the Daros Collection case, bad arithmetic.

Casa Daros had assumed government functions on a continental level, albeit with utopic thinking. There were few precedents for this in the arts and, unfortunately, none were successful. The visual arts activities of the Organization of American States, sharing some of the same aspirations, had only partial and temporary success. After the organization expelled Cuba, it was widely boycotted by artists throughout Latin America. Being located in Washington, DC didn't help much either. The activities of the Cuban Casa de las Américas were somewhat more effective, particularly during the decade of the 1960s. However, they were hampered by the restrictions imposed by the US on travel to Cuba.[7] None of these organizations managed to create a feedback loop that would truly nourish the countries involved or addressed. Big private collections, like the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection, or the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, now function more like the new model exemplified by Daros: through occasional exhibitions, grants, and the loaning of works, but lacking a real

A graffiti stencil by János Sugár resulted in the artist's arrest.

Museum of Modern Art staff protests Healthcare cuts outside of a fundraising event.

institutional center in Latin America.

Casa Daros originally seemed intent on filling this gap. After a long search for the right location, the organization settled in Rio de Janeiro. It was relatively centrally located and had the potential to integrate Portuguese-speaking Brazil with the rest of the Spanish-speaking continent. All that is about to be gone. If the project were taken over by the Brazilian government, as some still hope, it would be weakened by an immanent fear of potential Brazilian imperialism. Swiss capital and nationalism were definitely seen as less threatening in this regard.[8]

The main disappointment is still the breach of the commitment that was promised. Artists were told that Daros acquired works for "safekeeping" and not for investment. The intention was to create a source of primary information for future reference about those artists who the curators of the collection deemed important. Unavoidably, the choice of artists and works provides as much a portrait of those selecting as of those selected. Statistically, nevertheless, it was predictable that, given the quantity of works accumulated, the collection would offer an invaluable amount of crucial and useful information for future research. The Casa de las Américas, without any organized curatorial planning and relying exclusively on donations, was still able to create one of the best collections of Latin American art of the period 1960–80.

When a philanthropic institution commits itself to an activity normally performed by a government, it enters something akin to a marriage contract, one that only death or the Pope should be allowed to annul. Hopes are raised, and there is no recourse when these are allowed to fall. Once a private entity starts a project on this scale, it forfeits the right to stop it, unless it wants to show arrogance and capriciousness.

Philanthropies and nonprofit cultural organizations define themselves around a mission, and people working for them get involved in it, with an investment that goes way beyond just work hours. Yet, when the project is ended without any transparency, they realize that they were nothing more than normal employees strictly bound by labor contracts. The dissonance was visible during the preparation of Daros's last exhibition, "Cuba: Fiction and Fantasy." The staff, with their notices in their pockets, were fully focused on perfection, and opening night became an homage to a lost belief; the evening had the feeling of a wake instead of a celebration. This was enhanced by a small group of picketers with signs that read "LAVADAROS" (a pun on "washed" in Portuguese), alluding to money laundering.

However, the problem is not only in the defrauding of expectations. While museums have policies that roughly protect works from arbitrary deaccessioning, private collections don't. There are collections without any aims other than monumentalizing themselves and then proceeding to sell their assets wholesale. Although this damages the artists, the collections cannot be blamed (Carl Saatchi getting rid of his collection of Sandro Chia's work in 1984 comes to mind) since there is no law preventing them from doing so. When the plans are more ambitious and directed towards the public sphere, the lack of accountability has more consequences than just upsetting art markets. To continue the marriage metaphor, there is no prenuptial agreement, no appropriate document stating the purpose and timespan of the project, and specifying what steps will be taken in the event of errors, changes of mind, or "acts of God" that lead to cancellation. Unprotected, the temporary beneficiaries are thrown back into the same gutter where they were found. The artworks, meanwhile, may bring in lots of money and end up in a different, gold-plated gutter.

X

Luis Camnitzer is a Uruguayan artist. He immigrated to
Uruguay from Germany when he was one year old and
has lived in the US since 1964. He is a Professor Emeritus
of Art, State University of New York, College at Old
Westbury. He graduated in sculpture from the Escuela de
Bellas Artes, Universidad de la República, Uruguay, where
he also studied architecture. He received a Guggenheim
fellowship for printmaking in 1961 and for visual arts in
1982. In 1965 he was declared Honorary Member of the
Academy in Florence. In 1988 he represented Uruguay in
the Biennial of Venice. In 1998 he received the "Latin
American Art Critic of the Year" award from the Argentine
Association of Art Critics, in 2002, the Konex Mercosur
Award in the visual arts for Uruguay, and in 2011 the Frank
Jewitt Mather Award of the College Art Association and
the Printer Emeritus Award of the SGCI. In 2010 and 2014
he received the National Literature Award for Art Essays in
Uruguay. In 2012 was awarded the Skowhegan Medal and
the USA Ford Fellow award. He represented Uruguay in
the Venice Biennial 1988 and participated in the Liverpool
Biennial in 1999 and in 2003, the Whitney Biennial of 2000,
and Documenta 11 in 2003. His work is in the collections
of over forty museums. His books include: New Art of
Cuba, University of Texas Press (1994/2004); Arte y
Enseñanza: La ética del poder (Casa de América, 2000);
Didactics of Liberation: Conceptualist Art in Latin America,
(University of Texas Press, 2007); and On Art, Artists, Latin
America and Other Utopias, (University of Texas Press,
2010).

1

Silas Marti, "Rio espera resposta da Casa Daros sobre resgate public," *Folha de S. Pablo*, May 22, 2015 http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2015/05/1631915-rio-espera-resposta-da-casa-daros-sobre-resgate-publico.shtml

2

I should give a full disclosure here to avoid later accusations: my work is in the Daros Collection, I had a big exhibition organized by the collection that travelled through seven countries, I helped organize a symposium on literacy for them, I am working on a pedagogical project for the last exhibition (featuring Cuban artists from the collection), and I am friends with all the employees, curators past and present, as well as with the owner of the collection, Ruth Schmidheiny.

3

Much of the endowment wealth of respected foundations (e.g., the Guggenheim Foundation) came from the activities of old robber barons, or from new generations of oligarchs that profit from dubious monopolies and artificial financial bubbles. The wealth of the Schmidheiny family was made with asbestos-laden Eternit, a fact sometimes held against the Daros Collection. The collection and the Casa Daros project, however, is said to be the property of Ruth Schmidheiny and is financed with the divorce settlement reached with her former husband, Stephan Schmidheiny.

4

In the late 1960s the J. M. Kaplan Foundation channeled CIA funds to sponsor the formation of Central American leadership, the National Student Association (which was designed to counteract international leftist student movements), and anticommunist cultural associations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom and its Latin American publication, *Mundo Nuevo* . In the US, tax-exempt groups that gather and invest money to change government policies are categorized as "527 organizations."

5

In 2001 the General Motors Foundation donated $10 million to the Smithsonian Institute to rename the latter's hall of transportation "GM Hall," raising fears that mass-transit systems would be underrepresented. Lawrence Small, the director of the Smithsonian, was later willing to give "CBS Corporation's Showtime network what amounts to the right of first refusal on all documentaries dependent on Smithsonian archives or staff time" (Tyler Green, "Smithsonian exhibits our neglect," *Los Angeles Times* , July 10, 2006 http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jul/10/opinion/oe-green10). More recently, Shell sponsored the exhibition "Atmosphere" at the Science Museum in London and tried to influence the presentation on climate change. See http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/may/31/shell-sought-influence-direction-science-museum-climate-programme

6

Deborah Sontag, "Clinton Award Included Cash To Foundation," *New York Times,* May 30, 2015. The article is revealing of how the world of philanthropic foundations operates. It was prompted by Bill Clinton's request for a donation of $500,000 to his foundation in exchange for his appearance at the Happy Hearts Fund gala event. The gala itself cost $363,413. The added Clinton honorarium exceeded the expected third in expenses.

7

At the time, the only way to get to Havana from Montevideo without being documented by the CIA was by flying to Prague and changing planes there.

8

During the beginning of the project, Hans-Michael Herzog, director of the collection, was very explicit about finding ways to become a cultural catalyst, activator, and enabler, rather than a provider.

Reza Negarestani

What Is Philosophy? Part One: Axioms and Programs

The central thesis of this text is that philosophy is, at its deepest level, a program—a collection of action-principles and practices-or-operations which involve realizabilities, i.e., what can be possibly brought about by a specific category of properties or forms. And that to properly define philosophy and to highlight its significance, we should approach philosophy by first examining its programmatic nature. This means that rather than starting the inquiry into the nature of philosophy by asking "what is philosophy trying to say, what does it really mean, what is its application, does it have any relevance?," we should ask "what sort of program is philosophy, how does it function, what are its operational effects, realizabilities specific to which forms does it elaborate, and finally, as a program, what kinds of experimentation does it involve?"

Even though the corollary problems of philosophy as a specialized discipline (the tenor of its discourses, its traction beyond its own domain, its applications and referential imports) can in no way be ignored, they are however problems that, as it will be argued, can only be sufficiently addressed in the context of philosophy as deeper cognitive enterprise. The primary focus of this cognitive program is to methodically urge thought to identify and bring about realizabilities afforded by its properties (theoretical and practical intelligibilities pertaining to thinking as such), to explore what can possibly come out of thinking and what thought can become.

§1. Traditionally, philosophy is an ascetic program for the craft of (general) intelligence.

Ascetic to the extent that philosophy involves the exercise of a multistage, disciplined, and open-ended reflection on the condition of the possibility of itself as *a form of thought that turns thinking into a program*. The real import of this definition resides in precisely what a program consists in. Accordingly, in order to elucidate the significance of philosophy both as a programmatic discipline and as a form of thought that transforms thinking into a programmatic project, first we should elaborate what is meant by "program" in its most generic sense. To do so, the notion of program—in the sense of action-principles and practices-or-operations that bring about something-—should be defined parsimoniously in terms of its bare formal armature, stripped to those generic yet necessary features that underlie any type of program regardless of its applications or aims. These are: the selection of a set of axioms, and the elaboration of what follows from this choice if the axioms were treated not as immutable postulates but as abstract modules that can act upon one another.

A program is the embodiment of the inter-actions between its set of axioms that reflect a range of dynamic behaviors with their own complexity and distinct properties. More specifically, it can be said that programs are constructions

that extract operational content from their axioms and develop different possibilities of realization (what can be brought about) from this operational content. And respectively, axioms are operational objects or abstract realizers that encapsulate information regarding their specific properties or categories. In this sense, programs elaborate realizabilities (what can possibly be realized or brought about) from a set of elementary abstract realizers (what has operational information concerning the realization or the bringing-about of a specific category of properties and behaviors) in more complex setups.

In the programmatic framework, the choice of axioms does not confine the program to the explicit *terms* of axioms. Rather, it commits the program to their underlying properties and operations specific to their class of complexity. To put it differently, a program constructs possible realizabilities for the underlying properties of its axioms, it is not essentially restricted to their terms. A conveniently intuitive albeit imprecise and rudimentary example of this would be:

1. *a* is an *E*

In a Platonic style this can be roughly translated to: "If the form (*E*) Socrates partially exhibits defines who Socrates

is (*a*)," or in a more straightforward way, "if Socrates is a rational life-form."

2. *a* does x = for function or activity

"Then Socrates does something that displays particular properties of that realm of form," or "then Socrates does x as a rational life-form."

As a rational life-form, Socrates is a particular pattern-uniformity through which implicit patterns or properties specific to the realm of forms can be realized in the temporal order. , or what Socrates does as a rational life-form, is a partial realization of these forms as an intelligible practice or operation. In other words, is a practice whose operational content can be traced, changed, and combined with other practices to construct more complex realizabilities specific to the realm of forms that Socrates partially embodies. In this example, 1 and 2 represent the axiom and its basic operational information that can be abbreviated to "this *a* is of *E*-form" (again roughly translating to "Socrates's actions reflect the form to which he belongs," or "Socrates is what he does as a rational life-form").

This means that "if *a* has the form *E*, then it does x" and

"the function or activity typifies *E*-form." Here, the Platonic concept of *form* has been used in place of a category of underlying properties. Now this can be further compacted, "the form *E*, at the very least, does x." The program then elaborates the possible realizabilities of the form *E*. At the very least, the program can do or bring about x (the unprocessed operational content of the axiom). Or by introducing more axioms and following different strategies (or action schemas) by which operational contents of axioms can be brought to bear on one another, the program can construct other activities related to *E*. Following the above example, this can be expressed as:

A-1: When in *S1* (a particular state of affairs that gives a context to what Socrates does), Socrates does x (x typifies a behavior related to general properties of the rational life-form).

A-2: When in *S2*, Confucius does y (y typifies another behavior that reflects general properties of the rational life-form).

Program: various schemas of interaction or operational intercontent between x-act and y-act as typifying a rational life-form. Depending on how interactions or the operational exchange between axioms are performed and regulated (synchronous or asynchronous), what strategies or behaviors they follow, whether the elementary interactions are nondeterministic or deterministic and so

on, the program can both extract the specificities of the rational life-form (what a rational life-form really is and consists in) and bring about its possible realizabilities (what a rational life-form can possibly do). These realizabilities are constructed s that are not essentially entailed by the explicit terms of the axioms.

By plugging axioms and their operational contents together, the program also binds their respective states of affairs (*S*). The system of one axiom (the information regarding what it does and the state or the situation where this activity or behavior takes place) becomes the environment of the other axiom and vice versa. In this sense, the exchange between axioms can be seen as an ongoing communication between abstract agents which acquire new capacities or abilities as they respond to one another, in a manner which is similar to how multiagent systems dynamically evolve. A program, for this reason, is not a loose collection of axioms on which static principles or instructions are imposed. Possible compositions of axioms—or how axioms can hang together and interact—are process unfoldings through which the program can extract additional details from the underlying properties and utilize them to search and construct possible realizabilities.

In the programmatic framework, axioms are no longer sacrosanct elements of the system eternally anchored in some absolute foundation, but acting processes that can be updated, repaired, terminated, or composed into

composite acts through interaction. These composite acts exhibit complex dynamic behaviors that could not be generated if the axioms where taken in isolation or treated as fixed foundational principles. In this sense, a program executes the global effects of the *confrontation between axioms as elementary acts*, i.e., the interaction. These global effects are possible realizabilities of the program, or what can be brought about.

New properties and possible realizabilities can be uncovered by experimenting with the operational architecture of the program. Experimentation in a program involves both a controlled relaxation of existing constraints on how axioms hang together, how their operational contents are exchanged, as well as the addition of new constraints. It is through this form of manipulation that the range of realizabilities specific to a category of properties is broadened. For example, the relaxation or addition of constraints can lead to different modes of compositionality (how axioms and their operational content can hang together). It can suspend the so-called *innocence* of axioms in that each time axioms are called up they behave differently and result in different ramifications. On higher levels of experimentation, new axioms with different properties can be introduced to develop wider arrays of operations. And operations that typify other properties can be fused with existing operations to construct more complex realizabilities.

The meaning of the program is not entailed in its axioms—what they refer to or what they denote—but in how and under what conditions they interact. The right question in addressing a program is not "what do these axioms stand for or what does this program mean?," but "what is this program, how does it act, what are its possible operational effects?"

In short, what a program articulates is the operational destinies of the underlying properties of its axioms qua acting processes. The meaning of a program is a corollary of its operations, the contexts and senses of its acts and functions. Rather than being fixed upon some preestablished semantic of utility or metaphysical reference, this meaning is not only paradigmatically actional but also attached to the operational prospects of the program itself, i.e., its possible realizabilities.

This is precisely how philosophy is approached here. Rather than by starting from corollaries (the import of its discourse as a specialized discipline, what it discusses, and so on), philosophy is approached as a special kind of a program whose meaning is dependent upon what it does and how it does it, its operational destinies and possible realizabilities. In the first part of this text (Axioms and Programs), what will be discussed is the overall scope of philosophy as a program that is deeply entangled with the functional architecture of what we call thinking. In the second part (Programs and Realizabilities), the realizabilities of this program will be elaborated in terms of

the construction of a form of intelligence that represents the ultimate vocation of thought.

§2. Philosophy is a program whose primary axioms are those that pertain to the possibility of thought as such. Its basic task is to elaborate the operational content behind such possibility in terms of what can be done with thought, or more broadly, what thought can realize out of itself. If "thought is or would be possible at all" then what would be the ramifications of such possibility?

The significance of philosophy is in this simple yet vastly consequential trivia that it uses the possibility of thought as its premise, as an axiom that can be systematically acted upon. In doing so, it commits to the elaboration of *what comes after the premise*, i.e., what can be realized from thought and what thought can do, or more accurately, the possibility of a thought set on developing its own functional realizations.

The choice of axiom is a programmatic initiative for the reason that it opens up the prospect of constructing different realizations of properties the axioms represent. Rather than simply being a neutral assumption—or worse, an entrenched dogma—philosophy's axiomatization of the possibility of thought is the first major step toward programming thinking as such.

