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Editorial

A riddle: One night, an arresting officer enters a holding cell full of people. He asks the group what they were doing congregating on the public thoroughfare that morning. Why bring their bodies out from home to stand together on the sidewalk, walk together on the street? The officer seeks connection. Somewhere in the cell's radius a commercial window had been smashed. Somewhere in the cell's radius was a changing of the guards. Thinking for a moment that they can see each other, one of the arrested persons asks in return, "Well, don't you think another world is possible?" What happens when the arresting officer says yes?

The possibilities could split a body in two.

No matter the response, this body's dimensions will always exceed those of the cell.

Now and for centuries, decades, another world has been conceived of by bodies in need of place. After Sun Ra, one possibility, one necessity: space is the place. The place, among other things, for refuge—as Eva Díaz traces in "We Are All Aliens," an essay in this issue of e-flux journal charting space travel through visual art in the years since Ra touched back down (in Chicago or Birmingham) from Saturn. Among the more recent works on the contemporary art-on-space timeline, Díaz describes Halil Altindere's installation Space Refugee (2017), invoking Muhammed Faris's 1987 trip, as a stateless exile: the first Syrian to travel into space. The project, like others before it in the best veins of the sci-fi tradition, envisions "outer space as the ideal sanctuary for homeless and refugee populations."

Díaz elaborates on Faris: "A Russian-trained cosmonaut who traveled to the Mir space station in 1987, Faris spoke out against the Assad regime and joined the armed opposition in 2011. Eventually, he and his family fled Syria, crossing into Turkey. In the film, Faris describes the discrimination against refugees he and others experience, and reveals his hope that 'we can build cities for them there in space where there is freedom and dignity, and where there is no tyranny, no injustice.'"

"In contrast," Díaz continues, "New Spacers like Musk and Bezos treat outer space, ostensibly free of indigenous peoples, as a new frontier exempt from the exploitation that characterized earlier colonial projects. And yet … "

In the world New Spacers seek to recreate with themselves at the controls, the SpaceX–Guggenheim Mars joint venture becomes inevitable.

To highlight the contrast between these two developing realities, of course, Díaz reminds us that "voluntary, touristic travel remains an experience of privilege; for many around the globe, travel is undertaken in forced and dangerous circumstances."

In space tourism we may yet see echoes or reflections, satellites of the radiation from years of Terran cultural tourism. Parasitic symbiosis occurs in the art world too. In the body or bodies of current contemporary art, we see by-products of ongoing tourism leaving its internal and external marks, nodes; forced host-guest relations between national bodies.

In a more nuanced reflection, iLiana Fokianaki traces the host-guest nation reversals in Athens last summer, identifying the tactics of "Redistribution via Appropriation" at play in the mega-exhibition and contemporary art industrial complexes. Importantly, too, Fokianaki casts eyes on institutional rhetoric that hurls (self-flagellating) daggers toward the past, but a persistent reality remains in contemporary art's present: "Institutions, biennials, and mega-exhibitions attack colonial pasts, but not presents. They are quick to be politically correct and 'host' the Other—while often maintaining an all-white staff, and a clearly rigidly Western approach as to how to institute."

Fokianaki considers conditions under which "the Western mandate for the universal—which has corroded our varied and complex cultural histories just as the chemicals corroded the surface of the Parthenon Marbles—might finally collapse."

Another riddle, in a sense: "As the state wages its undeclared war, it faces the same question as the murderer: What to do with the body?" asks Oxana Timofeeva in "Now is Night." Of the ongoing, undeclared war in Ukraine, she relays: "There are rumors that some of the white trucks in a Russian humanitarian aid convoy that drove into Ukraine were empty but returned full of cargo 200 (the general name given to both fallen Russian soldiers and the zinc coffins in which they come home from the war). Some bodies come home, others stay on Ukrainian soil, buried on the spot. Some say that the Russian army has bought mobile crematoria: special trucks on a Volvo frame for the quick and safe disposal of biological waste such as the corpses of homeless animals or infected cattle."

What indeed to do with the body? And, here and elsewhere, do we consider body qua body, body in a body, or a more complex arrangement? Body first as metaphor then as metastatic ideology, a rail linked with others toward a common goal, or tied down as corpse? Body as leftover, as evidence, as person, or machine of the state. What begins to happen to constructions of corpses as seed, gross national product, necessity, possession of a larger, hungry, always threatened and proud growling national body when a body can be—or must be—shipped out, returned in ashes by priority mail or Amazon drone? Certainly we are running out of space.

Certain forces of capital relations lead the pack in producing involuntary movement, involuntary death: war and its continued fallout. Terradeformation: scorched earth, to say the least.

Depending perhaps on location, depending on where in the end of the end-of-the-world process one's people are or have already been, there too exist psychic preoccupations with catastrophe.

In "A First Step Towards a Regional Risk Assessment," Michael Baers maps real climate projections considered in Stockholm atop speculative accounts from the same city in 2040. At that time, from these reports back from the future, the bodies on earth face greater external harm, yet lack internal (weather) veins—instead of censors, the weather without invades so as to become the weather within.

Sometimes, we are or have been told, a body needs to embody an idea, moving it with hands, tools, weapons, or words along with others in order to construct a reality.

Looking back into a Soviet past, Robert Bird traces in this issue an as-yet-unmapped history of three possible lived concepts of (Socialist) realism, through the work and lives of three figures in critical conversation: the Soviet writer and poet Andrei Platonov, Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, and Soviet literary critic Viktor Shklovsky—whose "writings can all be taken as links in a single chain of utterances about the conditions of realism under socialist construction." Also in this issue of e-flux journal, we are delighted to hold space for a revived, multilayered historical conversation between Andrei Platonov's short story "Immortality," appearing in its first English translation here by Lisa Hayden and Robert Chandler, and the first English translation, by Robert Bird, of Georg Lukács's review of "Immortality," focused on railway protagonist Emmanuil Levin. To continue populating the reanimated community, we also include Jewish-Ukrainian Soviet poet Lev Ozerov's written portrait of Platonov, translated by Robert Chandler.

In Bird's "Articulations of (Socialist) Realism," he describes Platonov's commission to write a story for the Union of Soviet Writers and the railway newspaper Gudok (Horn). Bird shows how Platonov's own past as a railroad laborer literally animated a key metaphor: the revolution as the locomotive of history. "A revolutionary fact gives rise to a feeling and organizes labor," Bird explains, "but then returns to a metaphor that rapidly accelerates out of control. This literal belief in metaphor animated socialist realism, the official aesthetic system of the Soviet Union beginning in 1932, and Stalin relied heavily upon the mobilizing power of metaphor when, in 1935, he placed the rail industry at the center of public discourse."

Among Bird's later conclusions on the power of the word in these authors' work: "What is realist in the realist novel, then, is not its style or even its genre, but its operations of articulation and coupling, just like working on the railway."

He continues: “How, Lukács asks, will the realist novel, this machine of articulation and linkage, be retooled for the aims of socialism now that history has made its ultimate turn?”

So now—at night or at war or otherwise—how to order and reorder, construct via text, assembling bodies toward building the worlds we need in order to survive each other?

X

Oxana Timofeeva

Now Is Night

Undead Soldiers

The medical commission said
A little prayer to their maker,
Which done, they dug with a holy spade
The soldier from god's little acre,
When the doctor examined the soldier gay
Or what of him was left,
He softly said: This man's 1-A,
He's simply evading the draft.

—Bertolt Brecht, "Legend of the Dead Soldier," 1918

I found out that there was a war on between Russia and Ukraine at a small gas station, where I met some Ukrainians who, like me, were traveling across Europe by car. Neither Russian nor European nor American media had made any mention of a real military encounter between our countries, and so it was hard to believe these agitated women when they told of atrocities committed by Russian occupants on Ukrainian soil. They seemed like yet another element of brainwashing, just like the reports of Ukrainian Nazi atrocities that flooded the Russian media against the backdrop of the annexation of Crimea, only now with a Ukrainian accent—a mirror image of aggressive propaganda from the other side of the conflict. Ours was a meeting on neutral territory, so to speak, somewhere in the middle of a generic Europe. The women's tone toward me was unfriendly, even accusatory—as if being Russian automatically made me guilty of the atrocities they were describing. At some point it even seemed that they were screaming at me. Yet their stories of welded-shut zinc coffins returning "from the East" etched themselves into my mind.

It was late May 2014 , three months before Ukrainian security forces captured Russian paratroopers in the village of Zerkalny in the Donetsk Region. Putin's response to the question of how Russian soldiers found themselves in the territory of a neighboring country was that they "got lost" because there is no clearly marked border there, but the appearance of military personnel was living proof that forced even the official Russian media to utter the word "war"—though the Russian and Ukrainian presidents immediately rushed to sign a ceasefire agreement, as if to end the war before it had really even begun.

Then again, the war had actually begun long before Russia's secret incursion into Eastern Ukraine. The war came to the Maidan with the first nationalist slogans, and it came to snuff out the revolution. Rabid nationalists were the ones who brought war as they wrecked statues of Lenin. The nationalist turn of the Maidan repressed the movement's social content, while the ensuing war has frozen any potential flare-ups of class struggle. Fascism,

Crosses marked only with numbers stand on the graves of unknown Russian-backed separatists at a cemetery in the Eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, February 16, 2015. Photo: AFP

nationalism, the regime of war arise to put an end to the nascent worker's movement, as Georges Bataille wrote in 1933.[1] Today's wars remain true to the same goal, which is why in countries that the first world customarily calls "nondemocratic"—meaning "poor"—social and political protests become ethnic conflicts so quickly.

"They're showing us cartoons," said my friend on the day Putin flew to Minsk to discuss the conditions for settling the situation in Ukraine. The next morning, I was sitting on an airplane, greedily reading Russian newspapers, trying to understand (in vain) what it was the presidents had agreed upon. It was a secret that this newly printed matter could not reveal, even if it still smelled of ink, and neither could Eugene Thacker's great book on the horror of philosophy, which I read on the plane. Real horror was here, nearby—an invisible, cold horror between the lines of the morning papers, which told of the meeting between presidents and of ten living soldiers in uniform who lost their way into Ukraine, with weapons and documents, yet not a word about hundreds or even thousands of dead.

This is when I remembered the Ukrainian women at the gas station and their stories of welded-shut zinc coffins, which I had had trouble believing because they voiced what the newspaper won't tell you. A chance encounter on the road with these ladies is just part of the rumor mill, hardly an authoritative source of information. To be believed, facts must be revealed and confirmed by official sources presenting incontrovertible proof.

We usually only believe whatever has been publicly recognized as fact, forgetting how many stringent filters reality passes through to reach that stage—the stage of cartoons made in Russia, Ukraine, the US, or Germany depicting puppet presidents and the politics of the countries they represent. Such cartoons never show welded-shut zinc coffins with dead soldiers. They only show living soldiers, who, in the very last instance of the official Russian media spectrum, were after all only lost (maybe it's comedy, not truth, that we're unconsciously looking for in cartoons, and maybe that's what gives them their strength).

In a way, they really were lost: according to the few witnesses, many of the Russian soldiers were convinced that they were being sent to some region of Russia for exercises, only grasping that they were in Eastern Ukraine

when the hail of bullets began. Conscripts get lost while following some murky order, as do mercenaries, who also don't understand entirely where and why their division is moving; they are ideologically lost, succumbing to patriotic hysteria and throwing themselves into battle with any enemy indicated by mass propaganda, itself especially intolerant in times of war.

Entire divisions get lost with "one-way tickets" to enemy territory, only coming home as "two-hundreds." "Cargo 200" is the general name given to both fallen Russian soldiers and the zinc coffins in which they come home from the war, as if death had welded body and coffin together in zinc, turning both into one singular dead weight. This dead weight is the main material remains, the indisputable evidence, and the only reliable physical proof of war. War is nothing but an assembly line for the production of corpses. Cargo 200 is the principal immediate material product of the war, impossible to consume, while fresh graves are the trace it leaves on the earth.

Such dead weight is a serious problem in an undeclared war. The dead, like the living, have a formal status, upon which the claim of the living over their dead bodies depends. If there is no war, there are no soldiers. Two-hundreds return from Ukraine and, according to official sources, are either somewhere else entirely (e.g., at exercises in Russia's outer regions), or they resigned or went on leave—in a word, they are lost, but not fighting in a neighboring country. Identified or unidentified, what to do with this cumbersome burden? As a rule, in wartime the unidentified are buried in mass graves, and their families receive funerary notices or letters stating that their loved ones are missing in action, while identified two-hundreds are given to their families for burial. But what do you tell the families if there is no war, and where do you put the unidentified bodies?

As the state wages its undeclared war, it faces the same question as the murderer: What to do with the body? There are rumors that some of the white trucks in a Russian humanitarian aid convoy that drove into Ukraine were empty but returned full of cargo 200. Some bodies come home, others stay on Ukrainian soil, buried on the spot. Some say that the Russian army has bought mobile crematoria: special trucks on a Volvo frame for the quick and safe disposal of biological waste such as the corpses of homeless animals or infected cattle.

The undeclared war announces itself when conscripts and even more contract soldiers stop sending news to their loved ones. Some relatives mobilize, joining forces to search for and collate information, organizing communities and committees, and soon the Soldiers' Mothers organization is put on the blacklist of foreign agents. Some of their sons are found, others are not. Some mothers continue to wait, others receive their two-hundreds. Families meet and bury this cargo. Its point of origin is unknown, the only explanation a short note: "died while executing his military duty." The official explanation says they died in their own country—on maneuvers, or in an accident such as a gas main explosion—but there is no proof of war more solid than these identified two-hundreds, their coffins, and their graves, whose number is steadily growing: in wartime, the army literally goes underground.

Not only the army, but the civilian population too goes underground. Those who have nowhere left to run go down into the basements, pedestrian underpasses, and bomb shelters left over from the Second World War, with their children, mattresses, cats, and stools. Civilians hide from death in bomb shelters, while soldiers hide in foxholes and trenches. Dead soldiers hide in graves. Basements, underpasses, bomb shelters, bunkers, foxholes, and trenches are all anterooms to the grave—places where you look for final peace and shelter from the cold terror of the war raging above. Under a world at war, the mole of history burrows its tangled labyrinth, where, as in a nightmare, you go from one space to another—from the bomb shelter to the bunker, to the trench, into the basement, and finally, into the grave.

The grave is the final and ultimate bomb shelter. But even here, there is no rest for dead soldiers. Even the presence of their bodies as evidence of war rarely reaches the stage of official and verified information. Journalists try to get in touch with relatives and risk their lives in attacks by unknown assailants during visits to cemeteries to check the headstones on freshly dug graves—this, in fact, is one of the stringent filters that grinds reality into a cartoon—while the families suddenly fall silent or undergo strange metamorphoses.

"Dear friends!!!!!!!!!! Lonya is dead and the funeral is at 10 a.m., services at Vybutky. Come if you want to say goodbye," writes a twenty-nine-year-old paratrooper's wife on her page on the social network VKontakte, leaving her telephone number for friends to get in touch. The page is removed the very next day, but some journalists manage to make screenshots and call the number. The wife hands the phone to a man who introduces himself as Lonya and says that he's alive and well, ready to dance and sing.[2] Telephones can be taken away and a woman is easily put under pressure. Still, there is something about the very idea of a telephone conversation with somebody whose name one saw written on a gravestone (until the nameplate was removed), the very possibility of a singing, dancing zombie at his own funeral, having returned to his wife from a place from which there is no return. It's an evil cartoon reality, a twisted caricature of truth.

In Alexei Balabanov's film *Cargo 200* (2007), a girl falls into the hands of a militiaman who turns out to be a maniac and ties her to the bed in his apartment. She is waiting for her paratrooper-fiancée to come home from Afghanistan, but the fiancée comes home as cargo 200.

As an official, the militiaman is given custody of the zinc coffin, brings it home, opens it with an axe, and throws the corpse onto the bed next to the girl while shouting, "Wake up! Your groom is home!" The girl is left to lie on the bed next to her decaying, fly-eaten bridegroom. The action takes place in 1984, exactly thirty years ago, during the war in Afghanistan, which is when the term "cargo 200" first emerged; it referenced both the number of the corresponding order of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR (Order No. 200), and the average weight of each transport container carrying the body of a dead soldier (200 kg). I remember that year—my mom taking my hand, bringing me to the window, pointing towards the horizon, through the Kazakhstan steppe all red with poppies, and saying: "Look, there is Afghanistan."