Once the possibility of thought is adopted as an explicit axiom (as what must be acted upon), thinking becomes a matter of extracting and expanding the operational content implicit to the possibility of thought qua the axiom. The focus of thought's operational activities—the acts of thinking—is turned toward elaborating the content of thought's possibility in the sense of articulating what can be done with such possibility (program's operational possibilities) and what thought can become by acting on its very possibility (program's possible realizabilities). In other words, philosophy programs thought to systematically act on itself, to realize its own ends and demands, and to have as its main vocation a disciplined and persistent reflection on the prospects of its realizabilities. Thinking is no longer merely exercised as a non-optional practice but a practical enterprise.

This is where "philosophy as a program" overlaps "philosophy as a form of thought that turns thinking into a program." In using the resources of thought to determine the scope of thought's realizabilities, philosophy becomes thought's program for exploring and bringing about its own realizations. Put differently, philosophy's tacit assertion that "thought is programmable" is repurposed by thought as its principal normative task: "thought ought
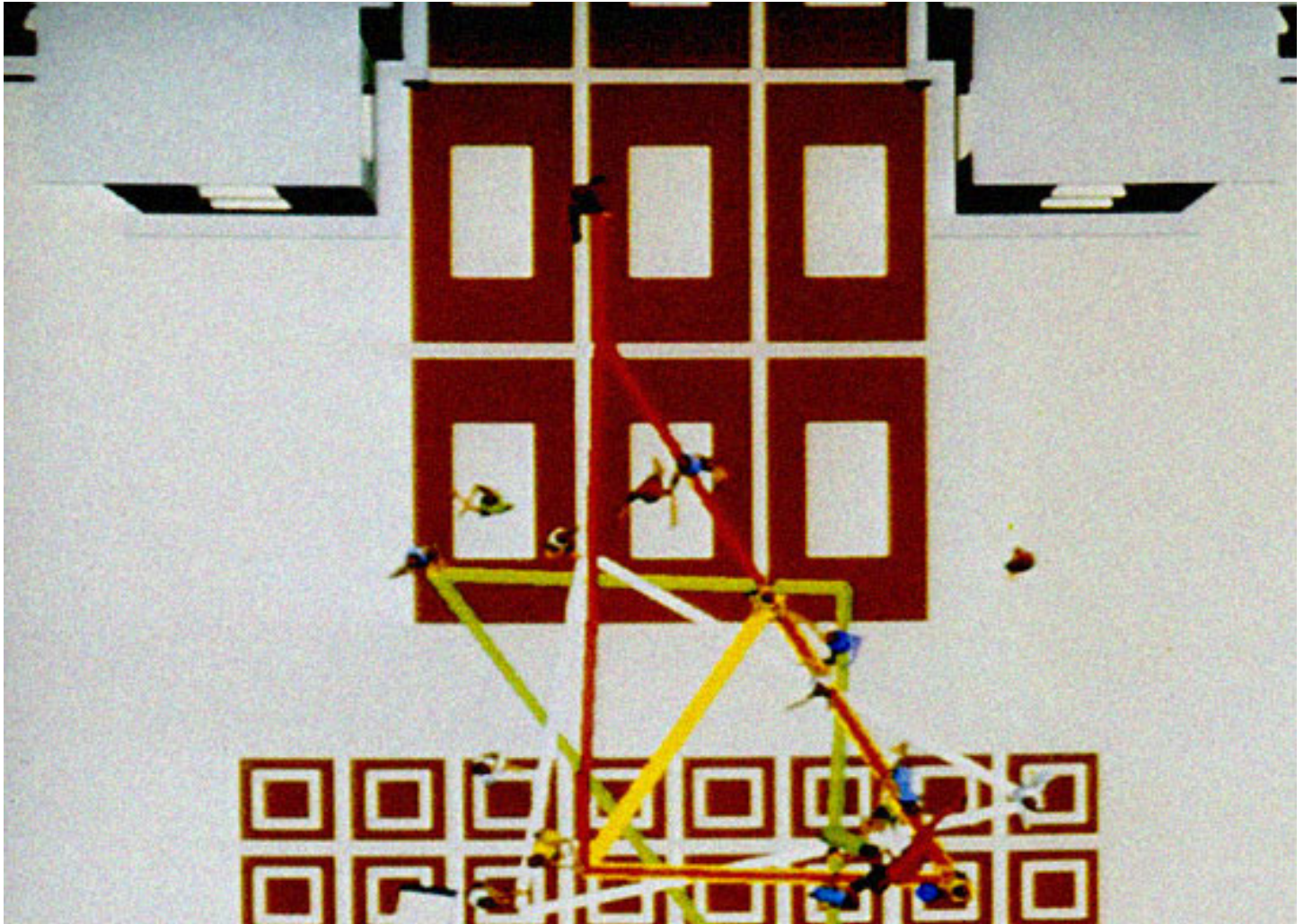
to be programmed." It is through this normative task that thought explicitly posits its own ends and augments the prospects for what it can do. Philosophy, in this sense, is more than being simply one mode of thought among others. It is thought's own cognitive-practical prosthesis for developing and augmenting a drive for self-determination and realization. A thought that has a drive for self-realization is a thought that before anything else secures its own ends. But to secure its ends, thought must issue and prioritize its own demands.

These demands first and foremost are concerned with wresting thought from heteronomous influences, be they associated with a higher authority, with the contingent conditions of its original setup, or with final or material causes. However, as these demands evolve, their focus shifts away from a resistance against the hold of heteronomy, toward an active articulation of the consequences brought about by autonomy. They change from demands of a realized thought to demands of a thought for which what is already realized—i.e., its current state or present instantiation—is not itself a *sufficient* expression of autonomy. This is a thought that makes its autonomy explicit by identifying and constructing its

possible realizabilities. Its demands are centered on the prospects of realization of thought by *different material realizers* (not to be confused with the abstract realizers or axioms of the program)*.* In other words, these demands revolve around the possibility of reconstituting thought outside of both what currently constitutes it and how it is constituted. They are the demands to reclaim and research the possibility of thought, but no longer under the limitative terms laid down by its native realizers (or constituents) or its present instantiation.

Accordingly, this reprogramming overhaul is not limited only to those material realizers or constitutive components and mechanisms that are directly at odds with thought's autonomy. It includes also those internal constitutive features that restrict the scope of thought's realizabilities or possible constructions. It does not matter whether such realizers are part of the biological evolution or sociocultural constitution of thought. As long as they exert heteronomous influences on the current realized state and functions of thought, or restrict the future prospects of thought's autonomy (the scope of its possible realizabilities), they are potential targets of an extensive reprogramming.

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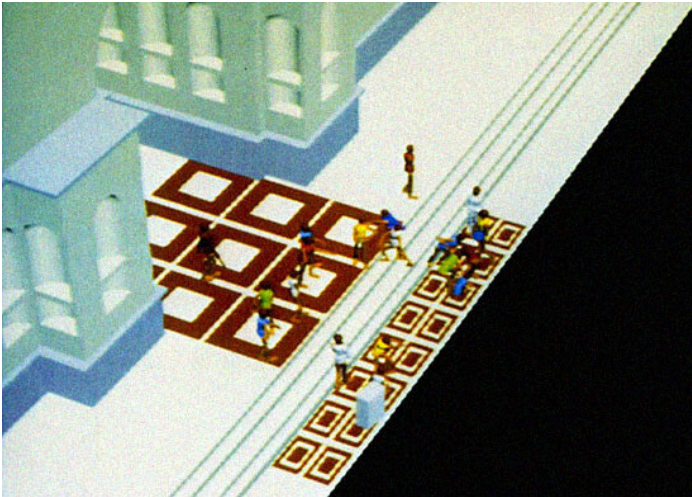
In order for thought to maintain its autonomy—in the sense of being able to institute and adjudicate its own ends—it must adjust or replace those conditions and constituents that impinge on its current state and functions. But for thought to be able to elaborate and follow the consequences of the autonomy of its ends, to render intelligible the ramifications of its possibility, it must free itself from those terms and conditions that confine it to a particular state of realization. This systematic move toward separating the possibility of thought from the circumscriptions of a singular state of realization is the beginning of a cognitive-practical inquiry into the possible realizabilities of thought. And it is precisely by investigating and constructing possible realizabilities of thought that the consequences of thought's autonomy and the ramifications of its possibility can be truly made intelligible.

In this sense, the inquiry into the possible realizabilities of thought is synonymous with an inquiry into the purposes of thought that are neither given in advance nor exhausted by its present instantiation. Indeed, the inquiry into the meaning and purposes of thought can only radically begin via a thoroughgoing theoretical and practical project aimed at reconstituting the possibility of thought outside of its contingently situated constitution and its current realized state. Determining what thought is, what its purposes are, and what it can do then becomes a matter of exploring and constructing different realizabilities of thought outside of its natural habitat.

Thought's program to institute its autonomous ends leads up to a phase in which thought is compelled—via the imperative of its time-general ends—to define and investigate its purposes by recasting its current state of realization. This phase marks a new juncture in the development of thought's autonomy for the reason that it involves the unbinding of both the realizabilities and purposes of thought. To this extent, the organized venture toward the functional realization of thought outside of its native home and designated format is in every sense a

program of the decontainment of thought. It is therefore a distinctly philosophical endeavor in that it normatively enacts an enduring philosophical wager, "thought cannot be contained": thought ought not to be contained.

What was initiated by philosophy's seemingly innocent axiom is now a program that directs thought to theoretically and practically inquire into its futures—understood as prospects of realizability that are asymmetric to its past and present. The thrust of this program is that the scope of its operations and constructive manipulations encompass both the realizer and the realized, the constituent and the constituted, what thought is made of and what thought manifestly is. As the ultimate expression of demands of thought, this transformative program is exactly the distillation of the perennial questions of philosophy—what to think and what to do—propelled forward by an as yet largely unapprehended force called philosophy's chronic compulsion to think.

§3. By reformatting thinking from a by-product of material and social organizations into a programmatic normative enterprise that rigorously inquires into its operational and constructive possibilities, philosophy introduces a vision of the artificial into the practice of thinking. Rather than a thought that is simply accustomed to the use of artifacts and has a concept of artificiality, this is a thought that is itself a practice of artificialization.

The concept of the artificial signifies the idea of craft as a recipe for making something whose purposes are not entailed by or given in its material ingredients even though they are afforded by their properties. These purposes should be understood not solely in terms of (external) purposes in which the product of the craft (the artifact) is used but also as potential functionalities related to possible realizabilities of the artifact itself regardless of its use or purpose of consumption. In this respect, the artificial expresses the complex and evolving interplay between external functionality (the context of use as the external purpose of the craft) and possible realizabilities of the artifact itself. This interplay can be seen as a harnessing process that couples the function as the use of the artifact with function as an instantiation of possible realizabilities of the artifact. By coupling these two categories of function, the process of artificialization produces or harnesses (in the constraining sense of "harness") new functionalities and purposes from the positive constraints established between the use and

30

realizabilities of the artifact.

The role of an artifact in practical reasoning is inherently double-faced to the extent that it is simultaneously determined by the established purpose and the realizabilities of the artifact itself. The structure of practical reasoning about artifacts (as in "artifact a is a means to bring about outcome c, so I ought to use a when in situation s as a means to c") is affected by this interplay between uses and realizabilities. If we take the purpose of an artifact (the established context of use) as premises for bringing about a certain outcome, realizabilities of the artifacts can be thought as the addition of new axioms with new terms that weaken the idempotency and monotonicity of entailment in a practical reasoning. Different instances of application for a given artifact may lead to different consequences or ends (weakening of idempotency), and the addition of new assumptions regarding the use of an artifact may change the end for which an artifact is a means (weakening of monotonicity).[1]

Artificialization can, therefore, be defined as a process aimed at functionally repurposing and exhibiting a vastly non-inertial and non-monotonic behavior with regard to consequences or ends. This repurposing can manifest as the augmentation of the existing realization of the artifact, the abstraction and transplantation of some existing function or salient property in a different or an entirely new context of use and operation, the readaptation of an existing use to a different instantiation of an artifact's realizabilities, and in its most radical form, the construction of both new uses and realizations by engaging in a craft that involves both a new mode of abstraction and a deeper order of intelligibilities (of materials and practices).

If what underlines the concept of artificialization is the constructive adaptation to different purposes and realizabilities, then in realizing its own ends and adapting its realization to the growing demands of such ends, thinking turns into a radical artificializing process. At its core, a thought amplified by philosophy to systematically inquire into the ramifications of its possibility—to explore its realizabilities and purposes—is thought that in the most fundamental sense is a rigorous artificializing program. This thought is at once dedicated to conceiving and adapting to new ends, and committed to a program of concrete self-artificialization. For a thought that has its own ends and demands, self-artificialization is an expression of its commitment to exploring its possible realizabilities, to reclaiming its possibility from heteronomous and limitative terms imposed by its natural realizers and native habitat. In other words, it is an expression of its commitment to the autonomy or rule of its ends.

However, in order for thinking to examine its possible realizabilities, it must first establish its inherent amenability to the process of artificialization. The first step is showing that thinking is not an ineffable thing but an activity or a function, special but not supernatural, and that it can be programmed, repurposed, and turned into an enterprise for the *design of agency*, in the sense that every step in the pursuit of this enterprise will have far-reaching consequences for the structure of this agency.

This is what is exemplified in its most resolute form in the earliest practices of philosophy, particularly the Cynic, Stoic, and Confucian proposals regarding the programmatic aspects of thinking: to understand thinking itself as an administrative function, to not isolate thinking from living but to treat life as a craft of thinking, rather than disposing of emotions and affects, giving them structure by bringing them in line with the ends of thought, and to demonstrate in every step of life the possibilities of thinking as a purpose-conferring and repurposable activity. Succinctly put, the common thesis underlying these programmatic philosophical practices is that in treating thought as the artifact of its own ends, one becomes the artifact of thought's artificial realizabilities.[2]

This is one of the most potent achievements of philosophy: by formulating the concept of a good life in terms of a practical possibility afforded by the artificial manipulability of thinking as a constructible and repurposable activity, it draws a link between the possibility of realizing thought in the artifact and the pursuit of the good. The idea of the realization of thinking in artifacts can be presented as an expression of thought's demand to expand its realizabilities. And therefore, it can be framed in the context of crafting a life that would satisfy a thought that demands the development of its possible realizabilities in whatever form or configuration possible—that is, a thought whose genuine intelligibility is in the exploration of what it can be and what it can do.

The craft of an intelligent life-form that has at the very least all the capacities of the present thinking subject is an extension of the craft of a good life as a life suiting the

subject of a thought that has expanded its inquiry into the intelligibility of the sources and consequences of its realization. Put it in another way, it is the design of a form of life appropriate and satisfying to the demands of a thought that not only has the theoretical knowledge of its present instantiation (the intelligibility of its sources) but also the practical knowledge of bringing about its possible realizabilities (the intelligibility of practices that can unfold its consequences).
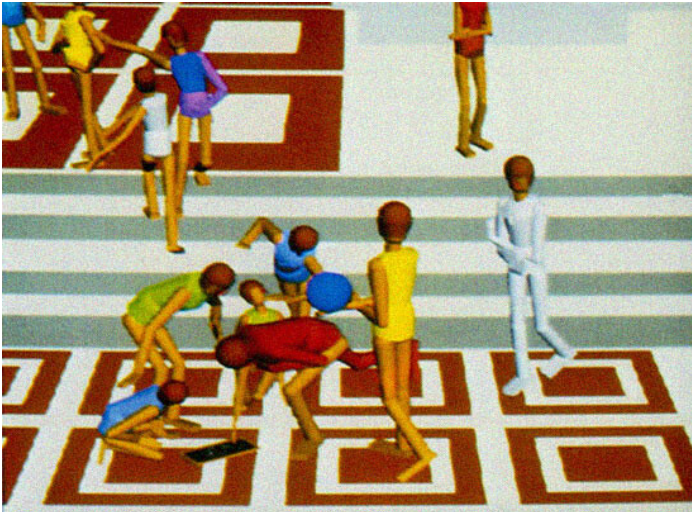
The second stage in demonstrating that thinking as an activity can indeed be artificialized involves the analysis of the nature of this activity. This analysis can be understood as an investigation into the sources or origins of the possibility of thinking (the different types of conditions necessary for its realization). Without this investigation, the elaboration and development of the consequences of thinking, its possible realizabilities, cannot gain momentum.

If thinking is an activity, then what is the internal logic or structure of this activity, how is it exercised, what does it perform, can it be analyzed into other more rudimentary activities, and what are the mechanisms that support these precursor activities? In this way, the philosophically motivated inquiry into the intelligibility of thinking sets the ground for a broader analysis of the nature of the manifest activity we call thinking.