Two hundred kilograms is the weight of the entire "transportation container," a tightly shut wooden box. According to transportation regulations, this box contains a wooden coffin. The wooden coffin contains a zinc coffin, hermetically welded shut, which, in turn, contains the dead soldier's body. But all these layers aren't enough to contain the dead. Like the paratroopers who stumbled into Ukraine, the dead get lost and wander around. They come home to lie down next to their brides, like in the 1984 of Balabanov's film, or they return to their wives and families to take care of them, like in our own 2014.

It is usually the poor who become soldiers, those who have nothing to offer except their own lives or the lives of others in exchange for bread and shelter for themselves and their loved ones. How else can a state fighting an undeclared war get the silence it wants from the recipients of that dead weight? It is not only living soldiers who are breadwinners; through military mortgages and other death benefits provided by the Ministry of Defense, dead soldiers continue to feed their families after they're gone.

In his story "Sherry Brandy," writer and gulag survivor Varlam Shalamov describes the death of poet Osip Mandelstam in the camp. The poet dies drained of all strength, wasting away from the diseases of the camp. He gets his camp rations and greedily starts tearing away at the bread with scorbutic teeth, bloodying the bread with his bleeding gums: "By evening he was dead. They only registered it two days later, because his inventive neighbors succeeded in receiving the dead man's bread for two days in a row, with the dead man raising his hand like a marionette. It so happens he died two days before his date of death, a detail of no small importance for his future biographers."[3]

There is a certain economy according to which the dead continue to feed the living or take part in their affairs in some other way. Once a corpse has entered this economy, it is neither alive nor dead. The cargo 200 of the undeclared war is acquired in the border zone between life and death, together with vampires, zombies, ghosts—all those for whom death holds no rest. They didn't die in Rostov, and they didn't die in Lugansk, but only somewhere between Russia and Ukraine, on the unmarked border, where they are still lost and continue to send signals and care packages from their shady border zone, the zone of the Undead. The corpse is firmly embedded into a machine distributing mortgages and care packages. It seems as if capitalism, for once, is blameless here. But in fact, capitalism feeds itself with the corpses that wars produce. That is the underbelly of the "war of sanctions"—the dimension not covered by the media—with its economic character and its political effects. In the dull grey zone of capital's material reality, the body wanders from one death to the next.

On July 17, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, met with disaster. The Boeing 777 passenger jet crashed near the Ukrainian village of Torez, approximately eighty kilometers from Donetsk, killing all 298 people on board, including fifteen crew members. In the course of the extended investigation that followed, different explanations were presented. American and Ukrainian sources claimed that the plane was shot down with a surface-to-air missile by the separatists/terrorists in control of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions and armed by Russia. The Russians, meanwhile, insisted that the plane was probably attacked by Ukrainian forces, or was purposely sent on a dangerous route by a Ukrainian air traffic controller, or was even shot down by the Americans themselves in order to provide a pretext for a new Cold War. Either way, Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was out of luck; it found itself in a zone of never-ending combat and constant attacks from the air, and its crash became the most obvious confirmation of the undeclared war with international stakes high enough to permit its association with the cold one.

The most exotic explanation, however, came from Igor "Strelkov" Girkin, separatist leader, who claimed that the passengers of the crashed Boeing had died several days before being shot from the sky. This claim was based on alleged eyewitness accounts from separatist fighters who had gathered up the corpses and claimed that they weren't "fresh" and were even bloodless, as if the plane had taken off in Amsterdam already bearing strange cargo: frozen corpses standing in as living passengers strapped to their seats.[4] Some conspiracy theorists even ventured to claim that the shot-down plane was in fact a different Malaysian Airlines Boeing—flight MH370—that had disappeared without a trace earlier that year, in March, possibly even with the same passengers.

This version of events was clearly borrowed from the British TV series *Sherlock*, where a plane is loaded with corpses to be blown up in midair in order to provoke an international conflict. Girkin's explanation stands out for its fantastic absurdity and its clear contradiction of any principles of reality. However, beyond the principle of reality, the madman proclaims a strange truth: he tells of

the airline of the world, where we are all passengers, seatbelts strapped on tightly. Madness is also reality, albeit communicated through a series of metaphors. In this version—let's not call it crazy, but metaphorical—the passengers of the Malaysian Boeing literally die twice. The catastrophe of which they are victims is preceded by another catastrophe, and so on, over and over, in an infinite loop: the plane keeps crashing to the ground, turned into debris by the war, and the passengers are gathered up, frozen, and strapped back into their seats.

"Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy, if he wins," writes Walter Benjamin in his sixth thesis on the philosophy of history.[5] And the enemy wins. Not us and not them, only the enemy wins in this war of attrition. The war as an endless series of enemy victories is "cold" not because no blood is shed (only in cartoons about this non-war is no blood shed). It is cold with corpses whose integrity is compromised, who are killed and frozen, just to be killed all over again. The war supplies new energy to the circulation of global capital at a time of crisis.

The corpses are lost in the time loop of death, in a grey of bad infinity much like the Hindu circle of samsara. But unlike samsara—the circle of reincarnation—our cold war is a loop of endless "re-dyings," which is equally hard to escape. The economy of war is based on the capitalization of death and inevitably implicates all members of society, whose relative peace and security is only sometimes disturbed by ominous returns of lost and dead soldiers who are still ready to go to battle for an enemy victory.

—Berlin, September 2014

Three Packs of Butter

Moscow. Kursky railway station. Summer 2015. In the waiting room, a vending machine attracts my attention. It looks like any other vending machine, except that it's painted green-and-gray camouflage and sells Russian military dog tags. Today Russian soldiers wear dog tags bearing the words (Armed Forces of Russia) and an individual alphanumeric number. The vending machine advertises the dog tags as a fancy and cool accessory. One can buy it for four hundred rubles, together with a chain to wear as a decoration, or with a key ring. If you wear this tag, you will be like a real Russian soldier. Every real soldier must have a tag, so his dead body can be identified.

In the past, the train running from St. Petersburg to Donetsk stopped at this station. Now this unpopular destination has been cancelled. But in the fall of 2014, I once took this train from St. Petersburg to Kursky station in Moscow. It was the cheapest second-class sleeping car, nine hundred rubles, no privacy whatsoever, but pretty okay beds. It was a day-long journey, during which, according to the old good Soviet tradition, one is supposed to engage in nice, warm conversation with a fellow traveler, without introducing oneself. Next to me was a guy from Rostov-on-Don, a city next to the Ukrainian border. As is customary, we were drinking strong black tea with sugar, and the guy shared some sunflower seeds with me. He told me that he had moved to St. Petersburg and settled down, working as a sales manager. He was thinking of bringing the rest of his family to St. Petersburg over time, because, although life was generally still pretty safe around Rostov, there were some shootings now and then.

At some point, a small group of soldiers passed through the carriage. For some unknown reason, everyone, including myself, pretended not to notice them. My fellow traveler also kept talking. But I caught something in his eyes, a very brief shift in focus, which I did not bother to interpret. The soldiers were so young, and the clothes they wore looked so excessively heavy. The thoughts that came to mind at the sight of soldiers in thick camouflage on the train to the Donbass in the fall of 2014 had to be immediately repressed. One dared not think these thoughts. No, this is not that! They might be mere army conscripts going back home from their service, or something else. Anything but that. The soldiers had already disappeared towards a platform, slipping away like phantoms, and only a strange recollection remained, like the subtle smell of earth. Real solders with real dog tags, which they got for free.

A touch of both anxiety and curiosity, raised by the sudden appearance of military personnel among civilians, feels somewhat embarrassing. It resembles the feeling when, sometimes, you see prostitutes from Russia or Ukraine who are about to board a plane to some rich Western country for their work. One could say that they are the same as any other passenger, standing in the same line for the check-in desk, but there is something in their appearance—maybe their high heels, or their hair, or their makeup, or some detail of their dress—that gives away their involvement in another, unknown, dangerous world, the world of having sex with strangers for money. We cast our eyes down: no, this is not that, real prostitutes are somewhere else, where no one sees them—this is just some random aberration, someone who is just dressed up too sexy.

Soldiers are the prostitutes of war. Just like prostitutes, they belong to another, sacred world. This world is based on the violation of a prohibition, be it the prohibition against sex or against murder. Just like the body of the prostitute, the body of the soldier is obscene and exposed to violence. Just like the prostitute, the soldier dwells in the area where average people do not go of their own accord. He is always somewhere else—in a zone of military conflict, a flash point. The violence of war and sex is not meant for human eyes—that's what we think. If this is a spectacle, then it is sublime and can only be observed

Alevtina Kakhidze, In Zhdanovka, the only place with cell coverage is the cemetary... , 2014.

from a safe distance. The sublime is, according to Schelling, related to the uncanny, *unheimlich*: that which ought to remain secret, but which has come to light. The sublime uncanniness of war and sexual violence.

To be more precise: in modern times this domain is not called "the sacred," but "the unconscious," as if what previously was external and social has now become internal and individual, giving itself away through the language of symptoms. As Bataille used to say, in modern times the unconscious replaces the archaic sacred, or rather interiorizes it. Forbidden areas, previously reserved for the sacred, do not disappear—instead, now the sublime uncanniness of the brothel and of war has its secret agent within us, transforming the memory of our hearts into a monstrous phantasm.

The function of mediation between this and that world—between an average man and a prostitute or a soldier—is provided by porn, which, as a privileged medium, gives us updates from the front of forbidden violence. Prostitutes are raped in sex porn, and soldiers are killed in so-called war porn. The visual evidence of war consists of dismembered bodies and dis-bodied members, spread legs and hands, breasts, open mouths without faces—in a word, what in psychoanalysis are called "partial objects." War porn provides the mold for other forms of porn involved in the capitalist production and consumption of pleasures. A permanent condition of our life is the capitalist economy, which paradoxically finds its balance through an endless imperialist war that roams around the world—from Vietnam to Afghanistan, from Iraq to Palestine, from Ukraine to Syria. War in capitalism is a production line which provides partial objects for a great deal of porn. It is in that world of forbidden violence that the encounter between the soldier and the prostitute

takes place.

But what is the difference, one might ask, between the archaic sacred and the modern unconscious? The difference is that the place of the archaic sacred is always somewhere else, beyond the border of prohibition, whereas the unconscious is always right here, without even "having a place"—what is forbidden and untouchable is at the same time the closest, the most intimate. What is the most frightening and alien reveals a truth about ourselves. With this impossible truth, we establish a relation of negation, repression, or rejection: this is not that. Anything but that.

"You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother," says the patient. To this, Freud responds: "So it *is* his mother." There are things which, according to Freud, can come to the light of consciousness only in negative form:

> Thus the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed ... The outcome of this is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists.[6]

In the dream-like language of the unconscious, "no" simply means "yes."

"This is not war," they said when the situation between Russia and Ukraine was formally discussed, not only by Russian propaganda in the mass media, but by all interested sides, such as European and American officials. From the "ATO zone" to permanent breaches of the peace agreement signed in September 2014 in Minsk, for more than a year this was called anything but war.[7] "With whom is Ukraine at war?" This was the question a journalist asked Maria Gaidar, hired as deputy chair of the state government of Odessa. It was not easy to answer this question. Officially, there were no Russian troops in Ukraine. With whom was Ukraine at war? With itself? With no one? The truth of the war is like the kernel of a dream, which reveals itself through negation, through the repeated "this is not that."

When they say, "This is not war," it is not a lie (we are trapped in a self-referential paradox, also known as the liar's paradox—but that's what happens when we try to bring anything to light by means of language, since it is language which, by lying, speaks the truth). So, this is not a lie, it is negation in the Freudian sense—an attempt by the unconscious to say, yes, this *is* that. Thus, through the lie of media, we get a kind of inverted access to the truth of the social repressed. "No" is a paradoxical "yes" of the undeclared war, its peculiar evidence, together with other evidence, like groups of armed soldiers found in the territory of another state, or fresh anonymous or mass graves, or dead corpses with or without their dog tags, or the negative evidence of those who left and never came back.

Another form of evidence is refugees. As the war goes on, it produces tectonic movements of people. Civilians run away from the places where combatants come. Those who can run, run, taking along with them what they can. What or whom they cannot take, they leave—there are always those who do not want to leave their land, or those for whom running and crossing borders would be impossible or too difficult. Soldiers enter the cities and take selfies with abandoned cats, whose owners disappeared, escaped, or died. Prostitution is a privileged form of employment in territories invaded by soldiers. When factories, schools, hospitals, and shops close, there aren't many places left to work. Prostitution also gets cheaper. Sex workers in war zones are ready to provide more services for less money. But they also try to escape to neighboring places.

As an unknown pimp reported, the Moscow black market for sex enjoyed very good times because of the invasion of people from Ukrainian cities and villages. He suggested that, for a sex worker, it is nicer to be from Donetsk or Lugansk than from Western Ukraine, because costumers feel much more compassionate towards them, whereas sex workers from the west are massively abused. One could probably explain this not only through nationalism but also through the idea of an alleged difference between refugees and economic migrants—those from the east seem to be fleeing war, whereas those from the west are simply fleeing poverty.

In Europe now, there are great attempts to apply this formal, abstract difference to real people running from the Global South. "Are these people really trying to escape from war, or they are just travelling in search of a better life?" That's what they ask, addressing one and the same crowd of huddled masses, half of whom will be grabbed and sent back to their devastated homelands to try once more to live there, and the other half, the lucky ones, who will get the appropriate status and join the growing army of cheap labor whose basic, paradigmatic case is prostitution. In Russia now, people from Lugansk and Donetsk are cleaning houses, doing laundry, renovating flats, etc. The supply of labor is huge; the prices are ridiculously low in this highly competitive market. No, there are no Russian troops and there never were any on their land. This is not war, this is just business.

In a way, our day-to-day reality is itself this negation, this horrified "no" to the question of what is really happening. We think we live our lives as the civilian population of peaceful territories, with the war somewhere outside. It is not here, not in Russia, not in St. Petersburg, but

somewhere far away, in Donetsk or in Damascus, beyond the border. This border between the outside and the inside coincides with the imaginary border of the sacred, beyond which anything can happen. But in the non-place of the unconscious, the inside and the outside coincide, and the territories of alleged peace, like my city, St. Petersburg, turn out to be nothing but a symptom of the war that is negated. We say: anything but war, and try to stick to this "anything," which is just the negative of war. This is not a peaceful territory, but the home front. The war has been negated, pushed outside, and repressed, in order to be found again as our deep interior.

The home front of our everyday life is a distorted mirror of that undeclared front where soldiers are being lost and prostitutes are being found. In St. Petersburg, I live next door to the Artillery Academy. From early morning till evening, big groups of conscripts, two by two, pass up and down my street. Every day I see them out my window. They are very young and dressed in uniforms. Recently I was cleaning my window, and they were looking at me, smiling and waving. I laughed and waved back—I've gotten used to them now. But a year ago, when I had just moved there from Berlin, these armed boys in uniforms walking up and down the street made me think that this might be a rehearsal for war, or maybe the beginning of war. But no, this was not a rehearsal.

In the Russian language, for "rehearsal" we say "repetition." A rehearsal rehearses something for the future, whereas a repetition repeats something from the past. The dialectic of rehearsal and repetition is thus to be found in translation. Recently I saw how the two notions coincide—it was a parade of military technology in St. Petersburg on Victory Day, May 9, 2015. Huge crowds, thousands of people, were in the streets—entire families with their babies, saluting the tanks with happy tears of patriotism, and with slogans like "We will repeat, if there is the need!" Glamorous girls with bronze legs and plastic lips taking selfies, sitting on the knees of soldiers dressed in Soviet army uniforms from the WWII period. Civilians were both rehearsing and repeating a phantasmatic scenario corresponding to a universal death drive—a desire for a world where all men are soldiers and all women are prostitutes. This phantasmatic scenario of war points either to the past or to the future, or it points somewhere else, in order to mask the fact that "this is it," here and now.