Thinking is examined both in terms of its internal and special pattern-uniformities and in terms of the underlying and more general patterns in which these specificities are materially realized. In other words, the analysis of thinking as an activity encompasses two dimensions of thinking as a function: function as the internal pattern-uniformities of thinking, or rules that make up the performance of the activity as such; and function as mechanisms in which these rules or internal pattern-uniformities—i.e., the first sense of function—are materialized.

Accordingly, the philosophical examination of the nature of thinking bifurcates into two distinct but integrable domains of analysis: the explication of thinking in terms of functions or roles its contents play (the logico-conceptual order of thinking as such); and the examination of materialities—in the general sense of natural and social mechanisms—in which this logico-conceptual structure in its full richness is realized (the causal order pertaining to the materialization of thinking).

To this extent, the philosophical program canalizes the inquiry into the possibility of thinking as a programmable and repurposable activity into two broadly idealist-rationalist and materialist-empiricist naturalist fields. In doing so, it lays out the framework for specialized forms of investigation that are informed by the priorities of these fields. Roughly, on the one side, the linguistic and logical examinations that focus on the semantic, conceptual, and inferential structure of thinking (the linguistic-conceptual scaffolding of thinking); and on the other side, the empirical investigations dealing with material conditions (neurobiological as well as sociocultural) required for its embodiment.

Both trajectories can be seen as two vectors that deepen the intelligibility of thinking by analyzing or decomposing its function into more fine-grained phenomena or activities within logical and causal orders. Within this twofold analytic schema, phenomena or activities that were previously deemed as unitary may appear to be separate, and those considered as distinct may turn out to be unitary. The conceptual and the causal orders are properly differentiated only to be revealed as converging on some fundamental elementary level. Thinking is shown to be possible not in spite of material causes and social activities but by virtue of specific kinds of causes and activities. In this fashion, the deepening of the intelligibility of thinking as an activity joins the boundaries of these two fields, as the intelligibility of thinking—its realization—ultimately resides in an accurate integration of its logico-conceptual and material-causal dimensions.

Interestingly, one of the areas where the idealist-rationalist and materialist-empiricist trajectories have been converging in the most radical way has been computer science, as a place where physics, neuroscience, mathematics, logic, and linguistics come together. This has been particularly the case in the wake of recent advances in fundamental theories of computation, especially theories of computational dualities and their application to multiagent systems as optimal environments for designing advanced artificial intelligence.

The archetypal figure behind computational dualities is the concept of interaction in the sense of synchronic and asynchronic concurrent processes, or the interchange and permutation of roles among players, strategies, behaviors, and processes. The computation is the interaction of the

system with its environment, or an agent with other agents. But this interaction is presented intrinsically and nontrivially in that it is on-line, concurrent, negatively and positively constraining, internalized, and open (throughout computation the system remains open to different streams of input). Computational dualities have been shown to be responsible for the generation of complex cognitive and computational abilities through scaffolding processes between increasingly specialized and functionally autonomous frameworks of interaction with distinct computational properties. Through the study of dualities and their hierarchies, computer science has begun to bridge the gap between the semantic complexity of cognition and the computational complexity of dynamic systems, linguistic interaction, and physical interaction.[3]

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To be continued in "What Is Philosophy? Part II: Programs and Realizabilities"

All images: "The Study of Hidden Symmetries in Raphael's *The School of Athens*," from Guerino Mazzola, Detlef Krömker, and Georg Rainer Hofmann, *Rasterbild — Bildraster* (Anwendung der Graphischen Datenverarbeitung zur geometrischen Analyse eines Meisterwerks der Renaissance: Raffaels "Schule von Athen")

Reza Negarestani is a philosopher. He has contributed extensively to journals and anthologies and lectured at numerous international universities and institutes. His current philosophical project is focused on rationalist universalism beginning with the evolution of the modern system of knowledge and advancing toward contemporary philosophies of rationalism, their procedures as well as their demands for special forms of human conduct.

1
Idempotency and monotonicity of entailment are inference rules that directly operate on the judgments or the relations between antecedents and consequents. Idempotency of entailment states that the same consequences can be derived from many instances of a hypothesis as just from one ("A, B, B C" can be contracted to "A, B C" leaving the entailed consequence C intact). Monotonicity of entailment, on the other hand, means that the hypotheses of any derived fact can be arbitrarily extended with additional assumptions ("A C" can be assumed as "A, d C" where d is the additional assumption and C is the unchanged consequence). Here, the turnstile symbol denotes entailing. Antecedents are on the left-hand side of the turnstile,and consequents on the right-hand side. Idempotency of entailment implies the availability of antecedents as free resources (in the context of reasoning via artifacts, different instances of application or use for a given artifact do not change the outcome). And monotonicity of entailment implies context-independency of reasoning (extending the role of an artifact or adding new assumptions about its use in bringing about some ends does not alter the result).

2
For introductions to the philosophies of ancient Cynicism, Stoicism, and Confucianism, see: William Desmond, *Cynics* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2006); John Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2009); Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000).

3
Research on computational dualities and concurrency can be traced back to the works of Marshall Stone and Carl Adam Petri. Stone's application of mathematical dualities (bijective correspondence between sets and equivalence relations between categories as inverse functors) to Boolean algebra set up a framework for a deeper analysis of the semantics of information processing. Petri's contributions to computer science—most notably his Petri nets, which were originally invented to describe chemical processes—provided the necessary modeling tools for studying process execution and problems associated with concurrent computation, such as scheduling and resource management (see the "dining philosophers" problem). But the main breakthroughs in the study of computational dualities have only been made recently through the intersection of different lines of research on asynchronic models of concurrency in physical systems (see, for example, the work of Peter Wegner), mathematical and computational models of nonsequential interaction games (see Robin Milner, Andreas Blass, and Samson Abramsky), and substructural logics and proof theory, particularly the work of Jean-Yves Girard.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of Irwin—the artistic group that was and still is a part of the wider art movement known as "Neue Slowenische Kunst" (NSK). NSK has dominated the Slovene art scene of the past few decades and has influenced many artistic practices throughout Eastern Europe. At first glance, the art practice of Irwin seems to be a specific version of postmodernism. Indeed, in their works Irwin artists combine quotations from different artistic periods, styles, and movements in a way that is typical of Postmodern art of the 1980s and '90s. On the other hand, Irwin's practice is different from Western postmodernism in many decisive respects.

Boris Groys

NSK: From Hybrid Socialism to Universal State

Diplomatic passports of NSK members. Installation view of the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

Western postmodernism was a reaction against the Modernist canon—against the emergence of a new Modernist salon and the establishment of normative rules for the production and appreciation of art. In other words, postmodernism was a reaction against the academization of modernism. Indeed, in the mid-1970s the Modernist canon dominated Western art museums, institutions of art education, the art market, art history, and critique. The goal of postmodernism was to rehabilitate everything that was repressed and excluded by this canon: a certain type of figuration (Italian *transavanguardia*, German neo-expressionism), photography, cinema, performance, and so on. The same can be said of architectural postmodernism, which was directed against the Modernist architectural canon, and of literary postmodernism, which rehabilitated literary trash of all kinds. Postmodernism privileged reproduction vs. production, secondarity vs. originality, anonymity vs. individuality. However, Western postmodernism also had its own utopian dimension. Postmodernism dreamt of infinite flows of desire and information and of a "hive

mind" or "crowd mind" that had the power to undermine every attempt to control and secure the meaning of individual signs: all these signs were supposed to be turned into empty, free-floating signifiers. Thus, even if Western postmodernism in its different forms was a reaction to late-Modernist formalism, it inherited a formalist attitude towards signs and images. All artistic forms were understood as zero-forms, devoid of any specific content or meaning. According to Postmodernist dogma, all content and meaning was permanently deconstructed by the anonymous processes of reproduction and dissemination. The only way to give meaning to art forms was to use them artistically in the here and now—the meaning of any particular form being totally dependent on its contextual use. And because all art forms were understood as empty—as mere forms without content—every individual artist had a right to combine and recombine them in every possible way. Thus, the famous "death of the author" was easily combined with the proclamation of unlimited artistic freedom and the vocabulary of forms inherited from the various artistic movements of the twentieth century. However, all these combinations and recombinations became, in the end, as empty as their individual parts.

The emergence of this type of postmodernism was not possible in Yugoslavia, nor anywhere else in Eastern Europe, because the conditions under which art was practiced there were completely different. First of all: the Modernist canon was never established, formalized, and institutionalized in Eastern Europe to the same degree that it was in the West. Even if Modernist trends were permitted in some Eastern European countries—or even welcomed, as in Yugoslavia—they did not have the same normative power as in the West. Here I mean the normative power supported by art institutions with an international reach, big money, and so on. But most importantly, art in general, and Modernist art in particular, was never totally depoliticized like it was in the West. In the Eastern European countries, public space remained controlled: the Postmodern vision of the totally free, potentially infinite flow of signs could never take hold there. Signs were not free-floating but politically charged—and the art forms that circulated in the same space were also politically charged. They were never experienced as empty signs that could get their meaning only through their individual artistic use.

Living in a Communist country, one still felt a close connection to the artistic practices of the early avant-garde from the beginning of historical communism. For a late-Socialist subject, the black square of Malevich was not merely a self-referential image that initiated the international zero-style of geometrical abstraction. Rather, in the Socialist countries the black square, as well as other images from the early Russian avant-garde, signified the beginning of the Communist era, with all its utopian aspirations. Similarly, old realist images didn't function as simple, politically innocent representations of landscapes

or city scenes, but symbolized the national tradition that was partially denied and partially ideologically reinterpreted by the regime. The same can be said about Socialist Realism and Nazi art. And the same can be said about late-Modernist art. It was experienced not as a production of empty signifiers, but as a commitment to a Western orientation and Western cultural values. In other words, every use of this vocabulary of images manifested not the creative freedom of an individual artist, but a certain political stance within the sociopolitical field in which this artist lived. Thus, under Socialist conditions the artist could not, in the Western Postmodern manner, operate freely with empty art forms understood as language without content. Using a Heideggerian phrase, one can say that under socialism, *die Sprache spricht* (language speaks): the forms that the artist uses are always already ideologically charged. Their combinations are also ideologically charged—and so these combinations have their own message that not merely undermines but rather overdetermines any subjective artistic message.
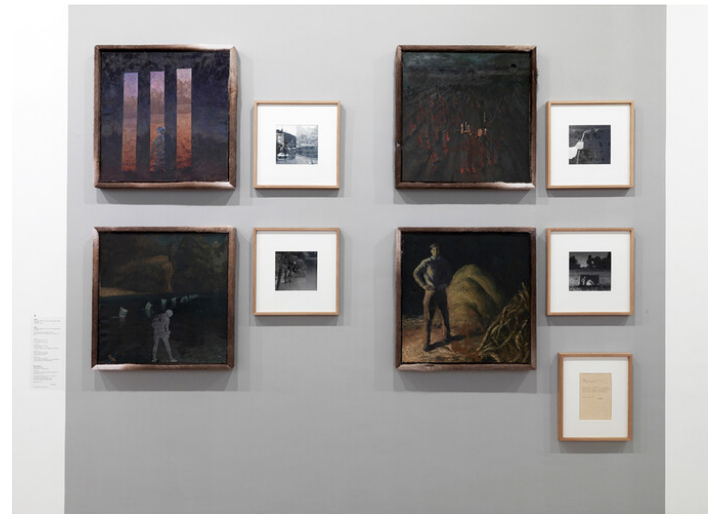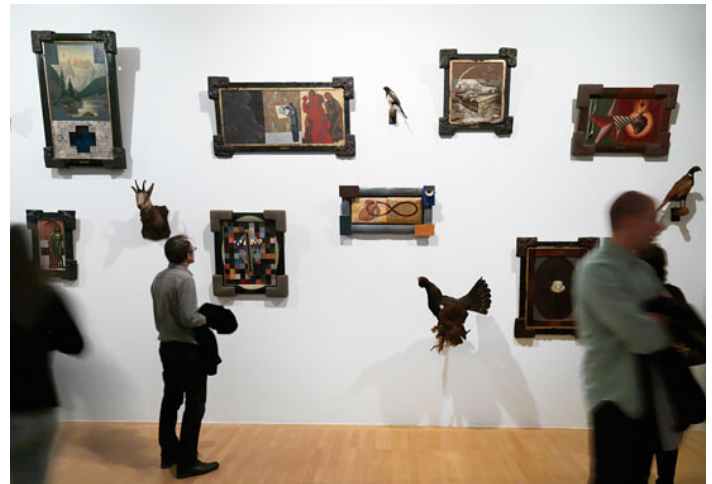

Installation view of IRWIN, Birds of Feather (Like to Like): IRWIN-OHO, 1985, at the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

1. Socialist and Post-Socialist Hybridity

When Heidegger says *die Sprache spricht*, he means that it is the community, the nation, that speaks through the artist because any language is basically always a national language. This is precisely the point at which the art strategies of Irwin and other late- and post-Socialist artists emerge. The event of historical communism produced a broken national identity in Eastern European countries. Communist ideology was and still is universalist and internationalist—in every country, its worst enemy was the

local nationalism, which was regularly characterized as "bourgeois nationalism." However, at the same time, the epoch of historical communism was defined by Stalin's decision to build "socialism in one country." From the beginning it became clear that the program of socialism in one country would lead to the rebirth of nationalism—and in a certain way, it did. The Socialist camp began to split along national lines: after Soviet communism we got Yugoslav communism, Chinese communism, Albanian communism, and so on—up to the Eurocommunism of the Italian and French Communist parties. However, these national communisms remained committed to a universalist message. In a certain way, this was already prefigured by the Stalinist definition of Socialist Realism: Socialist in content and Realist (in fact, national) in form. This definition presupposed, of course, that the Socialist content remained identical throughout all the different national forms. However, the national form began to shape and thus fragment the Socialist content. But this fragmentation did not produce a simple return to traditional national cultures—understood as specific, even idiosyncratic ways of life. Every particular communism had a claim to represent the universal and authentic truth of communism—interpreting the Communists of other countries as "revisionists." Here the analogy with Christianity is obvious, as the latter was also split along national lines during the period of Reformation and religious wars. Yugoslavia understood its own national version of socialism as transnational—first of all because Yugoslavia was a union of several national republics, but also because Yugoslavia was an important member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Thus, late Socialist and post-Socialist national identity could not be taken for granted. Accordingly, the language, including the visual language, that artists were supposed to use was not given but reconstructed. Now let us consider what such a project of reconstruction actually means.

The goal of national reconstruction was explicitly formulated by the Irwin group at the beginning of its activities. It's no accident that the word "retro-avant-garde" has been used to characterize Irwin's practice and, more generally, NSK's practice. "Avant-garde" here is basically constructivism. Reconstruction is the construction of the past for the future, and at the same time the construction of the future as work on the past. Retrospectively, one can say that Irwin and NSK did this work of reconstruction better than any other Eastern European artists or artist groups. There are different possible explanations for this. It may have been because Slovenian identity was broken at different places and along different lines; there was not only the Socialist, Yugoslavian past, but also the Nazi past, which could not simply be ignored: the Nazi past was related to a certain more traditional Germanness in Slovenian identity. It may have also resulted from the fact that the level of theoretical reflection and philosophical awareness was much higher in Slovenia than in other late- and post-Socialist countries. Whatever the reason, the Irwin

Installation view of IRWIN, Was ist Kunst, 1984-, at the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

group found a better solution to the problem of broken identity than many other artists and art theoreticians—in fact, the only possible solution. This solution was, like any true solution, very simple. Instead of trying to repair the broken identity, Irwin integrated into this identity the forces that were supposed to have broken it: the radical avant-garde, Socialist Realism, and Nazism. All these forces that had denied a separate identity to Slovenian art were interpreted by Irwin and NSK as forces that had modernized this identity. A certain combination of the revolutionary Russian avant-garde, Socialist Realism, and Nazi art retroactively became the image of the Slovenian avant-garde. Could one say that this Slovenian avant-garde never existed, that it was simply a later invention, a construction of the NSK? Yes and no. Yes, because all these phenomena were imposed on Slovenian cultural identity and not historically produced by it. And no, because even if all these ideological and artistic attitudes came from abroad, their particular combination was characteristic only of Slovenia, and not of any other place on Earth. So it is enough to reevaluate this combination, to perceive it as authentic, as being an integral part of the genuine historical fate of the Slovenian nation instead of being imposed from outside, to be able to reconstruct and not merely to construct the Slovenian avant-garde as a part of Slovenian cultural identity. And that is precisely what NSK did.