I have a big mirror that is more than a hundred years old. People say that old, silver-based mirrors keep on their inner surface a sort of record of what happened in front of them. I ask this big, silent piece of furniture: What have you seen, mirror? I imagine it has seen a lot. It might even have seen the worst: the blockade of 1941–44, human beings losing their minds, eating other human beings, falling dead from hunger. I am living in the city that survived, by any available means, a full military blockade. Some people from that time are still alive and remember these 872 days in Leningrad. These people never throw out food. One of them was Rauza Galimova, eighty-one years old. On February 3, 2015, she was detain by the security guards of a small supermarket. A cashier suspected her of stealing three packs of butter. She was brought to the police station, where she was treated badly and immediately died of a heart attack. Three packs of butter, fifty rubles each. The price of a dog tag at Kursky railway station is almost ten times more. No, this is not that.

When one mirror is placed in front of another, the mirrors produce the effect of a corridor of infinity. That's how our military unconscious is structured, as it mirrors the Real of war. Each war repeats and rehearses some other war; wars reflect one another; an obsessive repetition of the Afghan scenario in a Donetsk mode turns out to be a repetition before the Damascus premiere. And we stand in between these mirrors, as if caught in an infinite loop. We, peaceful inhabitants of the home front.

—*Cologne, September 2015*

Leopard Print Pants

One day in the summer 2015, I overheard some MA students chatting about leopard print pants. Would you ever wear such a thing? They look kind of fashionable, but you wouldn't ever really dare wear them. Such clothing is borderline vulgar. And yet, in December of the same year, I and one of these students got leopard print pants. We brought them from Ramallah, West Bank, where we went for a conference dedicated to Walter Benjamin. Not the easiest place to get to, and apparently not the safest either—in the heart of the Palestinian territories, occupied by Israel and surrounded by the Wall. Nevertheless, more than one hundred people from all around the world traveled there in order to discuss what the Angel of History really looks like.

Travelling to Ramallah from Jerusalem's Damascus Gate, we were so tired that we didn't even notice when the bus crossed the checkpoint. It was already dark and cold when we arrived. Historically, Arab cities do not really have clearly marked streets, so our map was rather approximate and it took us a while to find the apartment we had booked. The streets were busy with trade—in fact, the whole center of town looked like a big bazaar, with all kinds of popular daily goods for sale, especially casual clothing: hoodies, soft slippers, fluffy socks, and yes, plenty of cute leopard print pants, which immediately made us laugh.

At night, however, things got more complicated, since in that otherwise nice apartment we could not figure out how to make the heater work. The hot water wasn't running either. It was around zero degrees Celsius outside, and perhaps the same inside—too cold for a princess like me. I

One of the many shops lining the streets of Ramallah, 2014. Photo: Justin McIntosh/Wikimedia Commons

spent the night in my jacket, cap, scarf, and even gloves, covered by three blankets. We were thinking about refugees, about how they sleep in their tents—and the first thing we did the next morning was go buy warm hoodies, soft slippers, fluffy socks, and leopard print pants.

The conference went well, even if it was repeatedly interrupted by announcements which broke the routine format of academic meetings: some participants couldn't make it because they were turned away at checkpoints, refused passage to the other side of the Wall; one of the attendees was staying with friends at the university campus, where, during the night, soldiers stormed in with tear gas and kicked everyone out; a bomb exploded next door to a hostel where people were having an after-party; a library was destroyed … We were told that such things happen every night: Israeli soldiers just come without warning, enter random houses, create chaos, and leave, sometimes with no explanation, sometimes arresting someone or saying that they are preventing a terrorist attack. This is what is called occupation.

I didn't experience any such disturbances myself until the last night, when sounds from the street woke me up.

Staying in bed, still half asleep, I nevertheless attuned my ears to the noises, like a beast in a hole. People's voices, irregular cries, someone running, silence, voices again, something like a firecracker, then a scary silence. Finally, an explosion: I'd never heard a sound like that before, but it couldn't be mistaken for anything else. The explosion seemed rather far away, not terribly loud, but it made a long, booming sound. "Boooom!"—and the echo flooded my room. I felt fear—not an existential fear with neither subject nor object, praised by philosophers and poets, but a vital, bodily fear which, perhaps, any living being feels when real danger is close: the kind of fear that makes you lose your sense of gravity. I was almost trembling, buried under my blankets and wearing those infantile leopard pants, which now served as my pajamas.

After some time I stood up and, without turning on the light, very cautiously approached the big window. I looked through the curtain: someone was running away, then there was nobody, just a little pile of things on the ground, in the middle of the street, right in front of our building. As the locals told me later, these were stones—Palestinians usually throw them at armed Israeli soldiers. Children throw them especially, as soldiers do not really want to

retaliate against children. I returned to bed and fell into an anxious dream, which seemed like a continuation of that real-life nightmare. The sounds persisted. I put my cat into a carrier and went out. There were already other people waiting in the street with their belongings and even pieces of furniture, like chairs and lamps. A bus arrived and people tried to put all this stuff into the luggage compartment. The road was beautiful; we ended up at some palace, but were not let in; while waiting outside, together with all the others, I realized that we were not dressed properly: most of us wore slippers and clumsy nightclothes. It was cold in that garden.

The next morning, the streets where busy again and people behaved as usual, greeting each other, selling and buying funny things, drinking coffee, eating shawarma, as if nothing had happened. In the light of day, the city looked cheerful. This finally made me realize exactly what Slavoj Zižek meant when, a day earlier, in front of a big audience at Birzeit University, he talked about "the dignity of ordinary life." Drawing a historical parallel with the situation in the Palestinian territories, Zižek shared a number of anecdotes about the siege of Sarajevo during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. He relates the same anecdotes in his book *The Metastases of Enjoyment*:

> Suffice it to recall a typical report from the besieged Sarajevo: reporters compete with each other on who will find a more repulsive scene—lacerated child bodies, raped women, starved prisoners: all this is good fodder for hungry Western eyes. However, the media are far more sparing of words apropos of how the residents of Sarajevo desperately endeavor to maintain the appearance of normal life. The tragedy of Sarajevo is epitomized in an elderly clerk who takes a walk to his office every day as usual, but has to quicken his pace at a certain crossroads because a Serbian sniper lurks on the nearby hill; in a disco that operates "normally," although one can hear explosions in the background; in a young woman who forces her way through the ruins to the court in order to obtain a divorce so that she can start to live with her lover; in the issue of the Bosnian cinema monthly that appeared in Sarajevo in Spring 1993 and published essays on Scorsese and Almodovar.[8]

Commenting further on the Sarajevan women, who never forgot to put on their lipstick before dodging bullets, Zižek also recounts an exchange of telegrams between German and Austrian army headquarters during the First World War. The Germans wrote: "On our part of the front, the situation is serious, but not catastrophic." To which the Austrians replied: "Here, the situation is catastrophic, but not serious."

The Birzeit University campus is situated outside of Ramallah, some twenty minutes away by bus. On our way back after the conference one day, one of our hosts, Yazan, told us the following story. Some time ago there was another checkpoint between the two zones, separating the university from Ramallah, where most of the students lived. The bus did not yet run between the city and the campus, and, returning home from their classes, students always had to walk a couple of kilometers through the checkpoint area. Once, a random fight with soldiers flared up. A group of students started to run and throw stones at them. Two fat boys could not move as fast as the others and fell a bit behind the group, but they were still trying their best, until they realized that they were actually throwing stones not at the enemy, but at the backs of their comrades.

"What? They have a university?" asked an Israeli customs officer who was interrogating me at the passport control desk about the West Bank, when I was flying back to Russia from Tel Aviv. Yes, they do. The dignity of ordinary life is something one can only see when one is inside this kind of situation—catastrophic, but not serious. They have a university, they have science, they have art and love, they have cute fluffy leopard pants and fantastic falafel. It is just not visible from without, not revealed to an external observer. This life runs behind the Wall. You must go through the checkpoint in order to get there, and it is humiliating.

Of occupied or besieged places, of places where there is war, it is thought that they are totally other—exceptional domains of violence and death. However, as Zižek notes:

> The unbearable is the fact that in a sense *there is no difference*: there are no exotic bloodthirsty "Balkanians" in Sarajevo, just normal citizens like us. The moment we take full note of this fact, the frontier that separates "us" from "them" is exposed in all its arbitrariness ... so that it is no longer possible to draw a clear and unambiguous line of separation between us who live in a "true" peace and the residents of Sarajevo who pretend as far as possible that they are living in peace—we are forced to admit that in a sense we also imitate peace, live in the fiction of peace.[9]

At some point I came to a similar conclusion. My idea was that what we think of as peaceful territory is in fact a home front; war is not somewhere over there, where soldiers go to kill and die, but right here, in the place from which they depart (and to which they sometimes do not return). Our alleged peace is the place from which the phantasm of the sacred area of death and violence is constantly projected onto an elsewhere. We imagine bloody scenes of real war happening far away—in Iraq, in Syria, in Ukraine, etc.—and, comparing these to our situation, we believe that *ours* is not *that*. However, this very "not," this

Ramallah, December 2015. Photo: Maria Kochkina

negation, should be read symptomatically, in a Freudian manner, as a roundabout way of letting slip the truth which our own "internal" censor cannot accept: the truth of the mirror reflection of the "there" in the "here"; the truth of the "(t)here" of the war, which we mistake for peace.

I developed these ideas in September 2015, preparing my report for the Academie der Künst der Welt in Cologne, where I was invited to discuss the undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine. The event was called "Phone Calls from the Cemetery and Other Stories," after a work by the artist Alevtina Kakhidze, which was also presented at the exhibition. The title came from a real-life story, as related in the exhibition description:

> Alevtina Kakhidze's mother lives in Zhdanovka, a small town in the northeast of Donetsk that has seen some of the heaviest fighting in the war. She rarely leaves the basement; communal services have collapsed, and the only place that still has cell phone coverage is the graveyard outside of town. It is from there that she calls her daughter. Kakhidze documents these conversations in transcripts she then performs: they tell of her mother's unwillingness to leave her home, of the conflict's impact upon everyday life, and how people react—either panicking or developing a strange nonchalance. Kakhidze complements these heart-rending exchanges with childlike drawings of the local topography, mapping the conflict's impact upon a landscape familiar from a more or less peaceful childhood.[10]

The artist gave her mother a nickname, "Strawberry Andreevna," perhaps because of the mother's attachment to the little garden in Zhdanovka, which she continues tending in spite of the fact that there are bombings and shootings all around. A lot of people have departed: those who stay look after the dogs that belonged to those who left. Sometimes, Strawberry Andreevna rushes to the graveyard, the only place in the area where the last mobile provider, ironically called Life, still operates. She is not alone at this graveyard, which is busy with people calling their families and friends. From there, she reports to her daughter on the garden, on how she made preserves in her basement or picked strawberries, or how she went to the marketplace to sell vegetables. One of the drawings in the exhibition shows her with two baskets of tomatoes, saying: "I was walking from the garden and thought, what if they will start shooting, where should I hide? Behind which bush? I was going without making stops—because of the fear."

Life persists in places that we often blindly qualify as places of death—from the graveyard in Zhdanovka to places under occupation, siege, or military attack. In

Russian, there is a term for "civilians" that translates literally as "those who live in peace."[11] Paradoxically, this word that combines "life" and "peace" is applied precisely to those who reside in conflict zones. "Those who live in peace" are counterposed to the military, as if the real confrontation was not between two (or more) states and armies, but between the armies that wage war, and civilians, who, by definition, *live in peace*, and all the more persist in doing so when the situation is most desperate. When the Lugansk area of Eastern Ukraine was under attack and day-to-day civilian infrastructure had collapsed (there was no water, no electricity, no heating, no gas), the residents of the five-story apartment buildings that are common in the area made fires in the courtyards, cooking there together, eating collective meals, celebrating their newborns.

Paradoxically, it is war that turns a mere population into "those who live in peace." The closer death comes, the more willfully "peaceful" are the lives of people who do not leave their land. True peace is thus not found where everyone is trying to escape into safety and comfort: rather, peace is desperately lived by those who stay. They "live in peace" within the war itself, and in spite of it; they inhabit the war, creating within it a locus of unprecedented dignity, with which they water their little garden, take care of abandoned animals, color their lips, wear leopard print pants, write books, and go to the cinema. Dignity and fear go together—the nightmares of "those who live in peace" change the value of things under the light of day. Their very life in its ordinariness rises against the armies. Children throw stones at soldiers in order to make their way to school.

On the last day of September 2015, when my country started to bomb Syria, I was preparing my first class on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the European University at St. Petersburg. I opened Hegel's biography and reread the fragment on how this book was written. Hegel was thirty-seven; he was lecturing at the University of Jena, but was not very successful. He was quite poor, he needed money. He had a contract with a publisher in Bamberg for the *Phenomenology*, his first big and serious philosophical book. At some point the work slowed down and Hegel did not receive any payments, until his respected friend Niethammer intervened and convinced the publisher to pay Hegel an advance, as much as half the entire honorarium.

Hegel's deadline for submitting the manuscript was October 18, 1806. Shipping the text from Jena to Bamberg would take five days, so October 13 was his last day to take the package to the post office. On October 8 and 10, Hegel sent the bulk of the manuscript to Bamberg. On October 9, war broke out between France and Prussia. Hegel still had to send the concluding part of the book, but the postal service was no longer functioning. On the morning of October 13, French troops occupied Jena. "The hour of fear"—that's what Hegel called this moment. Soldiers burst into Hegel's house. He tried to be friendly, inviting them for a glass of wine, but he soon had to flee—with the remaining parts of the manuscript stuffed in his pockets. In another house where he took refuge, he spent a few hours organizing these papers and putting the finishing touches on the manuscript. Only on October 20 was he able to send it to the publisher, who, in spite of this delay, paid him what was due, as Hegel was broke and his house plundered.

This is the story of how *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one of the most difficult philosophical books ever written, came into the world. Its first chapter, "Sense-Certainty: or the 'This' and 'Meaning,'" discusses the dialectics of the phrase "Now is night." In the light of day, we can only keep this night true as negated, and by this very negation preserve it. Thus, in one sense, "Now is night" remains true even if it's not, and, in another, the *now* never really *is*. As soon as we say "now," we are already too late; we mark it as a moment that immediately falls into the past. However, by saying, and especially by writing, we keep this past: time itself folds into these "past nows." That night in Ramallah turned this dialectics into a personal experience of fear, the knowledge of which is shared by Hegel and the old lady from Zhdanovka. That was the night hour of fear, both negated and forever preserved by the dignity of the light of day.

—*St. Petersburg*, *February 2016*

X

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1
George Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” in *The Bataille Reader*, eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Blackwell, 1997), 122–46.

2
See http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/64975.html (in Russian).

3
See http://shalamov.ru/library/2/14.html (in Russian).

4
See http://rusvesna.su/news/1405676334 (in Russian).

5
Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* , ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Shocken Books, 2007), 255.

6
Sigmund Freud, “Negation,” in *On Metapsychology* , The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 11 (Penguin Books, 1977), 437–38.

7
“ATO zone” (Anti-Terrorist Operation zone) was how Ukrainian officials and media referred to the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk after they came under the control of Russian-backed separatists.

8
Slavoj Zižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (Verso, 1994), 2.

9
Zižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment*, 2.

10
See https://www.academycologne.org/en/article/651_alevtina_kakhidze_phone_calls_from_the_cemetery_and_other_stories .

11
Mirnye zhiteli (мирные жители), from *mirnye*, meaning “peaceful” (civilian, nonmilitary), and *zhitely*, meaning “those who live” somewhere (people, population, inhabitants, residents).

Andrei Platonov

Immortality

After midnight, on the approach to Red Peregon station, the FD locomotive began to shout and weep.[1] It sang in the winter darkness with the deep strength of its hot belly and then began to change to a gentle, weeping human breathing, addressing someone who was not replying. After falling briefly silent, the FD again complained into the air: human words could already be discerned in this signal, and whoever now heard them must have felt pressure on his own conscience because of the engine's torment—helpless, heavy rolling stock hung on the maternal hook of her tender and the station's approach signal was signaling red. The driver closed the last steam cutoff—the signal was still an obstinate red—and gave the three toots of a complete stop. He took out a red handkerchief and wiped his face, which the winter night's wind was covering all the time with tears out of his eyes. The man's vision had begun to weaken and his heart had become sensitive: the driver had lived some time in the world and travelled some distance over the earth. He did not curse into the darkness at the fools in the station, though he was going to have to take two thousand tons, from a standstill, up the incline, and the friction of the locomotive's metal wheel rims would draw fire from the frozen rails.

"It's a shame to wake Emmanuil Semyonovich, but it has to be done," the driver whispered to himself.

The constant slight vibration was making the locomotive's cab shudder. The fireman was stoking up the firebox, keeping the pressure in the boiler at its upper limit. One moment the balance valve was snarling in the air with steam; another moment it was stopping when the pressure had to be lowered by means of the injector.

"But it has to be done," said the driver. He grasped the siren's cord.

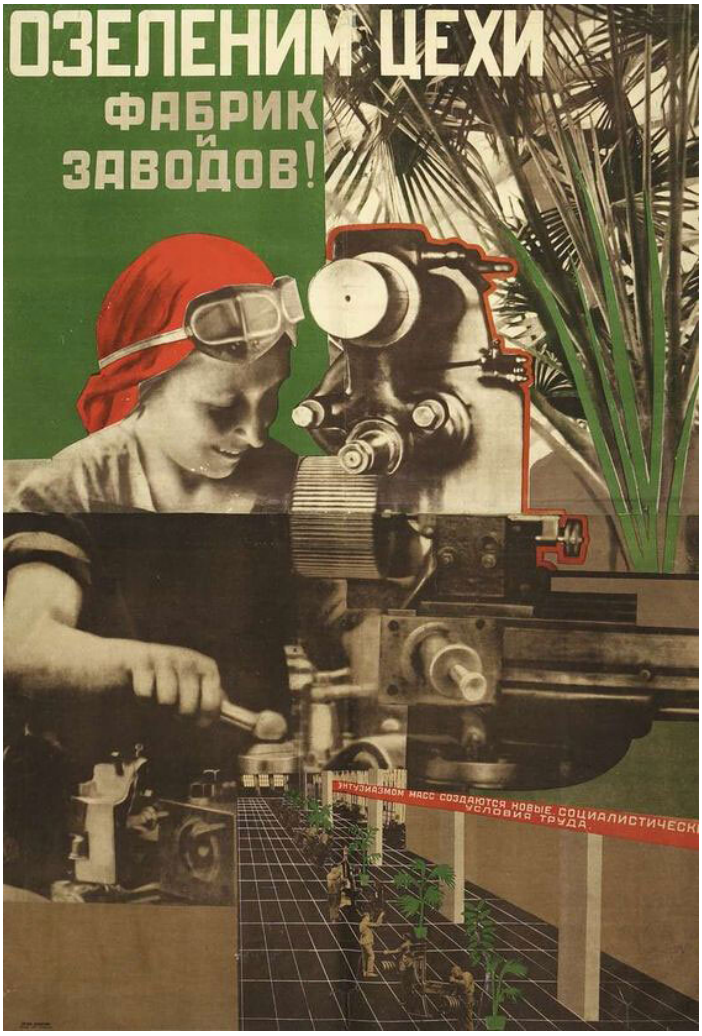
The machine again began to shout, sing, and weep into the winter's dark night, threatening and complaining.

In the pauses between his own signals, the driver heard dogs—apparently disturbed by the locomotive—begin to bark in some distant collective farm, while from Red Peregon itself came the singing of the station workers' roosters.

Now space was filled by an entire choir of voices: locomotive, roosters, and dogs ...

In a servant's room in one of the houses near the station a young woman awoke. She listened intently to the voice of the familiar locomotive: she knew all the engines of the Peregon depot individually, as if they were people of differing characters. She was the station chief's household worker, and she took a personal interest in the transport system.

"Either the brakes have seized up," the young cook said to



Soviet poster, date unknown. The poster reads: "We will green [used as a verb] the shops, the factories, the [power] plants!"

herself, "or something else has gone haywire—and that devil of a brake tester is asleep. What on earth's going on? This is worse than torment, worse than chaos. What snakes—they're making the whole of my heart ache!"

Barefoot as she was, she went to Emmanuil Semyonovich's closed bedroom, to tell him about the locomotive shouting just outside the station. But she didn't enter the room: she could hear her boss talking—he was already on the phone to the dispatcher.

"Is that you Mishchenko? Why are you holding the 4-0-3 on the approach?"

The cook went on standing outside the station boss's bedroom door; Mishchenko was evidently on the other end of the telephone line, saying something.

"Good, accept the train right away!" said Emmanuil Semyonovich, "I'll find out in the morning who's to blame. Why aren't I asleep? No, I am asleep. I'm fast asleep—but I'm having a dream about what you lot are getting up to out there. Hold on a minute! Listen to the hump yard!"

Galya the cook also began to listen. Now there were still more sounds: the pitiful toots of a second locomotive, coming not from where the FD locomotive was shouting, but from some other direction.

"Hear that?" the boss asked into the telephone. "Give an order to the hump yard. They need to release the brakes: the locomotive on the hump can't pull the cars!"

Emmanuil Semyonovich put down the receiver. The locomotives stopped shouting. Galya left the door, went back to her room and lay down in her bed. Now the shunting locomotive was whistling normally, not loudly, in the departure yard. She could hear freight cars rolling along the frozen rails and the discs of their buffers forcefully hitting against other cars.

"Who's making trouble in the shunting yard?" Once again the boss, still in his bedroom, was shouting down the telephone. "Why aren't they using retarders? Where's the through train from the zero yard, why don't I hear it? It should be here by now!"

He went silent; someone was answering him.

"Check everything and call me back!" said Emmanuil Semyonovich. "If it stays as quiet as this over there, I won't be able to go to sleep anyway … What? No, I'll be dozing. I won't go to sleep until the locomotives are all whistling! Goodbye!"

Galina sighed on her bed. "What are they all? Demons? Devils' spawn? I must inform Lazar Moiseyevich about the life we live here—I'll write him a card. Let him take these good-for-nothings to task. The boss is getting no sleep at all, neither day nor night."

Galina's large body was in such agony over the transport system because all the people she cared for at Red Peregon were also expending their hearts on the railroad. In the beginning, when Galina first learned about this kind of life, she had decided: Why should I care what troubles people let into their souls, I'll live on foot and I'll bear any burdens away on my own back. Locomotives, freight cars—it's all the same to me. I'm a woman after all, I'm a young lass!

After a while, however, Galya had found she had nothing to live on: if she wanted to exist alone as a pedestrian, carrying food in a knapsack on her back, then there was nowhere for her to apply her heart, her affection, and thoughts. And then, bowing to people by virtue of life, she began to share their lot and anxiety. As for living on foot, she could have lived like that, but she no longer wanted to; it was no longer of any interest.

She didn't sleep for a long time, warming herself under a blanket with her own warmth through the work of her own powerful heart.

"Enemy winds are whipping down the railroad and into the steppe," she thought. "People say that cold like this can make rails snap in half … Well, either the rails split or they don't split! Let them not split, or there'll be no goods being loaded and Emmanuil Semyonovich will grow thin again … I need to buy him some sour cream tomorrow. I don't know why, but the collective farmers are hardly bringing us any now: they guzzle it all up themselves, the prosperous devils, phoo, what ugly, greedy mugs you get in the steppe!" Galya began recalling the faces of collective farmers she knew. "I'm happy now—but the people we used to see in the past! Nothing but alien skin and hostile bones—and peasant pride! Yes, I'd thrash every one of you now, each in turn, because of the past! Class against class—that's what you lot were asking for! I'll give you class! *There's* class for you." Galya made a weak movement with her torso in the direction of the station boss's room: "He sleeps and he hears."

Galya herself had also once been a peasant and a collective farmer, though her heart was not drawn towards the one and only collective farm that was native and dear to her: it offered her little joy because of its smallness of scale.

She fell asleep. The telephone above her boss's bed was silent; her boss also slept and his body, accustomed to brief rest, was gathering strength, quickly, hurriedly—his heart had stilled in the depth of his chest, his breathing had shortened, supporting only a small watchful flame of life, each muscle and each tendon was secretly tugging, struggling against monstrosity and the creases of daytime tension. But in the darkness of a mind abundantly irrigated with blood, one quivering spot still gleamed, shining through the half-dark of eyes half-shuttered by lids: it was as if a lamp was burning on a distant post, by the entry switch of the main track coming out from real life, and this meek light could be transformed at any moment into a vast radiance of all consciousness and so set the heart to run at full speed.

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In the morning Galina took the station chief's knapsack and went to the bazaar. She had wanted so many times to throw away this decrepit, ancient knapsack—this awkward knapsack that had been stitched so long ago, in ancient years, from pieces of soft Russian leather and Ukrainian linen; Galina had patched up this knapsack-bag more than once, and, all the same, it was horrid. Beggars from afar had once travelled with knapsacks such as this, but even they had now stopped. But Emmanuil Semyonovich loved this knapsack: he had lived his whole life in peace with it, tramped and ridden one hundred thousand kilometers or more over the earth, and it had been his only property in childhood, in youth, and at a mature age—in his Cherkasy motherland, in the Ussuriysk taiga, on the outskirts of Moscow, and here, in Peregon. He had wandered about with this knapsack and wealth had never swelled it—only the surrounding apparatus of power had put on weight from goods, from throngs of people, and from the movement of corpulent trains. It felt as if goodness itself issued from this knapsack, from the hands of the person who carried it, though the knapsack itself was always empty.

Galina didn't find her master when she returned from the bazaar, but near the door of the closed apartment she came upon Polutorny the yardmaster: he had come to consult the station boss about where he could find a rooster for his Plymouth Rock hens. Galya ordered him out of her sight.

"Goodbye," said Polutorny. "I am now going to comrade Emmanuil Semyonovich Levin's office. I'll tell him not to keep boorish women in his home—they insult personnel and damage the mood of the cadres … "

"Go off and have a good weep!" said Galya. "You've grown used to Soviet power dancing attendance on you. But I'm something else!"

"What are you then if you're not Soviet power?" asked Polutorny. "Are you a contra or something?"

"That's it!" agreed Galya.

Polutorny did not get in to Levin's office immediately: a dispatchers' meeting was taking place there. Then Emmanuil Semyonovich himself came out to talk to Polutorny. The yardmaster said that he did not know how to carry on being. Day and night he was in a state of anguish: his hens had no appropriate, worthy rooster. They were special hens and they laid eggs all year round, but now, without a rooster, they were tearing about and shouting, and several had already taken to flying: they rose high in the air like regular birds and cackled up there. The lunacy of nature!

Levin looked silently into Polutorny's face. Goodness, what things in this world people find to live on: even hens and roosters can nourish a soul, and a heart can find consolation through poultry operations in the yard!

"I understand," said Levin quietly. "I know a certain chicken breeder in Izium, he's an acquaintance of mine. I'll write you a note for him now, you go and see him on your day off. If he doesn't have Plymouth Rocks, he'll tell you where you can find them. He has friends among serious chicken experts. I'll explain everything to him." Even as he spoke, Levin had bent over the table and begun writing.

Polutorny left. He was satisfied: let his farmyard peasant of an old woman just manage the hens and stop managing

Poster for the Soviet documentary by Viktor Alexandrovitsh Turin, Turksib (1929), which retells the story of the construction of the Turkestan–Siberia Railway.

him. If it were up to him alone, he would have roasted all the hens long ago so he'd have something to eat with his fruit spirits ... But his life was not progressing in a straight line: he had to use the very same hands to couple large-capacity freight cars and to palpate petty fowl—mere peasant-woman's creatures. Polutorny resolved to speak with comrade Levin about all this too, before this wife of his completely damaged his soul and he lost all his value as a capable Soviet worker. Oh, life, when will you get yourself sorted so we don't need ever to sense you!

Levin sampled the papers on his desk: communications, reports, notices, registers. A freight car had been derailed on the seventh track; the inspection point was still holding trains ... It was impossible for him to do the work of a thousand people all by himself; his system of preliminary notifications about train arrivals was, so far, delivering only weak benefits. Any system for work is but the game of a solitary mind unless it is warmed through by the energy of heart of every worker. Here in Peregon, he would also need to penetrate inside each person, to trouble and touch each soul so that a plant would grow out from it, blossoming for all.

Levin was smiling timidly. He was alone, thinking with shame and tenderness about the people near to him, his assistants in his work. He had understood long ago that transportation was, in essence, something quite simple, not a problem at all. Why then did it sometimes demand grievous martyrdom instead of ordinary, natural labor? A dead or hostile person—now that truly was a problem! And for this reason it was necessary constantly, unceasingly, to warm the other person with one's own breathing, to keep them close by so that they would not grow deathly numb, so that they would feel how necessary they were and—if only from shame and conscience—would give back, in the form of honorable life and work, the warmth of help and consolation they had received from outside them ... Not everyone's soul, however, was turned forward towards work and the future; many people's souls had nested far away in the rear, on the home front, in a yard where hens range, a wife is doing the managing, utensils age, clothing wears out, and an ancient huddled need clings on—a need that chills any man to the bone and makes him weep secretly inside himself, into the blood of his own body.

The clerk came in. He began saying something to the chief about events during the last twenty-four hours. Levin had also lived through the last few days and so already knew everything about them. As was his habit, he listened above all to the pauses of speech, in which every person imperceptibly, almost unconsciously, struggles with a sudden onslaught of personal, intimate, and astonished forces, then crushes them, thinking they do not relate to the matter in hand.

"Very good, Pyotr Ivanovich," said Levin. "What else?"

"Emmanuil Semyonovich ... Let me do my day's work at night."

"Why?" asked Levin.

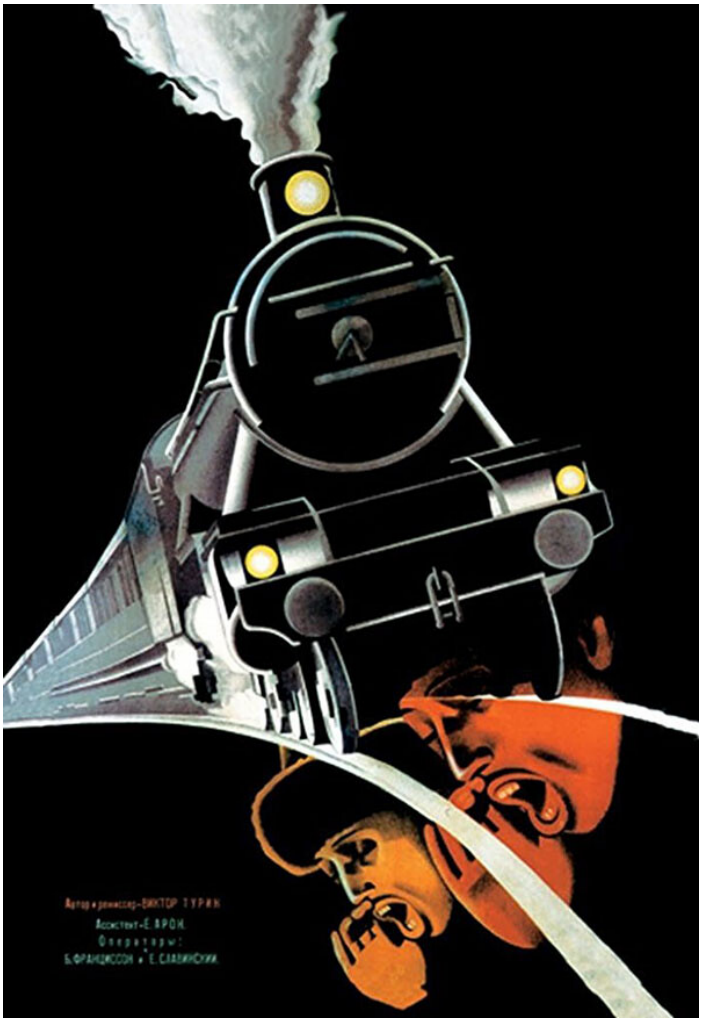
"Well," answered the clerk. His handsome young face took on a confused look, but the force of modesty and pride returned his composure.