In this way Irwin also substantially expanded the field of art forms available to artists living under standard conditions of postmodernity. At first glance this seems paradoxical because Irwin has operated in the relatively closed late-Communist/post-Communist ideological space. But this expansion of artistic vocabulary has its explanation. Indeed, the Postmodern free and allegedly unlimited play of empty, or rather floating, signifiers was based on its own rules of exclusion and censorship. The

ideologically motivated art of Socialist Realism and Nazi art was excluded from this play of signifiers. The explanation for this exclusion is simple enough. One had moral scruples when emptying art forms of their content, and the content of Socialist Realism and Nazi art seemed too toxic, too contagious to be completely removed through the operation of aesthetic purification. This is why the Holocaust and other crimes of the twentieth century were proclaimed to be "unrepresentable." One feared that if the related images were allowed to join the multitude of modern art forms, they would in turn be deconstructed and emptied, and would begin to function as pure aesthetic objects. In this way their toxic, contagious character (which will never really go away) would become neglected—and thus, these images could slowly infect the whole field of modern art forms. This anxiety regarding the infection of aesthetic form by ideological content is still so strong that images from the period of Socialist Realism and Nazi art are still excluded from the contemporary system of art representation. Here we have a pretty strong form of censorship. But the same form of censorship also has weak versions. For example, when I traveled through Middle America I saw a lot of artworks from the period of the New Deal—with explicitly progressive, political, ideological content. These artworks (mostly murals, especially by Thomas Hart Benton) are hardly represented in standard American art history—one struggles to find catalogues or books about them.

Installation view of one of the NSK department rooms at the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

For Irwin this ideological, toxic character of artforms referring to totalitarian regimes was not such a problem—because for Irwin all art forms are ideological and toxic to the same degree. Irwin does not see art forms as empty signifiers—and thus Irwin has no reason to suppress certain images as ideological. So Irwin shows that if we accept that all signs are ideological to the same degree, we become much freer in our choice of artistic forms and means than if we believe that signs can or must be empty. The remobilization of signs from the early avant-garde as well as totalitarian art was used by Irwin to give more energy to their project of reconstructing Slovenian national cultural identity. "Retro-avant-garde" here means not only the reenactment of certain avant-garde attitudes and gestures, but also—and maybe primarily—the influx of avant-garde energies into Irwin's artistic practice. The general mood of postmodernity was a certain melancholy after the end of the love affair with utopia. However, the project of reconstructing Slovenian national identity required some utopian energy—energy that Irwin got from the sources of radical modernity.

One can ask, of course, whether we need national cultural identities at all today—be they broken or unbroken, simple or hybrid. Is it not better to swim in anonymous flows of information and operate globally in our time of globalization? Yes, today we live in the age of globalization and the internet. Both are effects of the end of the Cold War and the erasure of the ideological divide between the West and the East. However, instead of producing the infinite flows of desire and information that were supposed to undermine and ultimately kill the Modernist subject of self-reflection and self-control, the internet has delivered an almost unlimited power to algorithmically organize surveillance and control. The cultural aspect of globalization also hasn't turned out the way many people initially expected.

In fact, contemporary globalization is the direct opposite of the modern ideal of internationalism and universality. The world of globalization is not a world of international solidarity or shared cultural values. Nor is globalization the realm of the anonymous "crowd mind" as it was celebrated by postmodernism. Rather, it is the world of the global competition of everybody against everybody. This competition pushes the subject who participates in it to mobilize his or her own human capital. And human capital, as described, for example, by Michel Foucault, is primarily the cultural heritage that is mediated by the family and milieu in which an individual grows up. That is why the contemporary logic of globalization, unlike Modernist internationalization and universalization, leads to cultural conservatism and an insistence on one's own cultural identity. The combination of globalization and extreme cultural conservatism defines the politics and art of our time.

My Western colleagues ask me from time to time: How are the Russian and Eastern European artists doing—did they already move on from Communist and post-Communist times? This question actually means: Have they already forgotten the repressions and traumas of communism and become what they always were—Polish, Slovenian, or Russian? From this perspective, for Eastern European

artists to move on means, in fact, to go back—back to a national cultural identity before it was allegedly repressed and distorted by communism. Here, of course, emerges the question of how far they have to go back to be able to rediscover and reappropriate their own cultural capital. Obviously, Russians have to go back to at least 1916. Maybe to 1913. This means that on the way to post-Communist normalization and globalization they have to abandon and subtract from their cultural capital almost the whole twentieth century. The situation of other post-Socialist countries is not so dire—they have to go back merely to the period before World War II. But they still lose several decades—and, in terms of cultural capital, this is not such a negligible amount of time.

Thus, today the old line between the West and the East reemerges in a different form. The West is not supposed to subtract certain periods of its cultural history from its cultural capital (maybe the only exclusion here is the German art of the Nazi era). This produces obvious inequality in the conditions of cultural accumulation and capitalization. However, on the level of official cultural policy, this Western point of view has also been adopted by Eastern European countries. This culturally conservative discourse currently dominates the public scene in Russia. But also in Eastern Europe, communism is understood mostly as a mere interruption, interval, or delay in the so-called normal development of these countries—a delay which, once it was over, left no traces other than a certain appetite to "make up for lost time" and build capitalism of the Western variety. The project of building capitalism through the erasure of the leftovers of communism reminds one of the well-known politics of erasing the leftovers of capitalism, with the goal of building communism.

Installation view of the NSK common room, at the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Matija Pavlovec. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

One can say that this is the anti-Communist perspective on the phenomenon of Eastern European "real socialism."However, Western leftist intellectuals share this perspective, even if they do so for different reasons. When it came to the Soviet Union, Western intellectuals were convinced that they understood Marxism much better than Russians did—and this insight was enough for them to see the entirety of Soviet culture as a historical mistake. So for them, any further investigation of Soviet culture made no sense because it was clear from the beginning that this culture was based on an interpretation of Marxism that was simply wrong (dogmatic, primitive, and so forth). State socialism of the Soviet variety was seen as a perversion and a betrayal of the Communist ideal, a totalitarian dictatorship that was more a parody of communism than its true fulfillment. Thus, from the position of the Western Left, real socialism also looks like a mere delay—this time, a delay in the development of the communist ideal. Thus, there is a consensus among the Left and the Right in the West that the Eastern European Communist experiment should be forgotten. Both the Left and the Right reject "historical communism," or "national communism," or "communism in one country" because it offers a peculiar mixture of particular national traditions and the universalist Communist project. The conservatives hate communism for contaminating the national traditions that they want to purify from everything Communist. And the Neo-Communists want, on the contrary, to remove all the elements of Russianness, Chineseness, and so on, to restore the Communist ideal in its absolute purity.

Indeed, Stalin's project of building socialism in one country led to the hybridization of communism and nationalism—and thus to a certain folklorization of communism and the artistic avant-garde. By "folklorization" I mean the integration of Communist ideology and avant-garde art into networks of legends and myths that constitute the historical memory of a particular people, or rather a particular nation. Socialist revolutions inscribed political utopias and the artistic avant-garde into the mass culture of the countries in which these revolutions took place, to a degree that was unthinkable for the countries of the West. For a contemporary post-Soviet citizen there is no basic difference between Malevich's black square, Mayakovsky's yellow vest, Lissitzky's red wedge that beats the whites, and jokes about Chapaev and Pet'ka.

The emergence of this new folklore, or "kitsch," was diagnosed by Clement Greenberg in his famous essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" from 1939. At the end of this essay Greenberg formulates the hope that the avant-garde will be saved by international socialism, i.e. Trotskyism. André Breton, in his manifesto-like text "On the Time When the Surrealists Were Right" (1935), takes a similar position. He quotes the somehow naïve-sounding letters about loving one's mother and respecting one's parents published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* as a reason for his final break with the Soviet Union. (Obviously these letters

were kitsch for him.)

However, it is precisely this Socialist/post-Socialist folklore, or if one wants, kitsch—this mixture of Communist tradition and national cultural identity—that is used as material by many contemporary Russian and Eastern European artists. Irwin is here again an especially good example because they practice the folklorization of the avant-garde in a very systematic and conscious manner, combining avant-garde images with heavy, traditional-looking frames, placing them together with deer heads and thus referring to the atmosphere of a provincial *stube*, and so forth. One speaks about modern antiquarianism. Irwin makes modern folklore.

It is possible to find other examples of this folklorization of modernity all across Eastern Europe. The use—or better yet, the production—of folklore is a Romantic tradition. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, romanticism was a reaction to the collapse of the universalism of the French Enlightenment and the failure of the French Revolution. Romantic poetry and art, with their mixture of desire and horror, the beautiful and the sublime, were manifestations of nostalgia for revolutionary times. Our time—the time after the end of the great universalist projects and secular utopias of the twentieth century—very much reminds one of the nineteenth century: it is dominated by the same combination of open markets, nationalism, and cultural conservatism. Under these conditions only art is able to maintain the memory of the hybrid, national communisms of an earlier time. And it is precisely this memory that constitutes the main cultural capital of contemporary Eastern European artists and writers.

Installation view of the exhibition NSK from Kapital to Capital, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2015. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Courtesy Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

2. The NSK State

Among many other things, this memory is a memory of a Communist internationalism that was formulated in opposition to the project of globalization, understood as the creation of open global markets—the process of economic globalization initially started and, as stated above, was partially realized already in the nineteenth century. At that time—or even earlier, in the eighteenth century—emerged the correlative project of a world culture in which all particular national cultures would be included and dissolved. This vision of world culture is, of course, a fascinating one. However, the question remains: Can this vision be realized by the power of open markets alone? Of course, cultural products, like all other cultural commodities, have become globally accessible. But cultural products are not consumed like other commodities. If I consume bread, it disappears after I eat it. If I buy a car, it becomes my property and can be used—and also ruined—only by me. However, cultural products are consumed in such a way that they do not disappear in the act of consumption. Thus, they need archives to be preserved—libraries, museums, universities. Open markets are not able to create and sustain such cultural institutions—this is a task, historically and today, for national states. Art and culture in general function today in this ambivalent situation: they are globalized as commodities but remain preserved as parts of national cultural heritage. There are no international museums, libraries, or universities. Of course, one can argue that the internet is such an international archive—and this is partially true. But the internet is based on the following simple principle: it answers the questions that you ask it. The internet does not give you information that you do not want to know. And people usually ask for information they are taught to ask for. In this sense the internet cannot substitute for national educational institutions. Beyond this, the internet is in private hands—and thus reflects the cultural identity of the American corporations that own it. Irwin's answer to this situation was the creation of the NSK state. Here we have the rehabilitation, or the artistic reenactment, of the Hegelian/Marxist idea of a universal state, which already in the nineteenth century was opposed to the capitalist vision of globalization.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a book that seemed to capture the mood of the time was Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). This book was mostly interpreted as a celebration of the victory of the West over historical communism and the impossibility of further social change. In fact, the book was not celebratory but rather pessimistic ("the last man"). The figure of the end of history was initially formulated by Alexandre Kojève in the lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that he gave at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris from 1933 to 1939. This course was regularly attended by leading French intellectuals such as Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, André Breton, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Raymond

Aron. The transcripts of Kojève's lectures circulated in Parisian intellectual circles and were widely read, notably by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Fukuyama was a student of Leo Strauss, who himself admired Kojève but believed that Kojève described the end of history too optimistically—due to the influence of Marx and his historical optimism. Strauss followed Nietzsche in believing that the post-historical mode of existence is the realm of the last man, the realm of decay and decline. Actually, at the end of his life Kojève also became much more skeptical about the post-historical condition. Fukuyama shares this pessimistic viewpoint and follows Kojève very closely in his interpretation of history and its end. However, he misses the central point in Kojèvian discourse. For Kojève the end of history is marked by the emergence of a universal and homogeneous state. The end of history means political and not merely economic globalization. So from the Kojèvian point of view we are still not at the end of history. The universal state remains utopian—it has to be implemented, but it has not been implemented yet.

The NSK state is precisely such a utopian universal state, built on the territory of art. What the artists practice here is a kind of Romantic bureaucracy—the artist becomes a bureaucrat, a clerk of the nonexistent universal state. In his famous essay "La trahison des clerks" (The Betrayal of the Clerks, 1927), Julien Benda aptly described the ethos of post-Hegelian modern bureaucracy. He named its members "clerks." The word "clerk" is often translated as "intellectual." But in fact, for Benda the intellectual is a traitor of the clerk's ethos, because the intellectual prefers the universality of his or her ideas to the duty of universal service. The true clerk does not commit himself to any particular worldview—even to the most universalist one. The clerk, rather, serves others by helping them to realize their own particular ideas and goals. Benda saw the clerk primarily as a functionary, as an administrator in the framework of the enlightened, democratic state that is ruled by law.

Today the state—even if it is internally organized in the most universalist way—remains a national state. Its clerks, notwithstanding their universalist ethos, are necessarily embedded in the apparatuses of power that pursue particular, national interests. This embeddedness is one of the reasons why the traditional clerk ethos, as described by Benda, has become utopian.

One can argue that the contemporary artworld tries to compensate for the lack of a universal state. Here one has to remember that Kojève was not only a follower of Hegel but also a nephew of and commentator on Kandinsky. Indeed, there is an inner affinity between the modern state and modern art: both believe in the predominance of form over content. The modern state is a form—a beautiful form. The true bureaucrat—or true "clerk"—serves this form before he loves it, because his thinking is formalistic through and through. The bureaucrat who serves not the form but the "content," be it the content of his own desires or the desires of others, is a corrupt, bad bureaucrat. The same can be said about the Modernist artist: he serves the form and tries to avoid corrupting it through his personal psychology or through external influences, motives, interests, and goals. As stated above, Conceptual and even Postmodern art inherits this service to pure form. Of course the artist, as also a bureaucrat, cannot be completely immune to corruption through content of different kinds. But both see their profession as an attempt to resist this corruption and to serve the beautiful form of art or the state as selflessly as possible. This concerns not only the creation but also the presentation of art in public space—the task in which art and politics necessarily collaborate.

In this respect the figure of the independent curator is especially interesting. Earlier curators were appointed by the state. Today, so-called international curators appoint themselves. In their curatorial practice they navigate among many private, institutional, and local interests, but their goal is to create an image of international art. In this sense they act as appointees of a nonexistent universal state. The contemporary international curator is a Romantic bureaucrat. NSK creates not merely a curatorial program but a Romantic state in which every participant—every curator or writer or artist—becomes a bureaucrat, one who is responsible for the well-being of the state, and who is selfless and conscious of his or her social duties. This artistic appropriation of the state and state bureaucracy seems paradoxical because the artist is supposed to be an anarchist. But anarchy and institutional critique are good when there are art institutions. In Eastern European countries though, art institutions are not very strong—and the art market is not especially powerful. In this situation artists have to create art institutions themselves—together with the state that is theoretically responsible for maintaining these institutions. Here again the artists of Irwin demonstrate their precise grasp of the current cultural and political situation; they thus announce the era in which all people will become citizens of their state—or of any other universal state.

X

Boris Groys is Professor of Aesthetics, Art History, and Media Theory at the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. He is the author of many books, including *The Total Art of Stalinism*, *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, *The Communist Postscript*, *Going Public*, and *Art Power*.

1.

You wouldn't think of Marx as a dancer. The image of him waltzing in his overcoat and with his beard is absurd, the next best thing to having him play in a Monty Python football match. For decades, Marx was as static as his Highgate headstone, a toppled monument to a struggle consigned to the ash heap of history, which itself was prematurely declared to be over. But history continues and repeats itself with a vengeance, even if the movements are faster, broader, and deeper than ever. The basic laws of motion still apply; capital still circulates objects, people, and memories as commodities, and that includes Marx himself, who is once again in his element, in perpetual movement.

In fact, Karl Marx spent much of his life walking. There are stories of the strolls he took with his betrothed and with her father and brother, with Engels, and with other friends. When he was ill, he took a holiday of hikes in the North of England and said he'd turned into a walking stick. Then, of course, there were Sunday rambles with his daughters during which he told them tall tales of a magic shop with wares that always return to their shelves sooner or later. Witnesses describe his angry pacing after arguments. Even when he was home, he would pace up and down. A worn piece of parquet, a mark from Marx's pacing, inevitably appeared any place he lived.

Marx paced up and down in his apartment because there were times when he couldn't sit still for long. Aside from arthritis and gout, he suffered from boils. "The bourgeoisie will never forget my carbuncles," he wrote to Engels in 1867. One hundred and forty years later, a team of medical experts analyzed his letters and concluded that it was joint pain, indigestion, and blood poisoning that made his writing so violent and convulsive. Why else hate capitalism so? One answer to such pathologizations of Marx's "overly negative" attitude toward the age of capitalist production is that it was the rhythm of pacing and sitting in pain that gave Marx's writing not only its verve, but also its structure. Hence the montage aspect of texts like *Capital*, quite radical for a nineteenth century obsessed with continuity. Marx switches back and forth from economic formulas to passionate, violently poetic literary writing, and we can imagine the interruptions as periods of evermore agitated pacing. The movement of pacing leaves its traces on texts just like it leaves its traces on the floor, we could say. But is that really the boldest way of answering the bourgeois medical commission?

2.