"Remind me of this toward the end of the day," said Levin.

The clerk left. Levin picked up the receiver and called home.

"Galya, do you know our clerk?"

Galya, of course, did know the clerk. Whatever did not concern her directly, she knew about in especial detail.



Poster for the Soviet documentary by Viktor Alexandrovitsh Turin, Turksib (1929).

"Go round to where he lives, ask if you can borrow something, something like a broom, have a word with his wife … All right, my little southerner? And then phone me."

Levin got to his feet. It was time he was outside, on the tracks. Into his office came an unfamiliar elderly man, wearing an old railroad conductor's greatcoat that must have been made about twenty years ago.

"I wish you good health, chief!"

"Hello … What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Er, well, I came about work. Here things are well ordered—you're an intelligent man. I want to progress now, I want to be in step … "

"Are you from the collective farm?" asked Levin.

"Yes, where else … Oh, Lord!"

"Why are you wanting to leave it?"

"'Cos our new bosses are so darned clever … Yes, darkness rules: former menders of fences now yell about scientificness, the importance of proper planning, and the basis of authority, and then they go and leave all the hay out to rot—it got soaked. We scythed it—and now it might as well be dust and ashes. Where we live, it seems, even the sun burns in vain: it raises the grass, it makes the grass grow tall—and then we just kill it with rot!"

Levin listened and then asked, "So your hay gets left out to rot—and all you do is wander about sighing."

"Sighing? It was our souls that were aching."

"Aching!" said Levin. He was now looking at this man point blank. "Your soul was aching in vain, your soul was a fool, your soul was a kulak! You were a bystander, you just stood by and smirked. You were thinking, 'All right, let everything go to the devil's mother—all in one night!'"

"Darkness ground the life out of me," the visitor said quietly.

"Still, you understood everything!" Levin pronounced. "Which means there's darkness in *your* head too … "

"Darkness? My head's full of thought!"

"Thought? Then what was this thought of yours doing? Why did it let the hay go to rot? Darkness can happen, but it's not the rule, and if your thought achieved nothing in the collective farm, then what use is it going to be here in the station? Go back home, I'm closing the office. You won't be working here."

Levin set off on his rounds of the station. A passenger train was waiting to leave. People were travelling north, to Kharkov, Moscow, and Leningrad. Moscow was where Kaganovich worked; it was where the station chief's wife lived. In the half-dark of the train carriage's window he could see an unfamiliar woman. She was gazing out in boredom at a station that was alien to her, at people who were of no interest, people whose lives here were going by, like hers, in hopes and concerns of their own, and probably she was wishing the train would leave soon, and then she could forget without a trace the people who remained at the station, and later she would never even remember the name of this place or think of the people living in the distant, smoking, little huts that could be seen from the moving train on the steppe horizon.

The station chief smiled modestly at his inadvertent thought. He considered the woman a fool to be thinking like this, but then he answered himself straightaway: Did he really think she ought to be getting off the train and staying here to work in Peregon?

"Yes," Levin abruptly said out loud and laughed.

He remembered another woman, young and endowed with the gift of living other people's feelings, a fine, unhappy actress. She had disappeared somewhere without glory, without a name, destitute, proud and meek, never giving him another thought, probably unable to sense what lay far away, what had long been of no use to her impressionable and fast-living heart. She was right, fate was irreversible, and the station chief already had a second, beloved wife; he had a little girl of a daughter with whom he would be going out into the world, arm in arm, into happiness, into a real, present life when the little girl had grown into a young woman.

Levin came to a stop absentmindedly, then went back to the passenger train. The woman who had been looking out of the window had stepped outside. She was standing by the end of the carriage, wearing a dark blue suit and with a southern cashmere shawl over her head. Her eyes were examining the unfamiliar station, the workers, the whole strange local world—and not with indifference but with surprise. She was around twenty years old; her fresh, focused face was watching intently, equally ready for a smile or for sorrow. Walking past her, the station chief raised his hand to the peak of his cap; the woman slightly bowed her head to him in response.

A lonely man, Levin rarely saw in person those faraway people for whom he worked. "That's what my daughter will be like soon," Levin decided for himself. "She'll be even better, happier ... But the station chiefs won't be like me. They'll sleep at night and go away on vacation, and they'll live in a family, with a wife, among their own dear children."

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Levin was out on the tracks when Galya caught up with him.

"Emmanuil Semyonovich! The clerk's wife works at the railroad tie factory and the child's yelling behind the door—and the door's closed with a lock ... What kind of life do you call that? No, it's no life at all!"

"What door do you mean?" asked Levin.

"What do you think? In their room, in their own hut ... The child lives there alone all day long. The mother and father are out at work! It's not right, Emmanuil Semyonovich. It's time someone went and organized them!"

"Go along to the clerk and get the key to their hut," said Levin. "You can stay with the child until the father's back from his shift. There's no one who can stand in for him today."

"And your dinner—who's going to make that? What do you think you're going to eat?" exclaimed Galya.

"I won't eat," said the chief. "I'll run on empty."

Galya put her hands on her hips and marveled. "Would you believe it! A man who won't eat! In the Ukraine—and not eating! And our bosses will get to hear of this, and then comrade Levchenko will descend on us again and then there'll be someone or other from Moscow, and then they'll find out a bit more and then it'll be, 'What's the matter with you, why all this fasting, where's your cook, where's your evil snake of a cook?' And then it'll be off to the northern forests with that damned cook and for the next ten years she'll be making borscht for a thousand mouths! So better I go and fetch that wee scrap and wrap him up in a blanket and take him with me to the apartment. Then I can coddle him a bit while I cook lunch for you."

Levin went to the marshaling yard, then to the hump and the inspection point. Things had gone wrong in the night without anyone letting on and four trains had been thrown off schedule. Shunting still seemed to entail any number of minor accidents and unfortunate moments with people. But Levin knew very well that every little chance misfortune was, in essence, a big catastrophe—only it happened to have died in infancy.

Settling for a while in the switchman's booth, the chief summoned the night controller of departures, who was still wandering about on the tracks. For some reason, he hadn't gone home.

"Comrade Pirogov," said Levin. "A while ago, you said you had nowhere to live—we gave you an apartment. You were suffering from exhaustion—I arranged for you to go to a health resort. You weren't getting enough pay—we gave you more, we began arranging bonuses for you, paying you overtime ... At home you get bored and drink vodka; at work you fail to keep a proper eye on your trains, and your freight cars shear the switches ... What's wrong with you, comrade Pirogov? Do you have some secret sorrow?"

"No, chief, I've no sorrow at all ... "

"And I've no more good will for you. I'm a poor person too, perhaps poorer and unhappier than you are!" said Levin, his control momentarily slipping. "Tonight I shall do your shift myself. You stay at home. You can collect your wits, have a rest, and report tomorrow to the Party Committee. I shall ask them to take your Party membership card back."

Pirogov stood before Levin without saying a word, a sad, confused person swollen by the night wind.

"Go on home," said Levin.

Pirogov did not leave.

"Finish the job, chief. Cripple me well and truly."

He turned away and, of their own accord, warm streams of tears inadvertently began running down his face. Pirogov had not been expecting them; he went straight outside immediately and set off into the wind so the air, in place of his mother, would dry his face.

Assemblers and couplers came into the booth. Levin asked them to speak only about the small details of their work; he already knew the main problem.

Assembler Zakharchenko began demonstrating that accidents were of no real importance; it was impossible for them never to happen.

"And what about your hopper wagon?" asked Levin. "Why was it derailed at the switch?"

"Comrade chief," said Zakharchenko, "conscience made me bring up all the day's food. I was so upset that it gave me the runs."

But he did not know what had derailed the hopper wagon.

"What derailed your hopper wagon," Levin explained on his behalf, "was your own greed. You doze off at work; you were late signaling and they changed the switch just as the wagon was passing over ... You are greedy, Zakharchenko! You live ten kilometers away—and at home you and your wife make pots to sell. You finish your shift, you go back home—and you sit down immediately at your potter's wheel. Then you have a little sleep, you sit down again with your pots, and you work away till it's time for your next shift ... You arrive here exhausted, almost ill. What you need is some sleep, but you have to take charge of trains ... How many rubles do you and your wife pull in from the pots?"

"About six hundred rubles," Zakharchenko answered meekly. "Somehow we never manage to make any more."

"You're lying," said Levin, "you earn more. But that's still not a lot for two people. Let me explain to you how you can earn more: pots are something we need, there aren't enough of them in the Ukraine. Come and see me after your shift and I'll draw up a schedule for you: when you should sleep, when you should throw pots, when you should come here. Then you'll arrive here fresh and there'll be no more incidents— *and* you'll manage to make more pots. Understand?"

"Yes, you're right, Emmanuil Semyonovich," said Zakharchenko. "We shouldn't have left this so long. Pots are important too."

"You married quite recently. How's your wife getting on with your dad?"

"Oh, she's all right, she's sweet enough ... Maybe she'll bitch up later."

"No, she's not going to bitch up. We'll educate her, we'll regulate her. But mind *you* don't do anything to ruin her ... "

"It's all right, comrade chief. I live carefully with her ... "

"Yes, you be careful," said Levin. "If you can't work well here, at least be sure to live accident-free in your own home!"

In guilt and distress, Zakharchenko left the booth. He walked up to the switch signal, sat on the switch rod, and saw the reflection of his own face in the glass of the signal light. "Eh, you Moscow schlub, you greedy devil," he said into the glass. "Bliny and more bliny—that's all you want ... You damaged a wagon and now they don't trust you with your own woman. And as for all these pots of yours, all these clay devils ... "

An hour later Levin was on the hump, taking part in disassembling inbound trains sent there by the control center. He noted in his little book what adjustments were needed to the technical equipment. Some fault or other appeared every day—either the retarders would fail or the brake shoes would be wearing out, or something was ailing in central control. Perhaps his eye was becoming keener and now seeing what it had not seen before, or perhaps mechanisms could not for even a moment be removed from a human being's breast and attention. To be on the safe side, Levin did not put his full trust in either people or mechanisms, his instinct being to love both.

On the way back to the office, Polutorny caught up with Levin.

"Emmanuil Semyonovich, I need to speak with you."

"Go ahead, comrade Polutorny."

"My wife's just been round, she was bringing me a cheese pastry. She says she wants to learn French—we've got a teacher here in Peregon now."

"All right," said Levin. "Why shouldn't she?"

"It's impossible, Emmanuil Semyonovich! Then there'll be no end to the follies she'll organize! She's already had enough of the Plymouth Rocks, now she wants to be rid of the rooster too ... All she wants, she says, is the French language, it's culture, she says. And before the Plymouth Rocks it was typesetting, but she gave that up because of her skin—the lead was going to spoil her complexion. Next she wanted to be a chauffeur, then it was agronomy and flower cultivation. Then it was target shooting, then she was leading other people's children around the park by the hand. And all to no purpose, all for nothing. And then she

took to raising chickens, and now it's the French language … "

"Does she often scold you?" asked Levin.

"She curses me through and through … As soon as she notices that a person—me, in other words—has appeared, off she goes: gr-gr-gr-gr, blah-blah-blah-blah."

Levin stopped by a pole, held his notepad against it, and noted something down.

"You know the way to *The Transport Worker*'s editorial office? Give this note to the editor, comrade Levartovsky. I'll phone him and explain everything and then he'll ask your wife to come and work there. They'll accept her for the time being as she is, without French, but later they'll insist she learn it, as a journalist. Your wife's just playing about, so let her take on a real job. French lessons can serve as a bait—but then she's going to have to take them seriously. First of all, though, she can do something simple, like filling up water jugs."

Polutorny stood in happy surprise.

"Why, Emmanuil Semyonovich, you've taken a hundred kilograms off my shoulders!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my woman! I mean my future journalist of a wife! Before eating, she weighs exactly a hundred kilos—she's a real petty bourgeois! Well, now I'll get down to some real labor, Emmanuil Semyonovich! I'll be able to push the wagons along by hand now, since that woman's no longer poisoning my heart!"

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Time was passing, more than half of his life had been lived … After graduating from the institute, Emmanuil Semyonovich Levin had lived alone through all his best, mature years. His most solid and constant friendships were only with the railroad proletariat—his friendships developed through personal contact, mutual help in work, and affection. Without personal connection with people, Levin could not understand how to relate towards the working class: a feeling cannot be a matter of theory. But a feeling acquires strength and meaning only in the shared actions of friends and comrades, in the troubles and happiness of laborious labor.

Levin returned home from work. Darkness was growing weaker in the sky. Not taking off his greatcoat, the man went and stood by the window in his own room and began to listen intently to the noise of freight trains going far into the distance, escaping into the dawn. He had had to reschedule all the night's trains; he had himself sent every train on its way out of the station; he had accepted a newly arrived train for sorting; and he had got new trains ready for early morning departure.

The last through train was growing quieter in the distance; he could just hear the sound of the locomotive taking the slope at full steam. Levin opened the ventilation pane so he could hear the work of the train for longer, and more clearly. It was not in celebratory meals with friends, in midnight arguments, or even in the warmth of well-equipped domestic happiness that Levin found satisfaction or enjoyment. He could fall asleep during a conversation about the truth of life and awaken instantly at the anxious whistle of a locomotive. He deflected the hands of his wife and friends in order to leave for the station at midnight if he sensed sorrow and anxiety there. The wagons were full of goods: the flesh, soul, and labor of millions of people living beyond the horizon. He sensed these people more deeply than the loyalty of friends, more than love for a woman. The first service and aid for his concern about all the unknown—yet close—people living beyond the far ends of the railroad tracks out of Peregon had to be love. He loved and imagined all these distant people, everyone to whom and from whom heavy trains were travelling. For delight in a single beloved being is nothing unless it serves the cause of sensing and understanding the many beings hidden behind that unique person …

It was already too late to sleep … Levin stroked and caressed his own body, which was already far gone from weariness. But plenty of pure, whole strength was still languishing within him, and it was strange that he should be in a hurry to expend that energy quickly and to exhaust himself in labor and cares, so that another, unknown, better, happy heart could make use of the result of a life squandered without mercy to itself, for to Levin it seemed that he himself could never live a life of full value: he was a temporary, transitory being who would quickly pass by in historical time—never again would there be such anxious, uninteresting people, preoccupied with train cars and locomotives. And maybe this was a good thing.

Feeling melancholy, Levin began stroking the wood of the table; he had an urge to wake Galya up and talk with her as with a sister, perhaps to complain to her or to someone else, to any human being, if a human being were to appear.

But all through his life Levin had kept silent when he was in pain, and his first pain had not gone away. Maybe it was then—in childhood—that his soul had been so shaken that it had begun to destroy itself and to sense, ahead of time, its own distant death. He was always able to picture, with precision, that childhood day, that nonetheless sweet day of a splendid, poor life. He was at school, sitting beside Volodya, who was not Jewish like himself, but Russian. Father David came in and began a lesson on the Law of God. He asked Volodya a question and the boy stood up awkwardly at his desk and leaned on it with inadvertent

Soviet poster, date unknown. The poster reads "Sleeping at work/ Helps the enemies/ Of the working class"

carelessness. The priest looked silently at Volodya, then said, "Look at you. You've been sitting beside a yid, and now you don't know how to behave yourself ... The two of you need to be separated." The entire class, all the pupils, silently looked at little Emmanuil, and Emmanuil noticed the smile, the satisfaction, and the pleasure on the faces of his own comrades. Emmanuil meekly opened his mouth a little so he could breath more freely through the pain and palpitations, and he gazed for the entire lesson at a desk where someone's small knife had carved the words: "want to go home." Father David himself was a baptized Jew.

Levin set off back towards the station; sometimes he did not feel like being alone. But there, running towards him, was a watchman; the man was hatless and, still far off, was already opening his mouth to shout something to the station chief. Levin began to run too, towards the man.

"Quick, Emmanuil Semyonovich, there's a phone call from Moscow, from Number One. The whole office is scared stiff ... they're holding a through train going north—the duty officer thinks there may be something urgent to deliver to Moscow, but who knows ... "

"Tell them to let the train go!" yelled Levin. "Who delayed it?"