Actually, there is a quite a bit of dancing in Marx. To begin at the beginning, there are his poems, written for his distant love and ballroom baroness, Jenny von

David Riff
Was Marx a Dancer?
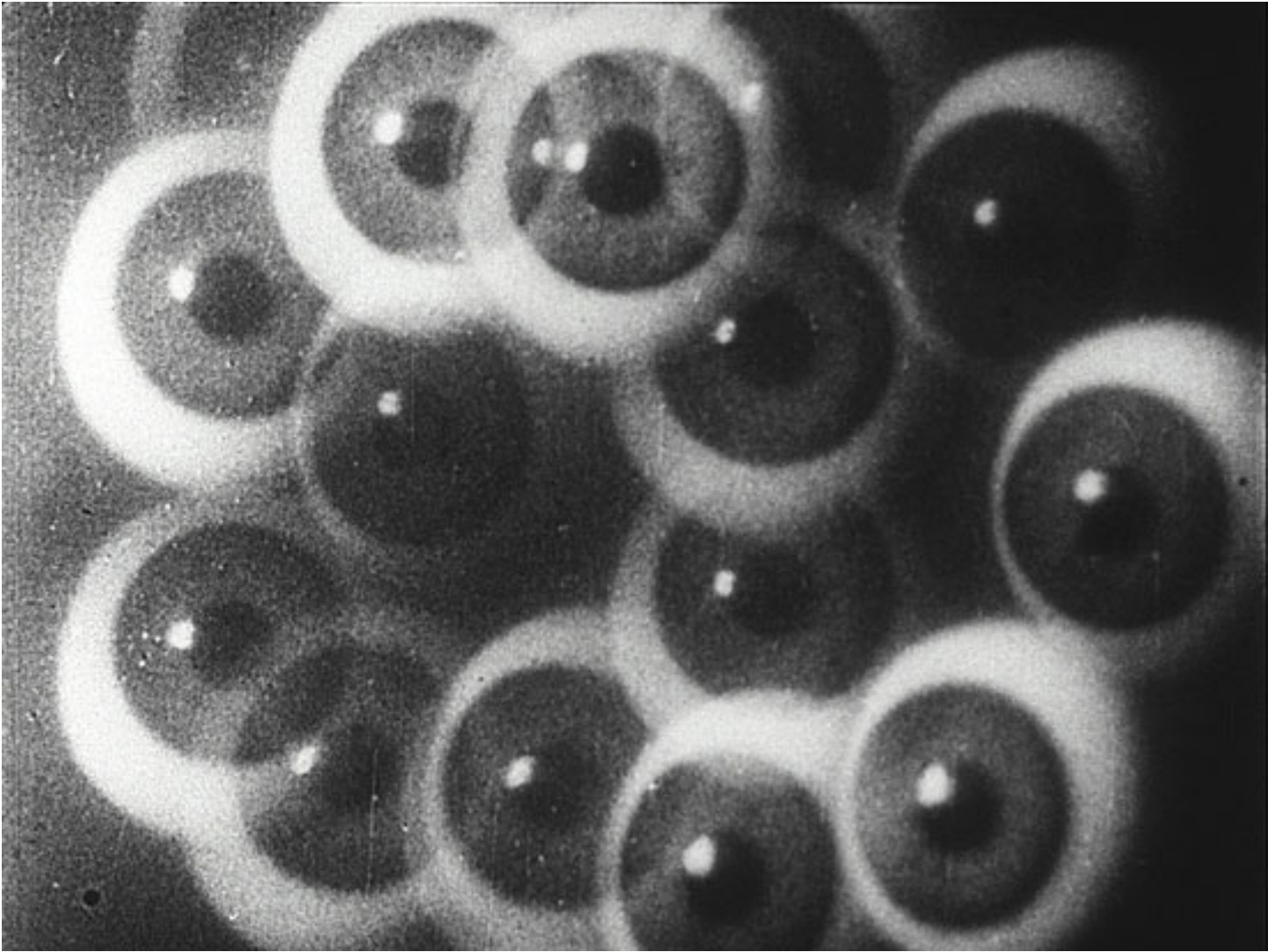
Hans Richter, Filmstudie, 1926. 3 minutes, 54 seconds.

Westphalen, who waited for him for seven long years while he studied to get his degree. Marx's poetry reaches out to its promised partner with memories of the ballroom, or so one imagines, interrupted by long, if chaperoned, afternoon strolls. The verses whirl and twist, curl and rust. These are generic salon rhythms, hammered out somewhat mechanically, but the goal is earnest enough: to protect transcendent love and shared ideals from the dirty world. The muses dance as the stars dance overhead in the sky, while the real world is a theater of cavorting monkeys. Young Marx is a Fichtean idealist: the only hope against chaos, contingency, and prose is pure poetic subjectivity, which lives in that other world, the world of ideas and purely intellectual movements.

Torn by the split between the Ideal and the Real, Marx the poet soon turns to prose. First he tries his hand at an absurdist novel, called *Scorpion and Felix*, heavily inspired by Lawrence Sterne's *Tristam Shandy*. Full of abstruse philological excursions, bombastic polemics, and obscure metaphorical collisions, there are nevertheless lyrical moments where he pauses, as if to remember his older persona. Marx's narrator at some point finally detaches his gaze from a barroom girl's blue eyes (as common as water in the Spree, he remarks haughtily, quoting Heine) and recalls the deep brown eyes of his beloved, where he once again sees the realm of the Ideal. Again, here, a Greek chorus dances its round, self-absorbed in its own limitations, needing no audience other than itself. It is a classical image, but one that arises like a childhood memory in a world out of joint, a world where epics—as Marx notes here for the first of many times—have become near-impossible. It was a sense of this impossibility that brought his literary activities to a standstill until he started writing as a philosopher.

The dancing stars of Marx's juvenile poetry turn into atoms dancing in a ray of light, as he writes his dissertation on the cosmic models of the ancient materialists Democritus and Epicurus. There is something

subversive in Young Marx's interest in these Hellenistic metaphors for social motion, metaphors Hegel had largely ignored in favor of the Stoics and the Skeptics, from whose dialectic of resignation and critique of the Roman Empire he then derived Christianity. Marx, for his part, contrasts the mechanical materialist Democritus with the more dialectical Epicurus. Both explained the universe as a storm or vortex of atoms falling in the void, but in Epicurus's version, each atom diverges or deviates in its own particular way because of its peculiar individual form. It is precisely this deviation that makes the atom's path into a curve, and one that must now intersect with other trajectories. As a result, atoms collide, attracted and repulsed by one another, allowing the world to emerge.

Marx's interest in Epicurus and his Roman student Lucretius is nothing literal, instead offering a kinetic metaphor for the social dynamics of the nineteenth century. The idea to look for such metaphors in late antiquity was something held in common by Hegel and his latter-day pupils, the Left Hegelians, to which Marx belonged at the time. Heir to the Enlightenment tradition of reading contemporary politics through the ideals of antiquity, the Left Hegelians were compelled by the sobering decades following the French Revolution to shift their focus from the ideals of Greek democracy to the "iron rule" of the Roman Empire and its strange mixture of liberal constitutionalism and absolutism.

It was this period that Hegel saw as crucial to the emergence of Christianity and the "modern" world spirit. The image of the Savior is a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the atomized, individuated subject and its dialectical counterpart, the solitary absolute ruler. Marx counterposes this model with that of Epicurus. In that world, the Ancient Greek gods live on in the intermundia in "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur," unconcerned with human affairs. But in the real world, the falling atoms are in constant motion, colliding and forming new community-molecules. At the same time, each atom's divergence is a sign of its autonomy, a self-identity no less imbued with singularity or "quiet grandeur" than the noblest gods, and one that survives even the most explosive collisions. There is something profoundly suggestive about the Epicurean and Lucretian visions of the world as a mass of atom-individuals, spinning and colliding in a vortex. We can see this vortex in pictures of the October Revolution's crowds, in the crowds of May 1968, at Tahrir, caught in the drone-eye dispositive of power. This is no Greek choir, but rather an aleatory materialism of bodies "thrown" into processes of subjectification and encounter as strangely baseless, variable, and contingent as falling rain.
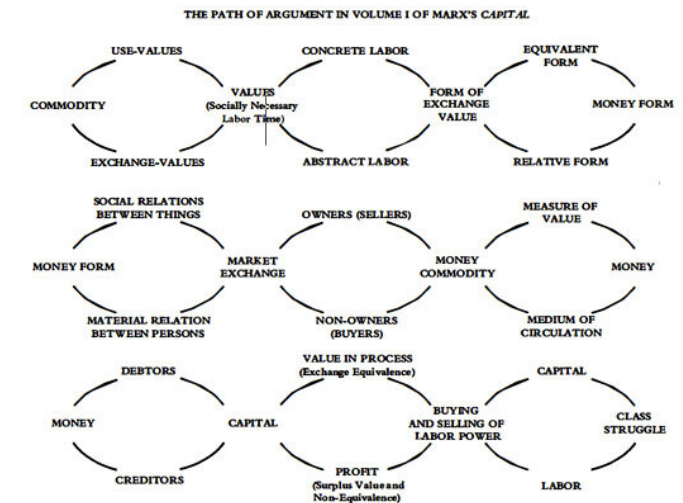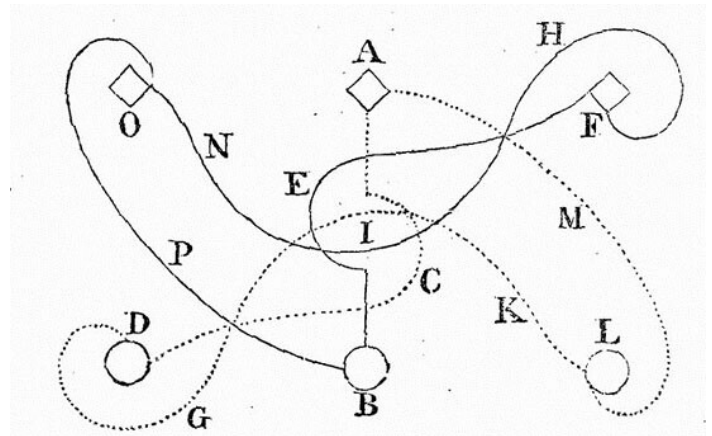
Above: An illustration from the book A Complete System of English Country Dancing (1820) represents the movement between multiple pairs of dancers. Below: A diagramatic explanation of Marx's arguments in Volume I of Capital.

3.

Marx's texts are not only in motion, they are about motion; something strangely kinetic survives the transition from poet to philosopher. These traces of movement are far from contingent. You might think they are only pretty words and lovely metaphors, but in fact, it is the conjecture of this text that at strategic places, there appear dance marks that anticipate Marx's entire model of capital as an accelerating dynamic of accumulative-expropriative circulation that could, at a crucial point, become revolution.

One great example of such an anticipation is a famous line where Marx says that the goal of criticism is not just empty philosophizing, but to "make the petrified conditions dance by playing them their own tune." This quote comes from one of Marx's first overtly revolutionary texts, *A*

Contribution to the Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right (1843), most famous for its description of religion as an opiate for the people, and for its first mention of the proletariat as a revolutionary class. The nebulous realm of ideology is easy to criticize, Marx is saying, its fogs relatively easy to dispel, but the real conditions it obscures are petrified, frozen, motionless. That is, historically shaped, politically negotiable conditions appear as transhistorical, nonnegotiable truths. All the "music" of social warmth freezes and coagulates into institutional architecture, which can only be unfrozen if you remind it what it is for and what it is made of. Criticism must fully situate itself in the real world that it wants to change, revealing the starkest symptoms and contradictions in their undisguised form, making shame more shameful by publicizing it, teaching people courage by showing them how to be terrified of themselves. The main goal of criticism is not to reform or improve an existing structure, but to reveal all of its flaws to the point that they provoke nothing but indignation.

It is then that conditions begin to "dance," as people upend and overturn an order of things that had only just seemed eternal. These "people" are no abstraction, taken over by a bourgeoisie eager to universalize its own values. For the first time, Marx foresees the rise of a class that really does represent the entire system's expropriative, objectifying, alienating logic. This class has nothing, it is naked and bare, yet its existence is completely objective, overdetermined by relations between objects, or object-agents, so to speak, in which humans themselves figure in a new, uncanny objectivity as people-things.

So when "petrified conditions dance," that dance involves both objects and people, object-agents and people-things, and even more, the human dancers have the tendency to disappear entirely as economics take the fore. Take the famous dancing table in the third or fourth paragraph of *Capital*, vol. 1, which proves more agile and nimble than if it were manipulated by spirit callers during a séance, once viewed from its side as a commodity, so full is it of metaphysical tricks and nuances. The table dances and turns, you see it from one side and then the other, as a collection of expended materials or as a salable piece of furniture with a certain value, or as a container of surplus labor, and all of these are different perspectives, like in a 3-D program. There are no detailed descriptions for object-animations in Sergei Eisenstein's diary-notes toward a film version of *Capital*, but given his use of such stop-motion sequences in *Strike* and *October*, we could easily imagine montage and counter-montage making the table dance quadrilles with so many other physical objects. What would the mute commodities say if they could talk, and which language would they speak, if not the language of dance? Their dance would demonstrate the role reversal of human-masters and object-slaves: humans are now slave to the movement of goods and provide their own immaterial services as if they were closed things rather than open processes.

Parisian dancer Louise Weber demonstrates her acrobatic cancan dance steps for the camera.

4.

There are traces of dancing in Marx's texts, and, far from coincidental, they gel with the overall nexus of aesthetics, politics, and social dynamics in his writing. But do these traces add up? More simply put, is there any actual choreography to be found in Marx's work? Is there any criticism of the wrong kinds of dances? Or any instruction on how to dance properly? If there is any place we should look for such a choreographic subcurrent, it is in Marx's writing on the Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath. Again, bourgeois historiography gives us a trivial reason: according to *Love and Capital*, a recent biography focusing on the relationship between Jenny von Westphalen and her husband, Jenny and Marx danced their way in 1848 at a Worker's Union Ball in Brussels, where, according to Mary Gabriel, the democratic dance floor no longer had a cordon between commoners and aristocrats, and Marx, surprisingly agile, turned and twisted his way through highly coordinated partner dances and quadrilles. So Marx danced, after all, with his ballroom baroness, on the eve of what was arguably the first failed proletarian revolution.

Marx's reflections upon the dramaturgy of this failure would produce one of his famous and most literary texts, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852), a profoundly performative essay on how 1848 prompted Louis Bonaparte to take power and install himself as Napoleon the Third *.* Marx pays great attention to how politics is acted out as a spectacle, how revolutions are performed as plays and thus accessible to a form of historical-dramatic criticism. Their history repeats itself, first as tragedy then as farce. The champions of commerce may be a sorry lot, yet they don heroic costumes taken from Ancient Greece or Imperial Rome, learning lines that remain alien until they are perfectly naturalized and the actor finally *becomes* his role, turning into a mad Englishman who mines gold in Ethiopia for the Egyptian pharaohs. The bourgeois revolution is a delusional historical theater, where grand epic expositions quickly turn into operettas, quickly ending in a *Katzenjammer* and a hailstorm of rotten vegetables.

Bourgeois revolution draws its rhetorical formulas and demands from the past, while the proletarian revolution of Marx's nineteenth-century modernity has to take its poetry from the future. And here, we could add, completing the conjecture, this poetry of the future is not theater but dance. A few paragraphs into the text's introduction, Marx says it clearly:

> Proletarian revolutions, such as those of the nineteenth century, engage in perpetual self-criticism, always stopping in their own tracks; they return to what is apparently complete in order to begin it anew, and deride with savage brutality the inadequacies, weak points and pitiful aspects of their first attempts; they seem to strike down their adversary, only to have him draw new powers from the earth and rise against them once more with the strength of a giant; again and again they draw back from the prodigious scope of their own aims, until a situation is created which makes impossible any reversion, and circumstances themselves cry out:
> Hic Rhodus, hic salta!
> Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze!
> [Here is the Rose, here dance!]

5.

That last line is cryptic, even hermetic, as suggestive as it might be for our purposes. To begin with, it is an argotization of the Latin original, then slightly changed and mistranslated. The correct quote, attributed to Seneca, is "Hic Rhodos, hic saltus," translated as "[The island of] Rhodos is here; here is where you jump." This is literally Aesopian language. It refers to the fable of *The Boastful Athlete*, in which an athlete comes to Athens and tells everybody how he jumped further than any man ever jumped and how this happened in Rhodes, where he had witnesses. Just ask them, they're in Rhodes … And then one smart person in the crowd said something important: forget about your stories and witnesses, Rhodes is here, and here is where you jump. Talk is cheap. Now act and prove it. Perform, don't just describe. To remain true and leave the realm of bullshitting, you must prove your ideas in reality. That is the meaning of the Latin saying, translated and collated in the sayings of Seneca.

Hegel plays with this phrase and considerably expands its meaning in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right*, which is what Marx means with his cryptic reference, himself performing a backtracking of the sort he has just described, and revisiting the text where he makes the petrified conditions dance. Hegel is addressing the gulf between the imaginary realm of "boasts" and "stories" and the real world of hard facts and physical proofs. Most

people would ask for such facts and proofs. But the point is that theory is a praxis, and the reason that appears in philosophy is the same reason that appears in the real world, so argues Hegel. Between them is a barrier of abstraction. How to overcome this barrier? Hegel answers with a burst of metaphorical mysticism. You must see the rose in the cross, he says. Overcome the funerary abstraction of martyrdom! See the potentiality of the messianic rebirth of a reason or spirit in a reality that oftentimes seems anything but reasonable. Everything real is reasonable, says Hegel. It sounds like an incredibly audacious statement. What does it mean?

To quote Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge from 1843, reason has always existed, though not always in a reasonable form. To Hegel, this means that philosophy, unlike the boastful athlete's claim, requires no external proof, just immanent consistency. Hegel says you only have to change the sentence a little, and something changes. You can change "Rhodos" to "rhodon," and "saltus" to "salta," and there you have it, a dance in roses. You can recognize reason as the rose in the cross, says Hegel, if you practice a certain kind of reconciliation, which grants a subjective freedom to accept what is reasonable in reality as something self-completed, even if it seems unreasonable, impure, or absurd. One can say that Hegel changes the meaning because he wants to shift it away into his own realm of mediations, and away from the direct action of physical veracity (jump) into the dancing dialectical spiraling world of antithetical proofs where negation is constantly negated (as the rose in the cross).

Marx's agenda was to put Old Hegel on his feet, to apply the dialectical method to parliamentary politics, censorship, law, and then most famously, political economy. This is exactly what happens here. Proletarian revolutions are stumble-dances and their history, we could add with Rosa Luxemburg, is one not of victory but of defeat. They activate resignation in something like a physical release, waiting for a timed, precise, protocoled moment to emerge from the improvised maelstrom of conditions, to leap into motion from a recovered stumble in a rose dance more glorious than the rarified philosopher's pose. Here is the rose, now dance. Even if you know you will fall. Realizing that you are about to stumble is not the same as resignation. Hegel's philosopher can only get past the barrier of abstraction by reconciling with finished or self-limited objects of an objective reality, by accepting the "real abstractions" and material artifacts of the real world as articulations of reason. Marx flips this around or turns it inside out: proletarian revolutions start, stop, fall, and rise. They constantly backtrack, break down, and remake the very objects that Hegel wanted to accept but that many a revolutionary has wanted to simply bypass or jump over.

Lenin would write a famous early book called *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, where he would heap abuse on Martov and the Mensheviks for their endless bourgeois

Hans Richter, Inflation, 1927.

backpedaling. But after the October Revolution, he himself would learn the tragic meaning of its inevitability. Ironically, the title of his book would resurface as the couplet closer of a joyous Odessa song from the Thirties, when it was briefly okay to dance the foxtrot, a memory of prerevolutionary Kiev and Salomon Shkylar's ballroom dancing school, where fat meets thin and spinster meets bachelor, and all the dances are a little stumbly and sick, a step to the left and a step to the right, one step forward, two steps back. Historical irony has it that this sounds like a short diagnosis of seventy years of Soviet experience, made from the happy-go-lucky perspective of a neofeudal present.

6.

So, in Marx's "Brumaire," there is the imperative to dance, to prove, to move of one's own volition, not just to tell tall tales of permanent revolution, where only words dance around their listener's ears. This is no subjective imperative, but an objective force, generated by the conditions themselves. You are not the inventor of the overall dramaturgy of the action, but as a subject, you must prove the audacity of your claims, not to be recognized or praised for actually performing a heroic feat, but simply because it is objectively necessary to act in an all-or-nothing situation. There are times when you can't just sit still, Marx is saying; you have to join the dancing, even if the choreography is all wrong.

A little later on in the "Brumaire," Marx describes such wrong choreographies. That is, he contrasts the first French Revolution with that of 1848 through increasingly physical metaphors of an imagined action on stage. The first French Revolution, according to Marx, follows an ascending path. It's a line of people symbolizing political parties. Those at the back are the most radical and push harder than those at the front, the most progressive parties furthest to the back pushing hardest of all. At some

47

point, Marx says, the person in front of the line is pushed aside, trampled down, and sent to the guillotine, and this process repeats until the most radical party has pushed everyone else aside. We could illustrate this through a simple exercise, but maybe we don't have to: it's easy enough to imagine recreating it in any situation where people are standing in line, such as outside a doorway. It's a process of elimination, maybe completely unethical (just like the pushy person at the back of the line), but tragically inevitable, a kind of political Darwinism in which only the fittest and most radical seem to survive, only to head for the guillotine themselves.

The Revolution of 1848, says Marx, is exactly the opposite. It's not a horizontal but a vertical line of people, like the town musicians of Bremen, where a rooster sits on the back of a cat standing on the back of a dog, standing on the back of a donkey. As this stack of people tries to move forward, it finds that motion is nearly impossible without dropping somebody. The most radical parties are the weakest, and they are on the top. When the stack of people moves forward, they fall off. First the proletarian party falls from the shoulders of the democrats, who themselves are shrugged off and dropped by the bourgeois republicans, who themselves are sitting on the shoulders of the Party of Order, which hunches its shoulders so that the republicans fall too. The Party of Order feels secure sitting on the shoulders of the armed forces, but these shoulder blades turn out to by bayonets, so the Party of Order falls too. The revolution follows a descending path; it literally falls from the sky, making all kinds of pained and apologetic faces before collapsing into spasms.

Clearly, Marx's contrasting metaphor rearticulates the text's big hypothetical dichotomy: the difference between an original tragedy and its farcical derivative. But something has been added in the process. There is a new participant in the action on stage: the mute, object-like body of the proletarian, set into dancing motion by the imperative of the conditions themselves. This pushes the entire action on the text's stage away from theater and much closer to choreography. To narrate two different revolutionary dynamics, Marx prototypes a variety of *Tanztheater*—dancing theater—drawing upon acrobatic routines, circus acts, displays of earnest inevitability, and comic ineptitude that would only later make their way into the toolkit of modernist choreography, if not to be rejected as too literal or illustrative. It is a broken, hurdy-gurdy aesthetic worthy of the variety show, certainly no ideal of dancing harmonious bodies in the ancient past, and not the poetry of the future that Marx imagines however vaguely for the proletarian revolution. What's more, this broken choreography is caught in the bad infinity of repetition, like a broken record or a mantra ever losing momentum. You know this in advance, but you must dance nonetheless. The fact that this *Tanztheater* remains legible in our own day goes to show that the aesthetic of our time is formed completely by a culture

stuck in endless repetitions of moments like 1848. Again and again, we see the greatest hopes dashed as springtime turns to winter. The Party of Order mobilizes its Freikorps throng, Louis Bonaparte or Putin at its head, ready to topple the priests from their Pythian tripods and to establish the state as something hovering above society like a crowd-control helicopter. If you repeat a farce often enough, it becomes a tragedy of its own.

Plate 197 from Muybridge's Animal Locomotion (1887) shows two models dancing the waltz.

7. Epilogue

The "Brumaire" was first published in *Die Revolution,* a German-language journal edited by Marx's former collaborator Joseph Weydemeyer in New York City. It provided something like international visibility to distant political developments that had dislocated the revolutionary European intelligentsia. The "Brumaire" was a text by a refugee for other refugees, all having become spectators of something grand, new, and unexpected, whether they were in Paris, London, or New York. By 1851, the year Marx probably started work on the "Brumaire," the huge political crowds of 1848—for example, those at the Chartist Rally in Hyde Park, fixed in the first photograph in history of a mass of people—had turned into the promenading audiences of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace. Giorgio Agamben wonders whether Marx might not have seen this strange new spectacle, where the commodity and its vis-à-vis, human labor, were shown

to one another for the very first time. Marx was certainly already in London, and how could he have ignored these strange new mass promenades under conditions of ultimate transparency, choreographies where finally the audiences themselves were on display, as they watched the dancing tables and chugging steam engines?

What makes it so intriguing to imagine Marx gliding through the phantasmagoric, slightly blue light of the Crystal Palace in 1851 is that we know how little transparency would fill Marx's life in the coming years. There was no space for promenading or dancing in this claustrophobic time of political emigration. Not only literally, as the Marx family moved through a succession of glorified slums, constantly in debt, all sleeping in one big bed. But also metaphorically: the space for political agency was narrow as could be. One of the only outlets was the enactment of political fracture through polemic and satire, heaping derision and abuse on enemies, rendering them impotent through the magic of words by exposing their secrets. Marx and Engels would ridicule the fates of their former revolutionary comrades from the days of 1848 in *The Great Men of the Exile*, a satirical book of barbs so intricate that Marx got completely caught up in writing in the genre of abuse. Perhaps the most excessive book of all in this regard is *Herr Vogt* (1859), a polemic against the Swiss journalist Carl Vogt, who slandered Marx as the conspiratorial leader of a communist sect. Marx wrote over seven hundred pages exposing Vogt's subservience to the aims of Napoleon III. He nicknamed Vogt "da-da" because this was apparently his first word, and considered calling the book *Dada Vogt* in a move so deft and subtle that only he could understand. His friends and family advised him to stick to a more legible title and to maybe return to writing the huge and convoluted manuscript that was to eventually become *Capital*, vol. 1. But Marx was very busy enacting his response to the tragedy of revolution, repeated as what would be a proto-dadaist farce, if not for all the ugly bodies …

Not all of Marx's polemics and correspondences were so desperate or divisive and so harmful as some have claimed. Some provided a reflexive space, or, in keeping with our general metaphor, a theater or dance floor of ideas. The theme of revolutionary tragedy or the tragedy of revolution resurfaced when Marx and Engels corresponded on this issue extensively after one of their favorite antagonists, Ferdinand Lassalle, the father of German social democracy, wrote the revolutionary drama *Franz von Sickingen*. Earnestly hoping to improve Lassalle's rather wooden drama through ruthless critique (does this ever work?), they accused him of idealism and of misconstruing the central conflict of revolution. The revolutionary hero does not fail because his high ideals are too good and pure for a dirty reality, but because the necessity to act upon these high ideals—the result of the conditions themselves—comes into direct conflict with the immaturity of these very conditions. The revolution is both necessary and impossible, and that is its central

tragedy. To show such complexity, says Marx to Lasalle, you should have been more Shakespearean and less declamatory. You can't declare ideals and show their disenchantment in long soliloquies; you need dialogue and action to demonstrate just what a rich and contradictory social fabric both requires revolution and prevents the projected changes from actually occurring.

Something very sad and tragicomic happened to Lassalle himself, by the way: he was shot in the groin by a Romanian imposter prince whose girlfriend he had seduced, only a few months after founding the trade union that would become the bulwark of German social democracy. Marx was devastated, and all the more surprised when some turned to him to fill the void left at the center of the worker's movement. Even though he'd basically published next to nothing in those years, all the slander had made him famous. It was then, in 1864, in the year of Lassalle's death, that things finally started looking up. The Marx family inherited some money, some of which went for a down payment on a house on Maitland Park Road called One Modena Villas. After Marx gave a rousing speech founding the International Workingman's Association in September of that year, his house was nicknamed the Emigré Medina, with illustrious runaways like Bakunin stopping in to build yet another ill-fated coalition. Still, it was a change of pace for Marx, who found that he had finally returned to public life and politics. As if to signal this change, the family cleared their living room of furniture and held an evening of ballroom dancing. Once again, light radiated from all the Emigré Medina's windows …

X

David Riff is a writer, artist and curator. He is a member of the work group Chto delat and was co-editor of the newspaper of the same name from 2003 to 2008. Riff currently works as contributing editor of the arts section of the online portal openspace.ru and teaches art history at the Rodchenko School of Photography and Multimedia in Moscow. He has published two monographs on late Soviet artists Vadim Sidur (2000) and Vladimir Yankilevsky (2002). More recently, he has written on post-Soviet contemporary art in publications such as *Flash Art*, documenta 12 magazine, *Moscow Art Magazine*, *Rethinking Marxism*, *Springerin*, and *Third Text,* and contributed to the monograph *Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor* (2009). In addition Riff has worked extensively as a translator in the field of contemporary art and is active in artistic collaborations. Together with Dmitry Gutov he contributed to the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 with the long-term project The Karl Marx School of the English Language.

We are done. I'm not speaking only about us here in Africa but of humanity, of man. We have sold our soul too cheaply. The feeling I have is that we are done for if we have traded our souls for money.

—Djibril Diop Mambéty

Charles Tonderai Mudede

Neoliberalism and the New Afro-Pessimism: Djibril Diop Mambéty's Hyènes

Senegal's second greatest director, Djibril Diop Mambéty, only made two features. The country's greatest director, Ousmane Sembène, made eight. Mambéty was born in 1945, Sembène in 1923. Mambéty lived for only fifty-three years, Sembène for eighty-four. It is useful to think of the two artists in terms of a golden age and a silver age. Sembène represents the former and Mambéty the latter, in much the same way that Yasujirō Ozu is the former and Nagisa Oshima the latter in Japanese cinema. With the golden age, we have the artist as a resounding bell; with the silver age, the artist as Baudelaire's *cloche fêlée,* the cracked bell.

But what is this cracked bell? It is a condemnation with pessimism. Sembène's work is consistent with that of all golden agers because it condemned without pessimism. Mambéty's work, like that of other silver agers (*cloche fêlée*), condemned but without hope for redemption. His criticisms were omnidirectional and unsparing. This is why it was possible to accuse Mambéty of giving in to afro-pessimism—but not in its original sense of relating the failure of African economic development to something cultural, something even genetic, something deep in the African character. This bad brand of afro-pessimism ignores the high interest rates on African debts, or the political support of corrupt African leaders who are aligned with European or American business interests, or the IMF's enforcement of economic development programs that have never worked anywhere in the world and at anytime in the three-hundred-year history of capitalism. Bad afro-pessimism claims that Africa is stuck because it is Africa.

Mambéty's second and last feature film, *Hyènes* (Hyenas), is, without a doubt, deeply pessimistic, and it is set in Africa; but it views African failure as something far more profound and universal. His pessimism is found not in the depth of the African character but in the human one. In fact, if one were not told of the true origin of *Hyènes*, one would naturally assume it is 100 percent African, that it's rooted in black culture, that it is a part of Senegal's rich oral tradition. It looks like a perfectly black African parable of the dangers of greed and the foibles of communal life. One could even imagine transforming its main characters into animals, a common feature for African folk tales: the

Seen here in stills, Ousmane Sembène's Black Girl (1966) is considered part of the Golden Age of African Cinema.

wise lion, the crafty rabbit, the persistent turtle, the pensive elephant. Indeed, the film begins with a herd of elephants, who, at the stroke of one cut, become human beings. But this is all an illusion. This is why the first and biggest surprise one encounters when examining the movie's background and steps of development is that the source of its story isn't anywhere in Africa but in the heart of Europe. The story of the prostitute who returns to her village to exact revenge on the man who broke her heart when she was young and vulnerable was all dreamt up in the head of a Swiss. *Hyènes* turns out to be a very faithful adaptation of *The Visit*, a play by the German-Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt. And it is this link between a work that is so European and one that appears so African that captures the essence of Mambéty's genius as an artist and the humanity of his pessimism.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* was even made into a film with Hollywood stars in 1964. Ingrid Bergman played the prostitute and Anthony Quinn the heartbreaker. But this adaptation is unfaithful and emptied of the pessimism that permeates and punctuates the original. *Hyènes* was made twenty-eight years later, at a time when the post-independence, post-Fanon optimism had evaporated from most of Africa. The dreams of the struggle for black liberation resulted in nothing but dry and bitter broken promises. We had exited the postcolonial era of the heroic Sembène and entered a new and sober era of globalized capital with pockets completely emptied by corrupt black leaders and debts to Western banks. Mambéty announced this new era splendidly with his broken bell. He did not only preserve the pessimism in Dürrenmatt's play but concentrated it with an appropriated but reevaluated European postcolonial afro-pessimist discourse.

The story goes like this: After many, many years, the prostitute with a broken heart returns to the poor village, Colobane, as a very rich woman. Her name is Linguere Ramatou. She is now old. She has a golden hand and golden leg. She never smiles. She has more money than the World Bank (this point is made twice in the movie). Those who can recall the tune "Never Been to Me" by Charlene (first released in 1977 and rereleased in 1982) should know the lines:

> I've been to Nice and the isle of Greece
> Where I sipped champagne on a yacht
> I moved like Harlow in Monte Carlo and showed 'em what I've got
> I've been undressed by kings and I've seen some things
> That a woman ain't s'posed to see.

If you can picture that glamorous, seedy world, then you have a pretty good idea of the kind of life Linguere Ramatou led during her long exile, and the source of her wealth.