"Comrade Yedvak," said the watchman. "Who else?"

In the operations room there were already about twenty people, without patience because of their interest. Levin ordered them all to leave, closed the door, and picked up the telephone receiver.

"Station chief Red Peregon here. I'm listening."

"And I'm Kaganovich. Hello, comrade Levin. Why did you come to the telephone so quickly? How did you have time to get dressed? How come—were you still up and about?"

"No, Lazar Moiseyevich, I was just about to lie down."

"Just about to lie down! People lie down to sleep in the evening not in the morning ... Listen, Emmanuil Semyonovich, if you cripple yourself at Peregon, I will seek the same damages as if you had damaged a thousand locomotives. I will check when you're sleeping, but don't you go making me into your nanny ... "

The dense, kind, distant voice fell silent for a time. Levin stood there without a word: he had long loved his Moscow interlocutor but had never been able to express his feelings to him in any direct manner: anything whatsoever would have been tactless and indelicate.

"It's probably nighttime in Moscow too, Lazar Moiseyevich," Levin pronounced quietly. "I don't imagine most Muscovites stay up all night, do they?"

Kaganovich understood and began to laugh.

"Have you invented anything new, comrade Levin?"

"Here we need to invent people all over again, Lazar Moiseyevich ... "

"That's the most difficult thing of all, the most necessary," said the clear faraway voice. A thin, groaning hum—the hum of electrical amplification—reminded both men about the long expanse of space, about wind, frosts, and blizzards, and about the concern they shared.

Levin told him about the work of the station.

The people's commissar asked Levin what help he needed.

At first Levin did not know what to say. "You have already helped me, Lazar Moiseyevich. Now I'm going to rethink myself all over again."

A pause. Again they could hear the work of the amplifier, the mournful whimpering sound of electromagnetic excitement overcoming the enormous spherical convexity of the earth. Both men listened silently to this torment of energy quivering across distance.

"Winter troubles me, comrade Levin," Kaganovich said slowly. "It'll be going on for a long time yet."

Levin winced. Kaganovich had been speaking as if to himself, and in his tone of voice could be heard thoughtfulness, humanity, and the anxiety of a genuine heroic soul. Levin waited for the right time, then answered, "It's nothing, Lazar Moiseyevich. We'll work, winter will pass."

Silence. Levin wanted to say still more, but his voice was in the grip of agitation. He was struggling with the secret shame of a happy adult person.

"Don't be too quick to comfort yourself, Levin," the commissar pronounced. "One must endure winter, grow during winter, and not just put up with winter because people say it's going to pass. A person should not even put up with his own self. If he does, he will become reconciled to the whole world—and the world, of course, is still bad ... Write me letters or ring up and ask to speak to me. Go to bed now. I wish you health!"

Levin walked away from the telephone and put his fingertips to his ribs, through his greatcoat. He regretted that there was not enough goodness in his body to allow him to live through a whole new age without sleep.

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One of Levin's assistants, Yefim Yedvak, had the face of a sworn enemy of a Turkish sultan. He was an unusual person; you would have had to go a long way in the world to find anyone like him. There was nothing he couldn't do, but he never undertook anything except out of extreme necessity: only a direct threat of death would force him to accomplish life and movement. The chief universal evil, in Yedvak's view, was one simple circumstance: people work today on what should not be done before tomorrow, thus making everything whirl around and suffer. And so Yedvak himself never began any task until the last minute, but he always did it well and would finish on time. Levin often gave him difficult assignments with close deadlines. But all Yedvak needed was to understand—and then he could achieve any task. Never, though, did he think up anything himself, or try to be clever. In his free time at home Yedvak played the balalaika, drank fruit spirits, brought in young women and danced with them until the merriment led him into despair. Yedvak, a person of large but immobile intelligence, lived like a barge hauler from the old days: he could work like a master; he could live all the way to the grave without doing anything at all. Women—however many of them there were—did not put up with him for long. Yedvak's soul was probably of such spacious capacity that no woman had been able to build a family nest there, feeling she was like a sparrow in an empty tank wagon.

"You raging around?" Levin once asked Yedvak.

"I'm living," Yedvak responded.

Yedvak had worked previously at a large factory in Kharkov. Levin wanted to ask his advice: might it be possible to improve the work of the station by borrowing something from factories? Factories, after all, had been profiting for a long time from the experience of the railroads. This could be seen in assembly lines, for example, or in automatic signaling and dispatcher communication systems.

"It's not impossible," said Yedvak, "but it won't help. Our bosses and commanders are used to getting things done by using crowds of people, through sheer weight of numbers. When one person is needed, they use three. Our way is not to think but to endure."

"But do *you* think? You don't say anything at work either—and all you do at home is dance."

" *I'm* not going to start thinking, I'm not that kind of person. And if I dance, it's from grief, from the chaos at this point of my life, in Red bloody Peregon!"

Suddenly aroused consciousness turned Yedvak's face a dark brown. He had not been so conscious of anything for a long time; even his moustache had gone hard and was beginning to stand up, as if constructed from fish bones.

"The people's commissar said habit is destroying us. A person should be able to break a habit and start to live anew ... "

"Oh yes," said Yedvak. "He's a commissar—I'm not."

"You sure aren't," said Levin. "Yesterday you delayed two trains for ten minutes—you had to round up five couplers to move two wagons. You should have been my grandfather: if he needed one cart, he always hired three. The first cart wasn't going to arrive, the pintle on the second cart was certain to bend—but the third cart, one way or another, would probably show up ... "

Yedvak felt dazed and hurt.

"Chief, you must give me some tasks that are more harder for me. Feeble tasks make me feeble. Moving wagons is an empty business. There was a duty officer there—but I'm a specialist of another order!"

"So there were two bosses in charge, were there? You were hindering people in their work!"

Levin then entrusted Yedvak with the task of thinking how best to transfer factory-style methods into certain jobs at the station. Yedvak had no intention of thinking forever and so he started on his thinking then and there. He drew on all his memories of factories, of garages, of collective farms, even of women, and completely absorbed himself in the problem. Levin was satisfied. The man's uncouth ways, his barge-hauler boorishness, his empty expenditure of both mind and heart—all this was only a public show, the distorted mask of a proud and talented temperament that had once suffered some hurt. Yedvak was secretly a serious person; to recover his well-being, all Yedvak needed was a task in accord with his abilities and his pride.

In the evening, Levin lay at home, fully dressed but with his head buried in a pillow. Sometimes his head ached badly, and his heart would beat painfully and close by, as if against the bones of his skeleton. This state, however, seldom lasted long; it was necessary only to suffer through it in silence. At night, after resting a little, Levin went off again to the station. Not that anything dangerous was going on there—but Levin had begun to feel bored in his room; he believed that a transient, temporary person like himself possessed nothing that might enable him to live on his own. Perhaps true future people had already been born, but Levin did not consider himself one of them. In order to understand others, he needed to turn away from himself for whole days on end; he needed to pinch and adapt his own soul in order to bring it closer to another person's soul—something that was always shrouded and bewitched—and so be in a position to attune this other soul from within to the simple labor of moving train cars around the station. In order to hear every voice, it was necessary almost to go mute oneself.

Stooping, Levin walked a long way down the tracks to the arrival yard. "Couldn't we start the preliminary information system in the place where the trains are assembled?" he thought, and smiled. How strange: he was accustomed to thinking with passion only about his work. What a boring person he was! Could any other human being ever find life with Levin of any interest? Hardly! How much life was still left him? Well, about twenty years. No, less than that, he had to complete his life faster; a radiant world, a brilliant society, would have no room for such an archaic figure as Levin, a man who thought only about schedules, commercial speeds, train car utilization, and ways to reduce the time a train stands stationary in a station ...

"No!" The solitary station chief laughed out loud. There'll be no such devils in the new world: they'll all have died out! Or else they'll have retired. They'll be blind old granddads, sitting outside a hut and telling stories ...

Levin remembered how children listen to a blind old man: they don't understand his words and don't attach any meaning to them. They look at his eyes, at his worn face, and all that interests them is that he is old and blind, and yet still isn't dying: were they in his place, they'd have died.

The chief returned home at midnight. Galya was already asleep. "I should train her up a bit and send her out to work on the hump," Levin decided. "Why keep her here, why have her expend her life on serving a single person? It's outrageous!"

He lay down in his bed, trying to fall quickly into a deep sleep, not for the pleasure of rest but for the coming day. He listened for a long while yet to the work of the receiving and outbound yards, the zero yard, the through traffic, the hump, the shunting ... The locomotives' signals were normal, trains were being sent off on their way, locomotives hauling trains were singing goodbye as they moved into the distance. Levin began to forget himself, and the light of his insomnia-reddened eyes began to fade in the inner dark of unconsciousness.

An hour later the telephone rang.

"The dogs!" said Galya, waking up in her room.

Levin opened his bloodshot eyes. His greatcoat and all his clothes were hanging on the headboard of the bed. Just in case, he at once took hold of the greatcoat with one hand—to put it on directly over his underwear if need be—and he glanced down to check where his boots were.

"Speaking," he said into the receiver.

"It's all right, chief, it's me, Yedvak. They were phoning from Moscow to ask about your health: were you asleep or not? As if you were some great and immortal person! I said Levin goes to sleep nice and early in the morning. We don't want any more noise from Moscow!"

"But you've just woken me up!"

"Doesn't matter. You'll sleep all the sounder," said Yedvak.

Levin sat for a little while on the bed, then dressed and went to the station. He had had an idea for increasing the standard load of a wagon and he wanted to talk with the carriage men now. There was enough of a safety margin in the strength of the axle set—it could carry a greater load.

X

Translated from the Russian by Lisa Hayden and Robert Chandler.

Andrei Platonov (1899–1951) was a Russian writer and railway worker. He wrote poems, critcism, and fiction,

much of which was published only posthumously.

1
One of the main classes of freight locomotives produced in the Soviet Union from 1932 to 1942. "FD" stands for Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the *Cheka* (the Soviet security service).

Georg Lukács

Emmanuil Levin

In their critiques, Western humanist writers frequently fault Soviet literature for expressing the face of the new socialist person with insufficient clarity. To a certain degree this criticism is correct and should be taken into consideration. In many works [of Soviet literature] (even some that stand on a quite high level), amidst a realistic picture of the socialist land's life environment and human interrelations, certain people are depicted as socialist heroes though in their psyche they belong almost wholly to the old, capitalist world.

However, the arguments of this Western European critique are quite often completely false. This critique expects the new person to be shown "ready-made," as a fully complete ideal that has already been achieved.

Similar false tendencies can also be observed in some works of Soviet literature. After all, it is relatively easy to construct abstract and, at the same time, utterly definite, "pure," "socialist" features and contrast them sharply to other features, which are also strictly defined and isolated and would be characteristic for a class-based society (a sharp and unconditional contrast between optimism and pessimism, etc.). It is much more difficult to show vitally and truthfully the complex process, so full of contradictions, by which the new person *comes to be* in a social environment that is also experiencing a period of becoming and is still suffering from the economic and ideological survivals of capitalism.

Nonetheless one can only show the new person in this way, for thus is he born in reality. In life there exists no "ready-made," complete person who would be one-hundred-percent opposed to *everything* old. The being of the new person is in his becoming. He is formed by overcoming the weighty legacy of a class-based society both in the outside world and within himself, first and foremost in decisive areas of life. He is formed, moreover, by executing the tasks that history sets before him by the necessary—and therefore the only presently possible—means. The content, direction, and intensity of this labor determine the new person's character. The problems which a person struggles to resolve and the very character of this struggle show who he is and what he represents: whether the new, socialist person is really being born within him and how far he has gone along the path of socialist rebirth.

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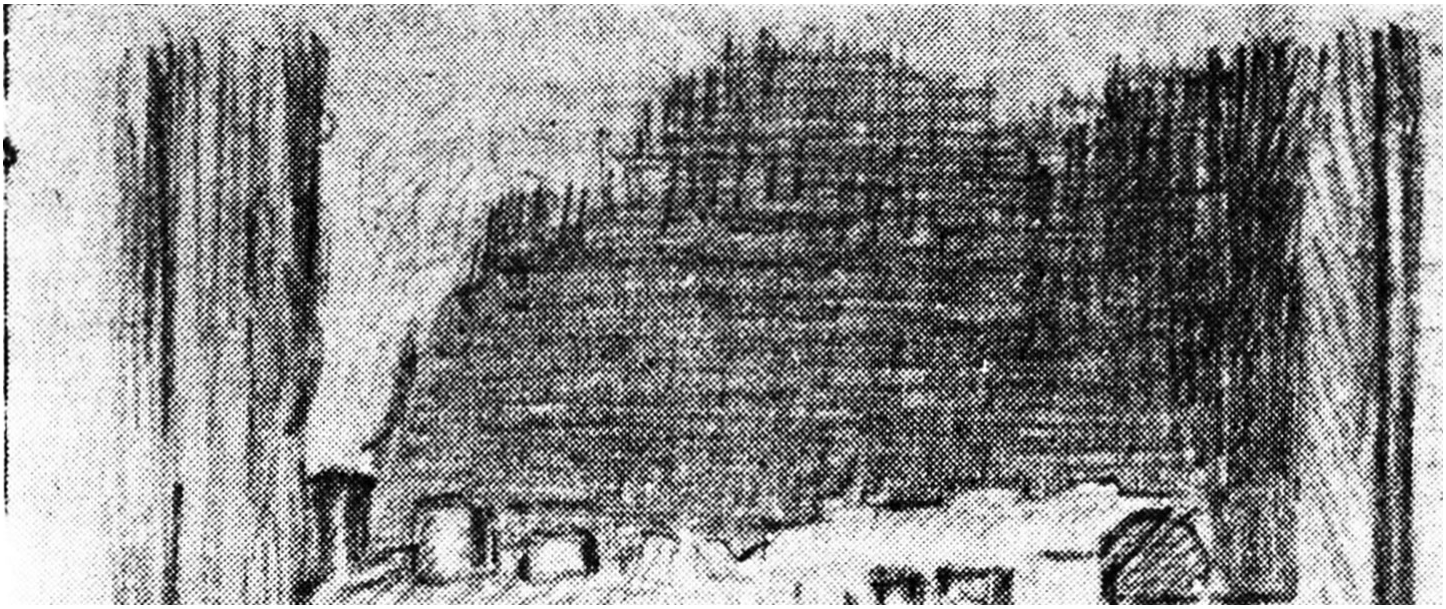
Modesty and simplicity are the most characteristic traits of A. Platonov's story ["Immortality"], in which he draws a beautiful portrait of the new person, namely the railway station chief Emmanuil Levin. In his striving to achieve simplicity and avoid rhetoric Platonov simplifies his composition to the maximum degree. He depicts the life of a small, distant station called Red Peregon in the course of a very short segment of time, which does not differ in any significant way from the usual flow of life before and after



the events described.

Thus this story is a simple picture of Soviet everyday life. But Platonov's story once again proves the truism that one must not judge literary works formalistically, by exterior features.

Rank-and-file, everyday reality; workdays: these are the favorite topics of naturalism. The naturalists draw pictures of usual, unchanging states, fearfully avoiding unusual and extraordinary events and characters which would rise above grey and boring mediocrity in any way.

The everyday life that Platonov depicts has nothing in common with such naturalistic greyness.

Platonov's main task is to reveal the tendencies of the development of people fighting for socialism within a picture of Soviet workdays. We see their difficult struggle with fatal survivals of class-based society: the struggle for overcoming darkness and ignorance in people's consciousness and hearts, of the disorder in life and work, that are the legacies of precapitalist or backwards capitalist lifestyles. In this struggle they also use the capitalist legacy, assimilating the organizational experience of developed capitalism in individual details of economic life; at the same time, however, they struggle against the capitalist legacy in all areas of life: against methods of organizing labor that are specifically limited by private property; against capitalist egotism and individualism; against the greed and inhumanity that are characteristic of people crippled by capitalism and slavishly subordinated to its division of labor. Only in its universal struggle against these survivals of a class-based society does the socialist economy grow. People who build this economy consciously, by overcoming all outer obstacles and inner difficulties, become socialist people in the process of their work and thanks to it.