The man who broke her heart is Dramaan Drameh. Through a favorable marriage he now owns the town's only grocery store, but he is not generous with credit because everyone in town is broke. The soldiers are broke, the teacher is broke, and even the mayor is broke. Early in the movie, the furniture in the town hall is repossessed. The poverty in Colobane is unrelenting—people even walk slowly, dragging their feet from place to place, as if the lack of money weighs down on them. Linguere Ramatou's return is met with great excitement and hope. Is she a good person? Will she be generous? Will she save the town? She will! But on one condition: the town must kill the man who broke her heart, and who forced her to leave her community.

The mayor, with the town's approval, rejects the offer, saying: "We are in Africa but the drought will never make us savages." The village agrees with the mayor. They have rules, customs, beliefs, morals. They will not kill an innocent man for money. That is immoral. That is what animals do in Darwin's race for survival. They are not animals. They are humans. Linguere Ramatou sets up a tent outside of the town and waits. Her offer still stands. How long can this community resist her money? Not long at all. Indeed, not even a day, because almost immediately members of the community begin buying things on credit.

The borrowing begins with the grocery store owned by Dramaan Drameh, who, though reluctant to provide credit, is obliged to because he now owes the town his life. As the days pass, the borrowing escalates and spreads. The locals buy new shoes, expensive cigarettes and booze, household appliances, and so on. A carnival even comes to town. Fireworks explode in the sky. The people of Colobane shoot up and down on a roller coaster with their hands in the air.[1] They are having the time of their lives. The grocer sees the writing on the wall: he is now a walking dead man. These debts need to be paid, and his life is the only thing that can settle them.

But here the film takes an interesting turn and adds something new to the original story. The justice system that eventually sentences Drameh to death is not colonial but older, African, even pre-Islamic. The ethos at the core of the death sentence is communal; it is the ethos of social formations that behavioral ecologists and anthropologists associate with hunter-gatherers. And the ethos of such groups is strictly and sometimes militantly egalitarian. At the end of the film, Dramaan Drameh is judged and executed by a process that in ancient times was meant to maintain equality among the members of the community. The stark conclusion of *Hyènes* is that the enforcement mechanism (communal killing) of the egalitarian ethos has effectively been captured by neoliberalism.

But we can't stop here. We need to go deeper than this reading of capture, which can also be applied to the original play. Durrenmatt's *The Visit* was completed in 1956, and the English drama critic Kenneth Tynan wrote

Djibril Diop Mambéty's Touki Bouki [The Journey of the Hyena] (1973) features a university student and a cowherd who steal money in order to leave Dakar for Paris.

in 1960 about the play:

The plot by now must be well known; a flamboyant, much-married millionairess returns to the Middle-European town where she was born and offers the inhabitants a free gift of a billion marks if they will consent to murder the man who, many years ago, seduced and jilted her ... Eventually, and chillingly, her chosen victim is slaughtered, but I quarrel with those who see the play merely as a satire on greed. It is really a satire on bourgeois democracy. The citizens ... vote to decide whether the hero shall live or die, and he agrees to abide by their decision. Swayed by the dangled promise of prosperity, they pronounce him guilty. The verdict is at once monstrously unjust and entirely democratic. When the curtain falls, the question that Herr Dürrenmatt intends to leave in our minds is this: at what point does economic necessity turn democracy into a hoax?[2]

In the way democracy was captured by Keynesian-era capitalism in *The Visit*, the egalitarian ethos of communal life is captured by neoliberalism in *Hyènes*. But the capture of the former is far more devastating than the capture of the latter. Democracy is still a relatively new institution, so one can understand its vulnerability and even forgive it. The mechanism that supports the egalitarian ethos (communal killing), on the other hand, can be argued to be *the* mechanism by which human morality was spawned and shaped. It is much, much older than democracy, and much more about the animal origins of our humanity.

With the support of evidence gathered from anthropological studies, it has been argued that what distinguishes the human animal from other animals is the social selection process of egalitarian justice. Morality is our species-being. The beaver has its dam; we have

Though previously adapted by Bernhard Wicki as The Visit (1964) featuring Ingrid Bergman, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play conveys the broken promises of post-independence Africa in Mambéty's adaptation.

morality. In the way a beaver uses its teeth to cut and gather the wood it needs for its niche, and in the way that this niche in turn shapes and defines its maker, we have also cut and carved the social space forming the morality that has shaped and defined us.

In his book *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*, the social anthropologist Christopher Boehm writes:

> Both punitive and positive social selection were closely involved with group political dynamics, and when band members started to form consensual moral opinions, and were systematically punishing deviant behaviors, a novel and powerful element was added to human evolutionary process. The ultimate result was the human nature we carry around with us today ... Lethal attacks on disliked individuals by sizable coalitions can be projected back into the Late Pleistocene Epoch with great confidence.[3]

Later in the book:

> These mechanisms entailed social selection in the sense that preferences shared by groups were affecting gene pools. More specifically, all involved *negative* preferences, and all disadvantaged the reproductive prospects of individuals prone to social deviance—or at least those who could not control their ... inappropriate hunger for power. For such moralistic social selection to have been a significant factor in shaping human gene pools, probably it had to be operating for at least a thousand generations.[4]

This social selection led to what Charles Darwin in the *Descent of Man* described as "group selection," but not in the sense of groups competing against groups directly, but in Prince Pyotr Kropotkin's sense of a group facing the challenges of its environment.[5] Groups that were dominated by tyrannical individuals simply went extinct: strong men do not make a strong community (that view of things is actually new to our kind of animal). Those groups that maintained equality among members survived: a group of weak individuals is more likely to be stronger as a whole. Counter to the ruling ideologies of our times, dependency actually increases the strength of a society because it increases cooperative behavior. And this is exactly how we made ourselves in the social space, or constructed the niche of our morality.

The grocer of Colobane dies in the poisoned pool of human morality. His death is also the death of what made us human in the first place—our morality, which was itself developed to keep tyrannical behavior in check for the survival of the community or band. (It has to be pointed out that humans are not the only animal with a strong sense of morality, or of equivalence; the very social capuchin monkey has this sense as well.) "We are not savages."

After the grocer's death, the prostitute makes big investments in the region. The movie that began with elephants ends with massive construction vehicles clearing earth for new luxury condos. We also see a new airport. Colobane is being globalized. But the price for this progress is not just our soul— *Hyènes* places the religious institution second to human morality: even the priest in the movie is almost immediately corrupted by the woman with more money than the World Bank. The price is our very humanness.

In the postcolonial cinema of Sembène, the soul can be defended because the Keynesian economics of his moment and its capture of democracy still left some room for national development. Capital controls were permitted, which meant capitalism had a limit, an inside and an outside. The outside of capital is where the soul or the spirit of the nation could reside. This national outside is

54

In Mambéty's film Hyenes (1992), tribal justice becomes a tool of neoliberalism.

where *Hyènes* begins.[6]

In an interview, Mambéty said:

> My goal was to make a continental film, one that crosses boundaries. To make *Hyènes* even more continental, we borrowed elephants from the Masai of Kenya, hyenas from Uganda, and people from Senegal. And to make it global, we borrowed somebody from Japan, and carnival scenes from the annual Carnival of Humanity of the French Communist Party in Paris. All of these are intended to open the horizons, to make the film universal. The film depicts a human drama. My task was to identify the enemy of humankind: money, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.[7]

At the end of the movie, however, the nation is no more and the status of our species-being has been profoundly disturbed. What kind of animal are we now? This is the afro-pessimism Mambéty introduced in 1992. It's not so much a question of why Africa has failed to develop, but of what capitalist development means to begin with. What kind of system does it initiate? Clearly, it's a kind of society that would never have survived the environments and challenges of the Pleistocene—a society dominated by tyrannical individuals.

The community judges and kills an innocent man because it can no longer judge and kill the strong.[8] And is this not exactly the world we now live in? What once made us more equal (communal killing) now makes us more unequal (capital punishment). Look at who is on death row in the US: most are from the weakest classes.[9] The weak are being killed by an institution originating in a mechanism that equalized the weak with the strong.

Morality is all about equalization, and the story that *Hyènes* tells is of how the equalization that benefitted the weak was deformed into a legal system that supports and maintains the power of the strong. It is therefore not surprising to find that the rise of neoliberalism in the early 1970s corresponds with the explosion of the US prison population. The Marxist geographer David Harvey marks 1973 as the year of neoliberalism's birth. The year before that, the US prison population began its climb from 250,000 (when the US population was just over two hundred million) to 2.2 million today (when the US population is just over three hundred million).

It is also for this reason that Michel Foucault noticed that neoliberalism as a project is not about changing our society (that's a Keynesian project), but who we are as a human, an animal.[10] The transformation has meant profoundly changing (and ultimately eliminating) human morality. Equality does not exist in a neoliberal world. There are only enterprises and debts to be paid.

X

Charles Tonderai Mudede is a Zimbabwean-born cultural critic, filmmaker, and the Film Editor for *The Stranger*. Mudede collaborated with the director Robinson Devor on two films, *Police Beat* and *Zoo*, both of which premiered at Sundance— *Zoo* was screened at Cannes. Mudede has contributed to the *New York Times*, *LA Weekly*, *Village Voice*, *Black Souls Journal*, *C Theory*, *Cinema Scope*, and is on the editorial board for the *Arcade Journal* and *Black Scholar*. Mudede has lived in Seattle since 1989.

1
What makes this scene very interesting is not just that it was shot in Paris, but also that is was shot during the annual Carnival of Humanity organized by the French Communist Party. This carnival for the proletariat doubles as a carnival for indebted neoliberal consumers. Such was the depth of Mambéty's pessimism.

2
As quoted here http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/money-changes-everything/Content?oid=887898

3
Christopher Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 83.

4
Ibid, 87. Emphasis in the original.

5
See Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (1902) https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/kropotkin-peter/1902/mutual-aid

6
In *Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* , Kojin Karatani, the Japanese Hegelian, organizes society into three forms: capitalism, the state and the nation. Each of these forms has a deep history. Capitalism comes from European mercantilism; the state from the European absolutist monarchy; and the nation from European peasantry. These essential figure in each is: money, the king, and the village. The modern European state came into formation in the 16th century by first the alliance of merchants (the city) and the king (the castle). These two were soon joined with the tribe (the village) to become what we still have today: capitalist nation-state. To modernize, each formation challenged and defeated its past. Democracy challenged the absolutist monarchy (beheading the king); classical political economy (Adam Smith, David Ricardo) challenged the core obsession of mercantilism, which was money, bullionism; and cosmopolitanism (tolerance) challenged "rural idiocy." But when there is a crisis, the modernized forms (capitalism, the state, nationalism) revert to their original, pre-modern condition. And each formation has its

essential crisis: for the state, it is war; for the market, it is an economic crash or bust; for the nation, it is the appearance of the stranger. When war happens, we get a king. When a crash occurs, we get a run on the bank, a panic to go liquid, a primal mercantilist obsession with money (bullionism). When a stranger appears, we get the tribe. Also, these forms have only been in harmony in the decades between the end of the Second World War and the early 1970s. Wolfgang Streeck, the German sociologist, calls this the era of democratic capitalism. The Bretton Woods economic order that was established in 1944 imposed capitals controls, and thereby limited power of capital and provided space for national and democratic integration and development.Before the Second World War, the tensions between democracy and nation on one side and capitalism on the other, had been escalating. The destruction caused by the war and the subsequent reconstruction of Europe eased these tensions not only in the West but much of the developing world. The 1950s and 1960s saw the reconstruction and rediscovery of nationalist identities and spirit in African states that were protected from the world culture of the world market. This freedom came to an end in the 1980s with the repurposing of the World Bank and IMF (Bretton Woods institutions), the formation of the Washington Consensus, and the deployment of Economic Adjustment Programs that required the liberalization of capital markets in poor and developing nations. This ended the national project as it was known in the post-war Keynesian period. This is the meaning of the references to the World Bank in *Hyènes* , a film made in the opening years of capitalism's resurgence. The nation and democracy were disconnected. The peace between capital and nation/democracy proved to be brief.

7
N. Frank Ukadike, "The Hyena's Last Laugh: A Conversation with Djibril Diop Mambéty," *Transition* 78 (1999): 136–53 http://newsreel.org/articles/mambety.htm

8
Djibril Diop Mambéty: "Dramaan Drameh in *Hyènes*, we find that he, too, is marginalized, although he is a well-known character in

the city of Colobane; he is marginal even though he owns a market." Ibid.

9
"Capital punishment in the United States is administered in an economically discriminatory way. The wealth disparity between those murderers who live and those who die constitutes a serious constitutional challenge to the permissibility of the death penalty." Jeffrey L. Johnson and Colleen F. Johnson, "Poverty and the Death Penalty," *Journal of Economic Issues* , vol. 35, no. 2 (June 2001): 517–23.

10
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* , trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010).

Corruption is the disappeared body coming back to life.
Its flesh seizes the veins of the postrevolutionary state, pumping, circulating, and blocking in a synchronized manner while unleashing shape-shifting forms as its residue.

Natasha Ginwala

Corruption: Three Bodies, and Ungovernable Subjects
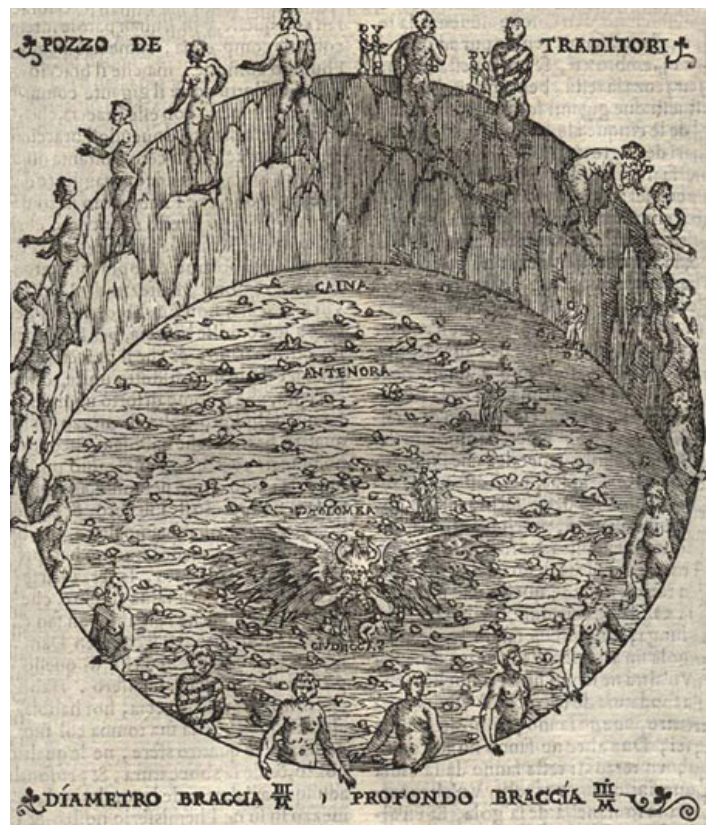
Circle IX, Cocytus, of Dante Alighieri's Inferno is shown here, portraying the traitors in the bottom of hell.

In medieval Europe, the Sovereign's body was considered to be double: the limited apparatus of the natural body, and a larger state of abstraction of the body politic.[1] Together they formed the geocosmic "whole" of sovereign territorial governance, unifying a corpus of subjects and providing a temporal stabilizer. Mortality and exhaustion could be associated with the ruler as a human protagonist, while the more-than-human power matrices of rulership could be implanted in the mystic morphology of the kingdom or commonwealth as a higher ground. This prevailing notion of the two bodies permitted the

continuity of monarchy even upon the death of the monarch, best expressed by the formulation "The King is dead, long live the King."[2]

However, the deception at the heart of this circuit causes a third body to arise from the organically immunized perpetuity of the double ruler.[3] And this third body does not inhabit either of these theological conceptions derived from the Christian *corpus naturale* and *corpus mysticum*. We can call this third morphology "corruption."

Corruption literally and symbolically splices through the indivisibility of the two bodies as a corporeal passage that undermines the singular thrust of their governing power. Casting a shadow reality over the surface of society and then dynamically percolating deeper, the parasitic quest of Trojan horses, double agents, fly-by-night operators, shady middleman with multiple cell phones, and match-fixers creates a relation with a business-friendly face before lurking into the "back office" to disclose their objectives.

> *The missing tape, the back office, the black market, counterfeit currency, that lazy bureaucrat, the anonymous file, the phone tap or leaked SMS, forged paintings and defective pixels, the creepy smile of a tycoon, the politician's tongue, and the shadows of fly-by-night operators repeatedly breach the social contract through perverse pleasure fantasies and subterranean nightmares.*

It is believed that the heart of the traitor is the coldest heart of all. The ninth circle of Dante's Circles of Hell is represented by a frozen underworld lake called
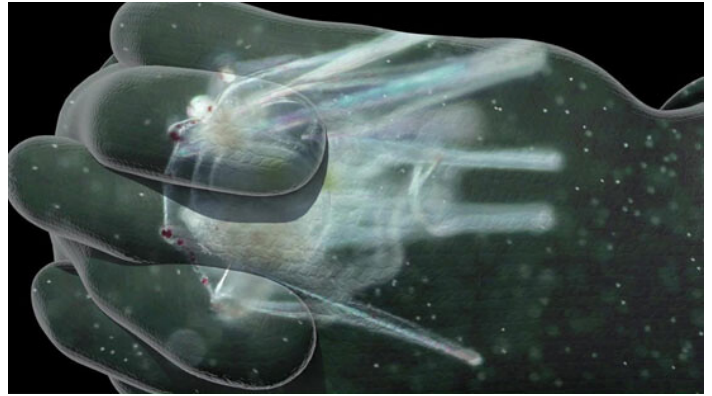
Cocytus—a sort of Death Valley full of whirlpools and oozing lament.[4] Here, various classes of traitors coexist—having betrayed kindred, country, guest, and benefactor.[5] Living through an Age of Extremes, this cosmology of cold suffering intersects with the climactic acceleration of the Anthropocene, registering human impact on the Earth's climate. As part of the "dismal hole" of punishment in the deepest zone of hell, there is the ultimate fear of being openly identified as the accused.[6] However, for retribution there must be a general consensus on what an uncorrupted polity would be.

"Evil is unintelligible," Terry Eagleton writes.[7] Corruption, on the other hand, is readable, reproducible, and profitable—often coextensive with the state's socioeconomic development patterns and performing an illicit union with its daily network of administration.[8]

> *Corruption begins where visible labor becomes invisible, and invisible labor becomes visible. It is in this corridor that it "acts out," and reenters the body politic as a sentient character, passing the stench of capital from body to body, as if an uncontainable viral flu.*

We are confronted with a gloved hand suspended in midair and plotting ... something. This hand appears dislodged from a body, as if for a magician's euphoric unveiling or as Adam Smith's "invisible hand" gone rogue to challenge a self-interested model of laissez-faire economics by re-presenting an exuberant constellation of interior life and the body politic as deep space.

Susanne M. Winterling's CGI work *Vertex* (2015) casts a bodily snapshot that moves beyond the surface pleasures of capitalist stimulation to consider the skin symbolically as a vulnerable organ. The lens probes a microscopic environment that sheds a deterministic perspective for a

Pio Abad, The Collection of Jane Ryan and William Saunders (detail), 2015. Postcard reproductions of Old Master paintings sequestered from Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and sold by Christie's on behalf of the Philippine Commission on Good Government. 68 sets, two postcard carousels. Courtesy of the artist.

polyvalent one. In epidermal memory, the artist recalls Chernobyl rain, stunted toxic beings, and bioluminescent creatures swarming like a membrane of keratinocyte cells. In this inside-out gaze, the skin's loss of haptic sensitivity is projected as a rupture in the physiological frontier between self and world—and thereby, as the inability to defend oneself from evil forces, be they bacterial, sexual, racial, or political.[9]

In this stealthy hand's repetitive gesture where interlaced thumbs and fingers produce an infinity loop, there is also the rise of corruption as a nonevent, providing action without confrontation. As critic Jan Verwoert writes in his recent essay "Torn Together": "Acts of corruption are elaborate disappearing tricks on the stage of common desire. They even out what should cause no ripples. Things go smoothly if what comes to pass happened as if it hadn't."[10]

The day laborer and the cognitariat are equally implicated in this realm and made subservient to the uncanny sweep of the veiled hand of corruption.

Like acid rain, corruption is a lethal blend of the natural and the unnatural, corrosively turning internal mechanisms into parasitic rituals.

In the Machiavellian account of corruption as "a generalized process of moral decay," it inevitably infects the vital organs of the body politic and poses the looming threat of political instability, while eroding social virtues of the idealized Republic.[11]

Artist Pio Abad treats the auction as an archeological site for excavating an astonishing range of unwieldy loot that exchanged hands under the martial regime of Ferdinand
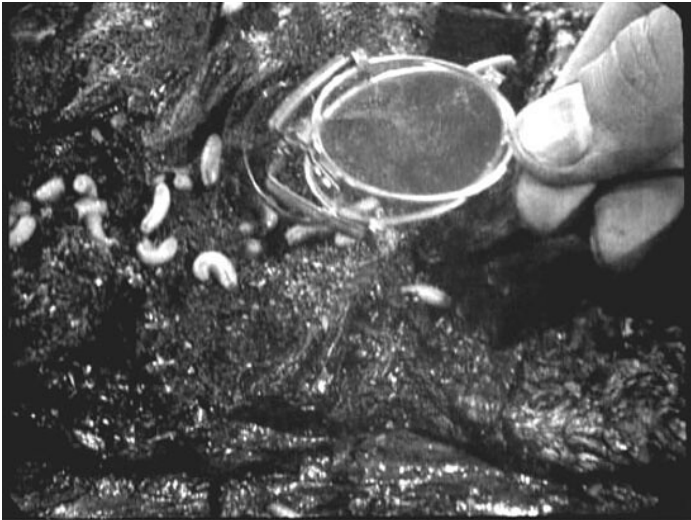
Maggots squirm in the meat offered to the Battleship Potemkin (1925) sailors, who ultimately revolt against the conditions.

A film still from Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 Soviet movie Battleship Potemkin, 1925. Black and white, silent film.

"It could crawl overboard on its own."
*"These aren't worms."*[15]

and Imelda Marcos, from Georgian silverware to Old Masters paintings. Through the fetishistic tendencies of this illegally amassed wealth, the art object is put to task as an insignia of myth-making and legitimation—mobilizing a repressive political imaginary.

Under the Marcoses rule, visual art and its display became a vital aspect of civilizing rituals brought outside the canonized Western museum and into the bureaucratic chambers and flamboyant private residences of authoritarian governance. The aesthetic condition of fraud thus became construed as an elite complex transacted across schemes of modernization in the Philippines.[12] As Arturo Luz, once director of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, said: "She'd come and pick things up whenever she wanted, even in the middle of the night ... There was no accounting, no questions asked."[13]

In his series *The Collection of Jane Ryan and William Saunders*[14] (2015), Abad creates a set of postcards deploying the Old Masters paintings that include works by Botticelli, Goya, Tintoretto, Titian, and Gauguin, which were shuttled in suitcases and private planes to be kept under guises over decades and eventually sequestered from Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos to be auctioned off on behalf of the Philippine Commission on Good Government. With several paintings in this "collection" considered fake, these postcard works perform as storytelling devices, illicit souvenirs, and forensic traces revealing larger consequences of the loot as an unauthenticated history, eerily echoing feudal patterns and the generational spread of oligarchic power in the present day.

"We've had enough rotten meat. Even a dog wouldn't eat this."

Jean-Luc Godard has declared: "Cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world." We often forget that corruption is also cinematic. A scene that perfectly illustrates the revolutionary economy connecting the moving image and deception is the famous breakfast scene in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin,* with the opening act entitled "Men and Maggots." It is 1905, aboard the Potemkin—a vessel of the Imperial Russian Army's Black Sea Fleet. Matyushenko and Vakulinchuk are the two sailors who begin to deliberate over the need to support workers at the revolutionary frontlines. Meanwhile, the crew sleeps in the lower decks. It is when rotten meat arrives on the scene that the brewing discontent becomes concrete. The presence of worms is an organic signal reflecting the fact that the crew is being regarded as lesser humans aboard the ship's symmetries of power. The ship doctor Smirnov inspects the liveness of decayed matter as his pince-nez transforms into a magnifying glass, a sort of evil eye evaluating the border between the edible and the inedible.

Instrumental in Potemkin's creation of propagandist shock reflexes is the close-up, which in Eisenstein is as critically deployed as montage.[16] Though properly speaking, for him this composition is not so much a close-up as it is a "magnification"—a large-scale shot to designate qualitative meaning—which in this case unites the individual and the social body in opposition to state authority. After this tipping point, the act of rebellion becomes a contagion as the resounding call of mutiny spreads forth from the sea back onto the land. Eventually, Vakulinchuk's martyred body acts as a source of raw evidence with the words: "Dead for a spoonful of soup."

Inversely signified by this historic rebel ship is the anonymous repression in vessels ferrying people across
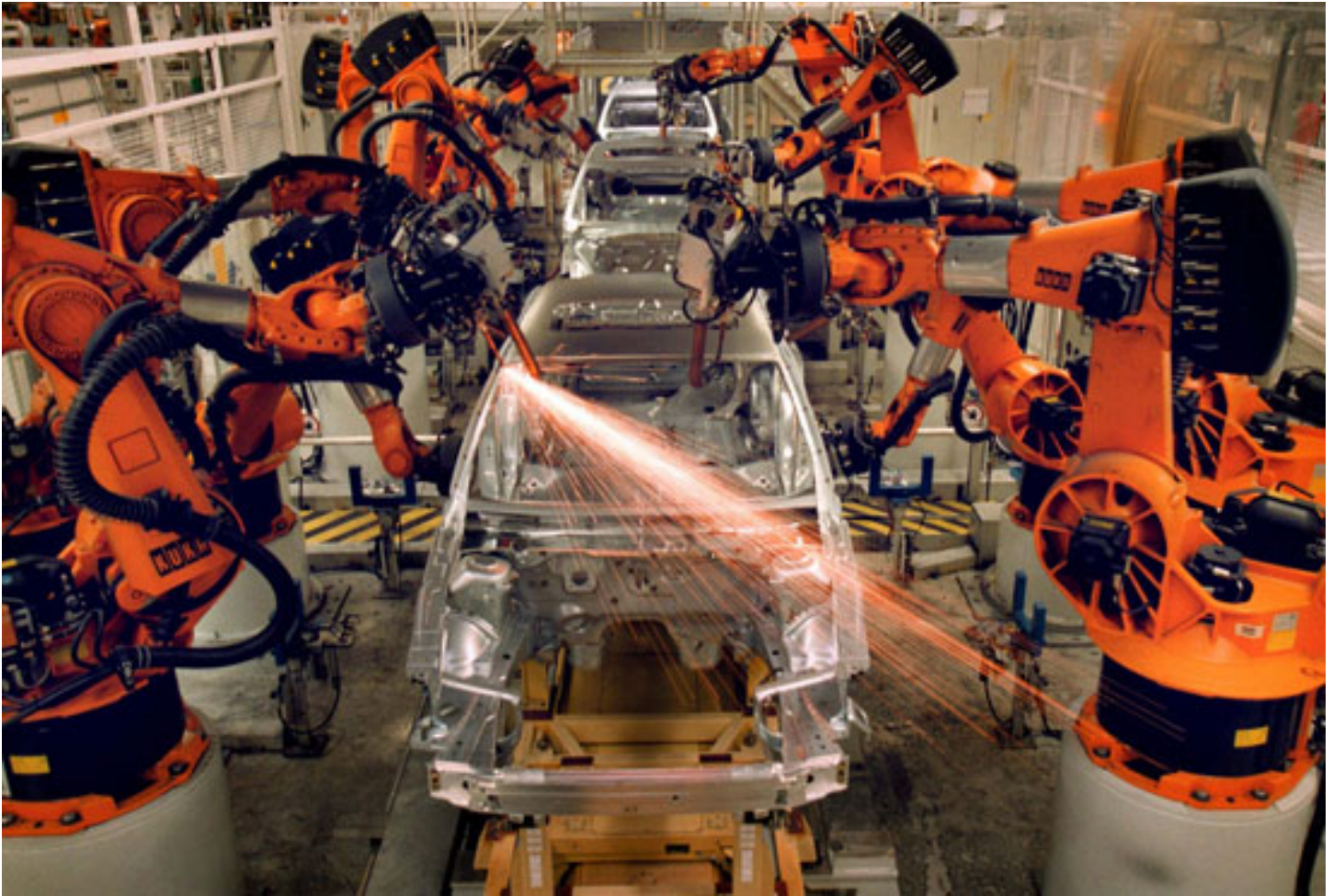
During the summer of 2015, a plant assembly robot killed a contractor that worked at setting up the stationary robot in a Volkswagen plant.

international maritime borders today—sinking amid news headlines, perilous water routes, and the forming of a subhuman sea-state. The ship as Foucauldian heterotopia has transformed into the generic boat of refugees, traffickers, and state agents that is a more complex human geography—an emergent space of death-life where irresolvable desire and frantic rituals of escape, corruption, and apathy assemble together.

In this parallel economy of transit, the will of individuals to exit wrecked sovereign territories is subjugated as contraband implicitly, in the same measure as an item of piracy. There is no real safety zone as the harsh limits of relief and assistance transfigure into nightmares of insufficiency. Within a perplexing mix of aspiration and desperation, that boat comes to be designated as corrupt infrastructure traversing a sinister scenography of global governance.

Corruption may be the still valid universalism in our midst, resonant since antiquity and continuing to find its strength as the invisible institution of neoliberal knowledge society, tasked with the administration of our collective depression.

Might it be possible for the artist as trickster to harvest the productive capacity of corruption's gestural performance—its speed, scope, double economy, and antisystemic drive?

Some months ago, at a Volkswagen production plant close to Frankfurt, a robot being programmed for assembly processes by a small team ended up acting out malevolently and crushing a twenty-two-year-old worker to death.[17] While this apparent "killer robot" erred on account of human imprecision, this episode may be observed metonymically as a reversed loop of machinic evolution. A postindustrial dystopia is activated in choreographies of human-machine dysfunction—performing as live threats in the daily pursuit of zombie capitalism.

While the industrially crafted bodies of the car and the robot share an affinity, the illicit action of the robotic agent reverses the terms of agreement between object and

61

subject as well as producer and means of production. Through a dramatic "unmaking" of the mechanized libido of the production unit, this proximity between artificial labor and the laboring human body becomes caught up in scenes of counterattack. Corruption is enacted here at the level of human consciousness—concerning the deeper crises of individuation within a glitched system where new forms of catastrophe await us.

While bodies assemble in states of multiple crises, dispossessed and upon unstable grounds, the shared condition today appears to be that of an entrenched loneliness and systemic corruption. In muddy times of planetary retrograde, we are bound together by separation, by relationship shadows—specters of prior intimacy, and partial fulfillment in the machinic present.[18]

It is in corrupt affairs that pleasure is resurrected as a collective being and a dissolving-together, no matter the costs involved. If corruption is defined as "a symptom that something has gone wrong in the management of the state," then it is not simply a matter of identifiable agents risking socioeconomic subversion of the market system.[19] According to Alain Badiou, it is in the running of an electoral democracy under the forces of capitalism that foundational corruption is instituted such that it becomes an essential condition.[20]

In the aftermath of robotic cannibalism and anthropogenic shifts, as new conglomerates of right-wing governance join a general decay of the body politic, corruption operates as both a counterhistorical project and a back entry for "unofficial" histories. On the one hand it threatens to lock us into an exclusively delivered image of history, with a promise of emancipation. While on the other, historical becoming involves contaminating the flows of major narratives of modernity through a means of editing—introducing characters, diversions and sequences of "eternal recurrence." Corruption survives as a figure of story-telling, the truth of which remains murky and to be discovered. It will be the last of the undead to die.

X

Natasha Ginwala is an independent curator, researcher, and writer. She is Curator for the 8th edition of CONTOUR Biennale (2017) and is a curatorial advisor to documenta 14 (2017). Recent projects include My East is Your West featuring Shilpa Gupta and Rashid Rana at the 56th Venice Biennale, Mind Moves Matter at L'appartment 22, Rabat, and Corruption… Everybody Knows as part of *e-flux journal* issue 65, SUPERCOMMUNITY. She was a member of the artistic team in the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (with Juan A. Gaitán) and curated The Museum of Rhythm at Taipei Biennial 2012 (with Anselm Franke). From 2013–15 she led the multi-part curatorial project Landings presented at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, David Roberts Art Foundation, NGBK (as part of the Tagore, Pedagogy and Contemporary Visual Cultures Network), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and other partner organizations (with Vivian Ziherl). Ginwala trained in Visual Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU in New Delhi and participated in de Appel Curatorial Programme, Amsterdam (2010–11). She has written on contemporary art and culture in journals such as *The Exhibitionist, e-flux journal, Ibraaz, Afterall,* and has contributed to numerous publications.

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Charles W. Mills, "Body Politic, Bodies Impolitic," in "The Body and the State: How the State Controls and Protects the Body," ed. Arien Mack, special issue, *Social Research* , vol. 78, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 583–606.

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See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2008), 5–8.

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Dante, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* , trans. Seth Zimmerman (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2003), 224–27.

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He began: 'You want me to return to a despair / So painful that even before I relate the deed / Its remembrance is more than my heart can bear.'" Ibid., Canto XXXIII.

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Wallace Fowlie, *A Reading of Dante's Inferno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

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It is worth recalling here Frantz Fanon's thinking around the "epidermal schema" investigating the alienation of the Black figure and the reactive forces at play.

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See Pio Abad, *Some Are Smarter Than Others** , artist's publication (London: Gasworks and Hato Press, 2014).

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Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

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James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema and History* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 199–205.

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