One of these people is Emmanuil Semyonovich Levin.

He establishes order at his little railway station. He realizes, on the small scale of this station, the program for the reorganization of railways that comrade L. M. Kaganovich has proposed. He regards himself merely a small cog in the enormous mechanism of Soviet railway transport.

True, he is an idiosyncratic cog in an idiosyncratic mechanism.

We do not know how long Levin has worked at this station, but we see that his concern for it has entered into his flesh and blood: deathly tired, asleep at night, he subconsciously feels whether everything is in order on his line and in his depot. This is what he says one night during a telephone conversation with the night watchman: "I'll find out who's responsible in the morning ... Why aren't I asleep? No, I am asleep, but I dream everything that's happening there ... Hang on a minute! Listen to the hump yard! ... "

And on another occasion: "I can't fall asleep anyway when everything is so quiet over there ... What? No, I will just doze. Let the locomotives whistle, and then I'll be able to fall asleep."

It stands to reason that technology and organization occupy the foreground of Levin's work. He is passionately interested in all improvements in both areas. He has become a specialist. He has introduced a system of "preliminary notification"; he confers with anyone who knows even the slightest bit about further rationalizing measures, about the possibility that factory methods of labor might expediently be deployed in the transport sector, etc.

But his passion for technology and organization has never, not even for a second, given rise to the dry one-sidedness that is typical of managers of capitalist enterprises. For Levin the person and the machine, the person and technology, are inseparably linked to each other. The former controls the latter, and out of their fruitful interaction arises the socialist organization of the economy—and is born the new person. "Just in case, Levin did not put his full trust in either technology or people, instinctively loving both the one and the other."

Therefore Levin's task is one of reworking and reeducating people. Platonov's great artistry is evident in the way that the small, outwardly insignificant segment of life that he depicts shows us an enormous multiplicity of processes that reveal this inner reconstruction of people. True, Platonov only charts the direction, the tendency of these processes, and—this is another strong side of his art—we do not see in his work any completely changed people, seeing only the "fulcrums of Archimedes" to which Levin applies his lever; we see the movement elicited by his stimulus and the wholly definite *direction* of this movement.

Levin's passion for such a remaking of people is a very characteristic trait of his personality. But in order to understand the socialist character of his personality one must first understand the concrete content of Levin's major passion. He is no moralist, nor an abstract "educator of humanity." The first task before him is to make good railway workers of his employees (who are peasants or semi-peasants). The socialist meaning of this reeducation reveals itself in the complex dialectic with which the personal, individual inclinations and peculiarities of individual people are consciously brought into accord with work; at this the personality is emancipated from all chains, and its abilities and human dignity grow. The progress of labor is organically combined with the flowering of personality.

The reworking of the peasant or craftsman "human material" into industrial workers was one of the important historical missions of capitalism. It carried out this mission by utilizing the threat of hunger. It turned backward peasants into obedient "parts" for its machines, and the revolutionary workers' vanguard had to conduct a stubborn struggle with the capitalists in order to counteract the dehumanization of these backward peasants.

Levin knows that to cultivate the backward peasant or craftsman into a real worker who has mastered the high technology of socialist production one needs to turn him into a conscious member of society, full of a sense of responsibility. The same sensitivity that keeps him awake at night, whenever he fails to hear the whistles of locomotives and the noise of shunting, causes Levin to hearken to the words of his employees. And he not only hears their words, but also the pauses and lapses in their speech, in order to find the ailing places in these people's souls that have thus far prevented them from developing their abilities and, in the first place, becoming good railway workers.

Work at the station, its precise and uninterrupted functioning, is the originating point and goal of Levin's concern. But here also the unique dialectic of the socialist system—the means which Levin utilizes for the achievement of this immediate goal, to expose "defects" in people's personal lives and to "repair" these defects—exceeds the concrete tasks of organizing labor at the little station. They enable the growth of all of a person's abilities, not just his "railway" ones, and help him to escape the petty, narrow, crippling frames of the rural or urban petty-bourgeois world. The cultivation of a good worker is not limited to teaching him to execute his immediate job correctly; it elevates and fills a person's *entire* life, giving him also energy, intelligence, and stability in his personal life. A person is indeed, as dialectics teaches us, the product of his labor, in the broadest sense of the word.

Levin knows this. For him it is not only a well-learned Marxist truism, but also the basis of everyday life, of normal everyday work. One of the interesting traits of Platonov's art is that he is very sparing with technical descriptions, despite the fact that he is evidently much more deeply and thoroughly acquainted with the technical issues of railway transportation than writers who fill entire chapters with the descriptions of machines on the basis of hurried notes. All of his attention is directed at people. Learning technology, the inability to master it, etc.—all this is shown in the mirror of human tragedies and tragicomedies, human heroism and common incompetence.

All the human fates that Platonov depicts are concentrated around Levin's figure. They are interesting in and of themselves, but their main purpose in the story is to reveal in vivid colors the role that a person like Levin can play in changing the lives of other people.

From the exterior, Platonov's story seems to lack a strong compositional backbone. It consists almost entirely of a series of Levin's conversations with his employees and of his preceding and subsequent thoughts. The point of

departure and culmination of these discussions is always the everyday work at the station, while their central concern is some petty, homebound, "private" concern of the worker. One worker needs a well-bred rooster for his wife, who raises fowl; another makes clay pots in his free time; a third wants to work only at night, so as not to leave his child alone in an empty house during the day, etc.

The human and artistic significance of these conversations is that they reveal important questions of life. Marriage to a woman who has failed to find a place in life and seeks forever new, but always frivolous activities, disorganizes her husband's personal life and work. One employee's greed spoils his productive work. And Levin's critical comments about the direct link between "personal" life and work evoke in people new thoughts and feelings, which affect their entire existence.

Everywhere one sees Levin's sympathetic attitude towards people and his readiness to come to their aid. He tries to discover and fulfill his employees' desires, even completely private ones that seem quite distant from "the task at hand," from work—and all of this in order to help them to strengthen in work and in life. At the same time he is no philanthropist, no soft-hearted man who answers "yes" to any personal request. He poses, for instance, the question of excluding one evidently hopeless employee from the party; he sharply denies work to a man who has left his collective farm and is counting on finding an easy wage on the railway without real, intense labor.

Thus, depending on the circumstances, on what the people he deals with deserve, Levin can be kind or stern; he either sympathizes with people and meets them halfway or becomes implacable. This is a true Bolshevik, the kind that socialist construction needs. He carries out the line of the party, and he does it in his own area—not in a mechanical way, but as an independent, flexibly thinking, and deeply feeling person, as a leader and educator of the masses.

But, thanks to these very same qualities, does he not then turn into one of the boring, lifeless "ideal characters" that evoke readers' fully justified tedium?

This is entirely out of the question. And not because some secondary "negative" trait has been "sewn onto" the "ideal character" of the Bolshevik (as this, unfortunately, is still frequently done in Soviet literature), in order to make him a "living person" precisely on account of his frailty. Such an approach helps nothing. A wind-up doll remains a wind-up doll, a piece of wood, and will never become human simply because some insignificant detail has intentionally been spoiled.

Negative traits in and of themselves are incapable of vivifying a literary image. The living interaction between a person's virtues and mistakes; an understanding that these mistakes are no exterior contingency, but very frequently emerge from those very virtues; an understanding that these positive traits, as a whole, are linked with a person's social fate and with the main problems of modernity: this is the only possible basis for creating a living literary image.

This is exactly the way that Levin's image has been drawn.

No special perspicacity is required to recognize in Levin the traces of hidden suffering. They are felt in conversation with Pirogov (Levin wants to raise the question of Pirogov's exclusion from the party): "'... I am also a poor man, perhaps even poorer, even more unfortunate than you!' exclaimed Levin, letting go of his will for an instant."

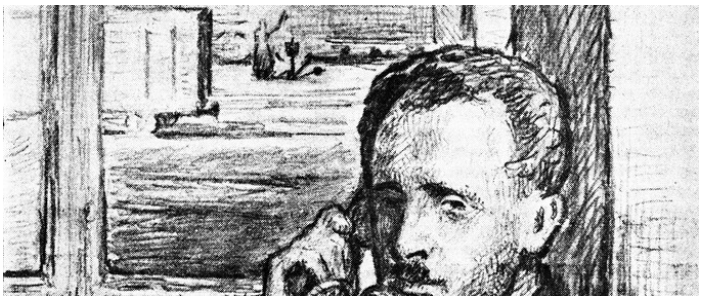
This hidden sadness, suppressed by an act of will, is explained by various recollections about humiliations suffered in childhood, about an unhappy love—memories that arise once in a while in a flood of conscious activity, like bubbles in water. We know nothing of Levin's life path. But his entire intellectual and moral image, as well as the style of his work, show that he had to pass through a difficult path before becoming the self-abnegating and conscious fighter for socialism that we see in him ...

But nor is Levin's emotional life free of inner conflicts at the present time.

He has long understood that transportation is, in its essence, a simple, easy matter. "But why then," Levin asks, "does it sometimes require not usual, natural labor, but a sacrificial tension? A dead or hostile person: that's the difficulty!"

What does this tension of labor cause in Levin's creative work? We have already seen that it evokes in him a concentrated attention to all the people with whom he works: "It is necessary constantly, unceasingly to warm another person with one's breath, to hold him close, so that he not become dead, so that he feel his necessity and—if only from shame and conscience—return the warmth of aid and consolation he has received from without in the form of honest life and work ... " But at the same time, inseparably linked to this quality, Levin harbors a certain *asceticism* that characterizes his entire inner image.

We have already mentioned the clerk who asks Levin to allow him to work at night. Levin finds this request suspicious and he sends Galya, his household worker, to the clerk's apartment in order to become better acquainted with his living conditions. He learns from Galya that the clerk and his wife work at the same time, leaving their child alone to cry behind the door. Levin asks Galya to remain in the clerk's apartment in order to sit with the child until its parents return from work. "But who will make you dinner? But what will you eat?' Galya exclaimed. 'I won't eat,' answered her boss. 'I will live on an empty stomach ... '"



In this case Galya turns out to be not only more intelligent and practical, but also more humane than Levin. She tells him sharply off and decides to bring the child to Levin's apartment so as to take care of both of them at once.

This seemingly minor and insignificant episode illumines some fundamental traits of Levin's character and his self-assessment not only as a personality, but also as a sociohistorical type. Platonov repeatedly returns to this question. These are the thoughts that occur to Levin in his exhaustion:

> But within him there still churned plenty of whole, pure force; and it was strange that he desired to spend this force as soon as possible, to exhaust himself in labor and concern, so that the other, unknown, better, happy heart might make use of the result of a life spent without mercy to itself, while Levin himself, as he thought, would never be able to live a life of full value. He considered himself a provisional, transient being that would quickly pass in historical time, and there would be no more people like him, anxious and uninteresting, puzzled by carriages and locomotives, and perhaps this was a good thing.

It is typical that both here and in other similar cases, in his low assessment of his own personality Levin constantly upbraids himself for what is actually his best quality—for his passionate immersion in work. This is no contingency, no purely individual trait, and even less is it Levin's simple eccentricity. This is a broad problem of the contemporary transitional period, a reflection of the social division of labor at the contemporary stage of the development of socialism—true, given in subjectivist distortion, but at the same time necessary in this very form.

The social division of labor under capitalism was always inwardly contradictory. On the one hand, it was a powerful engine that aided the growth of material productive forces and, at the same time, of a person's personal qualities—ability, knowledge, and experience. However, on the other hand this division of labor crippled people (and not only workers, although they were crippled most cruelly, of course), turning them into one-sided "specialists," into a mechanical supplement of machines. Thus the social division of labor in capitalist society hinders the development of personality. The works of major artists and thinkers of the capitalist period constantly convey a decisive protest against the obstacles that block the path of the free development of personality and lead to the destruction of individuality. Since he highly valued the many-sided, broad development of individuality in the great people of the Renaissance, Engels underscores that the social basis of this culture was an as-yet-undeveloped capitalist division of labor.

Under socialism this situation changes radically but, of course, not instantly, not immediately.

Let us take a person's attitude to labor for example. It is typical that, when listing the economic and ideological premises of the *supreme phase of communism*, alongside the abolition of "the slavish subordination of personality to the division of labor," alongside the comprehensive development and growth of productive forces, Marx also underscores that "labor becomes not only a means of existence, but also the most urgent necessity of life."

These premises of the supreme phase of communism begin to develop at the first stage of the construction of socialism, but naturally they cannot yet exist in their final, complete, and harmonious form. The path to their realization inevitably faces its own contradictions.

These contradictions are very diverse. The most primitive and widespread are obstructions to the correct organization of labor, with which Levin struggles indefatigably. However, Levin's own inner contradictions grow on the same social roots; only in his case they rise to a higher stage of consciousness.

The majority of Levin's employees have yet to understand what the new socialist labor entails. They must free themselves from their petty bourgeois limitations in order to see how socialist labor educates them, makes them the kind of comprehensively developed people that they could not have even imagined themselves as before.

Levin stands incomparably higher than this level. His ascetic sadness and self-abnegation arise from his

V. Chernetsov, Portrait of Emmanuil Levin. Illustration from the journal Literaturnoe obozrenie 19–20 (1937).

impatience, from his mental leaps across the contemporary stage of development. This mental leaping ahead and this gaze, untiringly aimed at the future, are not only subjectively justified, but also objectively necessary. The conscious restructuring of social reality, of the economy, and of people would be impossible without such a mental anticipation of the future.

The great leaders and teachers of socialism know how to combine the correct understanding of future development

with a courageous and realistic approach to contemporary reality, with an understanding of its contradictions and failings.

In one conversation with Gorky, Lenin speaks of the happiness of children who will no longer have to bear the difficulties of contemporary reality on their shoulders; but he immediately adds: "And yet I don't envy them. Our generation has been able to fulfill a task that is exquisite in its historical significance. The forced cruelty of our life will be comprehended and justified. Everything will be comprehended. Everything!"[1]

But such a profound understanding of the contradictions of reality is no simple matter and does not simply stand to reason. It can be achieved in full only by real, great leaders. People of a smaller scale frequently display a psychological conflict between the contradictory parts of this complex unity: either the glow of the future that they foresee eclipses the comparatively boring reality, or the achievements of the present day evoke a smugness, a self-satisfaction, that conceals its real failings behind various surrogates.

Let us return to the main problem of Levin's life.

It is incorrect to believe that the comprehensive development of human personality has been achieved completely and in full at the contemporary stage of development; but it is just as incorrect to see the person of this period as *merely* a boring preparer of the material premises of the future, as *merely* transitory phenomenon, as a kind of "manure for history."

Levin inclines towards this latter point of view. It is doubtlessly more heroic, profound, and useful for work than the vain smugness that some workers display; nevertheless, this point of view is also false.

Levin fails to understand the independent value of the contemporary person, even if this person is a transitory phenomenon. This is the psychological basis of his sadness and his asceticism. Out of his correct self-limitation, which is necessary in his position, he draws the excessively far-reaching conclusion about his imagined lack of full value. However, by underestimating himself, he unconsciously and unwittingly underestimates the socialism to which he is so passionately devoted and to which he sacrifices his entire life every minute.

Surrounded by his employees, Levin is a true comrade and a good educator, who leads them towards socialism. However, Platonov shows that this very educator also needs to be educated. We have already mentioned the lecture read to him by Galya, his cook. The second "lecture," even more important and more profound, issues from comrade Kaganovich.

During their brief nocturnal telephone conversation, so full of the deep and modestly unspoken love of good workers for each other, Kaganovich reinforces Levin's prescribed correct working methods in his own work, raising them to a higher level and making generalizations from them. Kaganovich says: "A person should not get accustomed even to himself, otherwise he will reconcile himself to the entire world, though it is still in a bad way ... " But at the same time he says: "Listen, Emmanuil Semyonovich. If you cripple yourself at Red Peregon I will demand compensation as if you had ruined a thousand locomotives. I will check when you are sleeping, but don't make a nanny out of me ... "

Kaganovich is also wholly dedicated to his work and, like Levin, sacrifices his nocturnal rest. This sacrifice is illustrated very finely and delicately in Levin's remark: "It's probably night now in Moscow as well, Lazar Moiseyevich. There also people don't wait for morning to go to bed." But the words of the People's Commissar also contain a serious warning, a comradely critique of Levin's excessive, ascetic intensity. On the night following this telephone conversation, inquiries are once again received from Moscow about Levin, about his health, about whether he is asleep. "As if you were a great, immortal man," the night watchman jokes. But that is indeed the truth, however much Levin might deny it in his asceticism.

This problematic is the problematic of many of the best, most profound people of our time, the typical problematic of the contemporary socialist person. Impatience and irreconcilability with respect to imperfect reality also characterized revolutionaries of an earlier generation; it remains one of their important character traits today. The manifestation of such impatience in Levin's work and in his relationships with people is truly socialist. We have tried to show that the problematic characteristics of his personality are also borrowed from reality and are marked by a character typical of today, that is by a socialist character. But at the same time, despite their typicality, these characteristics contain an aspect that remains to be overcome; moreover, this negative aspect cannot be overcome in the way Levin thinks it can, i.e., ascetically. This thought is subtly developed in the story without at all impoverishing its vital, complex truth. It is precisely on the strength of his problematic nature that Levin is a living person of our time: he is not a dead "ideal character," no "bookish invention," but a true "person with his contradictions."

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Translated from the Russian by Robert Bird. Originally published in *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 19–20 (1937).

Georg Lukács (1885–1971) was a Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic.

1
Maxim Gorky, “V. I. Lenin,” at marxists.org https://www.marxists.org/archive/gorky-maxim/1924/01/x01.htm .

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Articulations of (Socialist) Realism: Lukács, Platonov, Shklovsky

Two puzzles dominate recent discussions of Soviet literature and Marxist aesthetics in the 1930s. The first is how the official Soviet system tolerated and even at times celebrated such an idiosyncratic writer as Andrei Platonov, who in the last twenty-five years has emerged as the central literary artist of the time. The second puzzle is how socialist realism, a literature wholly focused on the future, came to model itself on nineteenth-century realism, with the result that the bulk of socialist realist novels (and works in other literary genres and artistic mediums) read like tedious exercises in nostalgia, while artists who really anticipate the future, like Platonov, became marginalized.

These two puzzles have brought close attention to the circle around the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* (Literary Critic), which had been created in 1934 as a locus for theorizing socialist realism, became closely allied with Mikhail Lifshits and other progressive Marxist philosophers, and also published the bulk of Platonov's critical writings. In August 1936 *Literaturnyi kritik* broke with its charter to publish two stories by Andrei Platonov, "Immortality" and "Among Animals and Plants," in the same issue that Georg Lukács published "Narrate or Describe?," a foundational work in the theories of narrative and of realism. In this essay I propose to read Platonov's "Immortality" together with Lukács's "Narrate or Describe?" and Lukács's review of "Immortality," as part of a wide-ranging dialogue that also involved Viktor Shklovsky, about realism in general and the method of socialist realism in particular. This dialogue suggests that, far from legislating an outmoded style for the novel, Lukács derives from Platonov's fiction a portable model of socialist realist method that will ensure the dual agency of the artist—as composer and medium of history—while allowing literary form to adapt to continual changes in the structure of history. Recovering the ambition of Lukács's essay not only clarifies its historical context, but also suggests how the realism in question then might be the realism with which we still contend in our own day.[1]

1. "Immortality" and Socialist Realism

"Immortality" was commissioned from Platonov under the auspices of a large project called "People of the Railway Empire," initiated by the Union of Soviet Writers and the railway newspaper *Gudok* (Horn) in late 1935. In line with the new Stakhanovite movement, which showcased particularly productive individual workers in each major industry, on July 30, 1935 Stalin gathered the most illustrious railway workers for an awards ceremony at the Kremlin. By August 17, working at a Stakhanovite pace, the publishing arm of the rail industry prepared and published a commemorative volume, *Liudi velikoi chesti* (People of Great Honor), which featured brief biographies of the sixty-seven award-winning railway workers. Sometime that autumn a decision was made to commission literary works about them. Platonov was assigned two Stakhanovites of the rails: pointsman Ivan Alekseevich Fyodorov of

The agit-train October Revolution included a car specifically outfitted for propaganda purposes. Photo: Vertov-Collection, Austrian Film Museum

Medvezh'ia gora station, and stationmaster Emmanuil Grigor'evich Tseitlin of Krasnyi (Red) Liman station. Fyodorov became the protagonist of "Among Animals and Plants," in which he is maimed while trying to stop a runaway train, is honored at a ceremony in Moscow, and promoted to the position of coupler. Tseitlin was fictionalized in "Immortality" as Emmanuil Semyonovich Levin, the indefatigably caring chief of Red Peregon station.

Platonov (1899–1951) was a natural choice for the project. Born in the family of a railway engineer, he had frequently set his stories in and around rail yards. He explained his railway obsession in a text later published by his widow Mariia:

> Before the revolution I was a boy, but after it happened there was no time to be young, no time to grow; I immediately had to put on a frown and start fighting [i.e., in the Civil War] ... Without finishing technical college I was hurriedly put on a locomotive to help the engineer. For me the saying that the revolution was the locomotive of history turned into a strange and good feeling: recalling it, I worked assiduously on the locomotive ... Later the words about the revolution as a locomotive turned the locomotive for me into a sense [*oshchushchenie*] of the revolution.[2]

A revolutionary fact gives rise to a feeling and organizes labor, but then returns to a metaphor that rapidly accelerates out of control. This literal belief in metaphor animated socialist realism, the official aesthetic system of the Soviet Union beginning in 1932, and Stalin relied heavily upon the mobilizing power of metaphor when, in 1935, he placed the rail industry at the center of public discourse, as seen in railway commissar Lazar Kaganovich's speech at the celebration of July 30, 1935:

> In *The Class Struggle in France* Marx wrote that "revolutions are the locomotives of history." On Marx's timetable Lenin and Stalin have set the locomotive of history onto its track and led it forward.

> The enemies of revolution prophesied crashes for our locomotive, trying to frighten us with the difficulty of its path, its steep inclines and hard hills. But we have managed to lead the locomotive of history through all inclines and hills, through all turns and bends, because we have had great train engineers, capable of driving the locomotive of history. We have conquered because our locomotive has been steered by the dual brigade of the great Lenin and Stalin.[3]

Tropes unexpectedly spawn real imperatives. Though Platonov had been marginalized since his stories attracted Stalin's personal ire in 1929 and 1931, the railway commission promised a way back into print.

"Among Animals and Plants" was accepted by the journals *Oktiabr'* (October) and *Novyi mir* (The New World), but Platonov refused to make the changes they demanded. Both "Among Animals and Plants" and "Immortality" were then rejected by the prestigious almanac *God Deviatnadtsatyi* (The Nineteenth Year), before being accepted by the journal *Kolkhoznye rebiata* (Kolkhoz Kids), where they appeared in abbreviated adaptation for children.[4] The decision by the editors of *Literaturnyi kritik* to publish Platonov's stories as the first and last ever works of fiction ever included in the journal demonstrates both their high regard for Platonov and their determination, despite his difficulty in finding outlets for his work, to see him in print.

Given the political tenor of the moment—August 1936 also witnessed the first Moscow show trial of Stalin's rivals—it was an act of no little boldness. In an extended but unsigned preface, the editors explained their decision as dictated by the timidity of literary journals' editorial boards, which prefer safe "routine" and "cliché" to a realism that reveals contradictions and incites reflection:

> We categorically reject the formula "talented, but politically false." A truly talented work reflects reality with maximum objectivity, and an objective reflection of reality cannot be hostile to the working class and its cause. In Soviet conditions a work that is false in its ideas cannot be genuinely talented.[5]

What sounds like pure casuistry reflects the journal's consistent position that literary narrative possesses a degree of autonomy, i.e., means of efficacy that cannot be mapped directly onto ideology: "Vigilance is necessary. In order that it be real, actual, Bolshevik vigilance, however, and not just a bureaucrat's fear of 'unpleasantness,' it is necessary first of all to know literature."[6]

Georg Lukács was a leading light of the journal, and the unnamed editors' opposition between "literature" and "bureaucracy" calls to mind Lukács's 1939 essay "Tribune or Bureaucrat?" In fact the entire project "People of the Railway Empire" had been conceived along roughly Lukácsian lines, considering his opposition to pure factography in the 1932 essay "Reportage or Portrayal?" The project was to be rooted in close study of Soviet life, specifically through an archive of transcripts of worker interviews that were commissioned especially for the occasion. As its organizer Vladimir Ermilov stressed, writers would travel to the home locations of their subjects "for personal impressions, so that this figure really comes to life in the hands of this writer when he is writing, working."[7] The result will be that "this literary work will not be isolated from the specific nature of the railway … in order that these works show people in the genuine, specific surroundings in which they live, work and fight."[8] Unlike previous collective documentary projects (e.g., on the heroic Cheliuskin expedition to the Arctic Sea or on the construction of the Moscow Metro), authors were urged "to provide stories, highly artistic documentary sketches and literary portraits, written by authors themselves over their personal signature; not reworked transcripts but genuine, self-sufficient artistic works about the person."[9] In addition to prose works written on the basis of the transcripts, Ermilov encouraged the creation of plays and also a "railway *Chapaev*," modeled on the popular 1934 sound film about a Civil War-era commander.[10]

Platonov fulfilled his commission with admirable conscientiousness, completing his two stories by the deadline of February 10, 1936. For "Immortality," in addition to renaming his protagonist and the location, Platonov appears to have used the (unknown and possibly lost) transcript of Tseitlin's interview with great license, deriving from it only the basic picture of a railway station chief working tirelessly to keep trains on schedule despite the incompetence and truculence of less conscientious coworkers. In Platonov's story the logistics specialist Polutorny is preoccupied with finding a Plymouth Rock cockerel for his hens. Another logistics specialist, Zakharchenko, spends most of his time at his pottery wheel producing wares that he sells at great personal profit. Night supervisor Pirogov is depressed, needy, and incompetent, while Levin's assistant, Yedvak (based on the word for "hardly," *yedva*), is simply lazy. Protected only by his loyal but limited cook Galya, Levin sacrifices sleep and nourishment to keep a watchful eye over the entire operation.

In his story Platonov observes a delicate oscillation between documentary source and fictional invention. Traveling to Krasnyi Liman only after finishing the story, Platonov found Tseitlin "intelligent (true, I've only spoken to him for ten minutes so far) and very similar to his image in my story."[11] Publishing the story in *Literaturnyi kritik*, Platonov attached an enigmatic note: "In this story there are no facts that fail to correspond to reality at least in a

small degree, and there are no facts copying reality."[12] Platonov strives for realism, but realism excludes the "copying" of reality. So what, for Platonov, was realism?

2. Realism as Articulation

It was a version of this question, I will argue, that stimulated Georg Lukács to publish "Narrate or Describe?," one of his major statements on the theory of narrative, in the same issue of *Literaturnyi kritik* as Platonov's "Immortality." Lukács begins ("in medias res," he admits) with the coincidence of two parallel scenes in contemporaneous novels named for anagrammatic heroines; namely, the horse races in Emile Zola's *Nana* (1880) and Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873–1878). Zola's "brief monograph" about horse racing is a symbolic insert into his novel about the prostitute Nana, while Tolstoy makes Fru-Fru's fatal fall into a turning point for multiple plotlines centered on the adulteress Anna. Zola's horse race is exterior to the central story, while Tolstoy's is fully integrated. "In Zola the race is *described* from the standpoint of an observer; in Tolstoy it is *narrated* from the standpoint of a participant," Lukács concludes.[13] The question for Lukács is: Which writer—and which method—treats the event more realistically?

When it appeared in the original German in the November and December 1936 issues of *Internationale Literatur*, the Moscow-based organ of the international Popular Front, Lukács's essay "Narrate or Describe?" was presented itself as an intervention in the heated debate over realism that was instigated on January 28, 1936 with an editorial in the central Party newspaper *Pravda*. The anonymous author of "Muddle instead of Music" condemned the "formalist" tendencies of Dmitrii Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, i.e., its excessive interest in matters of pure form, leading the opera to be promptly yanked from the stage of the Bolshoi Theatre. More articles followed, broadening the initial critique to cover not only the overemphasis on form ("formalism"), but also the opposite overemphasis on raw sensory data ("naturalism"), both of which become watchwords for modernism. The articles targeted a range of artists in various media: Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream* (with librettist Adrian Piotrovsky and choreographer Fedor Lopukhov), artist Vladimir Lebedev's illustrated children's books, Mikhail Bulgakov's drama *Molière*, and the collected writings of poet and novelist Marietta Shaginian. Threatening administrative penalties (or worse) for offending artists and critics, the campaign against modernist excess was quickly extended to all mediums of art and instilled a deep and lasting chill on Soviet culture. It suggested an end to the notion of socialist realism as an autonomous method that could engender a variety of styles and modes for socialism, and its transformation into an obligatory and uniform style based on the replication of safe artistic conventions encoded in a restricted canon of authoritative exempla.[14]

In the process of updating his argument to suit the new struggle against formalism and naturalism, Lukács introduces a fundamentally new concept of realism based on the treatment of chance (*Zufälligkeit*). Lukács judges *Nana* and *Anna Karenina* by their starkly different treatments of chance in the horse race scene: Tolstoy's horse race is an "exceptional" event (112/101, 125/111), but one that is so closely integrated with the novel's major plotlines that Frou-Frou's fall reads like a death sentence pronounced on Anna herself. Zola's, by contrast, is self-contained and easily separable from the rest of the novel. For Lukács, Tolstoy exemplifies how truly realist artists "elevate chance to the inevitable [*das Zufällige in die Notwendigkeit aufheben*]" (112/102). Lacking this air of inevitability, Zola's horse race is merely a naturalistic "hypertrophy of real detail," as Zola himself describes his method (116/104). For Lukács, Tolstoy "provides quite another mode of artistic inevitability [*künsterlische Notwendingkeit*] than is possible with Zola's exhaustive description" (112/102). Lukács concludes: "Narration establishes proportions [*gliedert*], description merely levels" (127/112).

The established English translation of this line obscures the concept I take to be central to Lukács's new concept of realism: articulation. In the Hegelian tradition articulation (*Gliederung* in German, *raschlenenie* in Russian) does not merely establish proportions and arrange into hierarchical order, but also elevates chance to the status of necessity. True to its etymology in Latin and German (*artus* and *Glied*, meaning a joint, limb, or member), articulation reveals details to be the limbs or members of an organism. Lukács is most interested in how narrative articulates isolated occurrences as events in history, understood in a Marxist vein; he argues that narrative articulation "conforms to the laws of historical development and is determined by the action of social forces" (122/108). Thus the "artistic inevitability" of the narratively articulated event (*Ereignis*) coincides with historical necessity. Lukács even goes so far as to argue that history itself "objectively articulates" (*gliedert*) the fictional world and the characters that the realist artist depicts (122/108).

Lukács's dual concept of "articulation"—history working through narrative, and narrative working to produce history—draws on Hegel's use of *Gliederung* in the second part of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. Dedicated to the philosophy of nature, this section traces how simple organisms—plants and animals—express their inner idea or subjectivity by articulating themselves into complex forms. Through articulation, "subjectivity … is developed as an objective organism, as an image [*Gestalt*]": "This moment of negative definition grounds the transition to a genuine organism, in which the outer image harmonizes with the concept, so that these parts are essentially members, while subjectivity is the all-pervading unity of the whole."[15]

Lukács's was also aware of a famous passage in the *Grundrisse*, where Marx deploys *Gliederung* to denote the process by which economic production articulates inchoate social relations into hierarchical structures, which can retrospectively be read as a palimpsest of economic history. By analogy with evolutionary paleontology, Marx suggests that new forms of society retain structures inherited from more archaic ones: "Bourgeois society … allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up."[16] Lukács follows Hegel and Marx in using "articulation" as a way to hold together the individual and world-historical vectors of causality. When applied to narrative art, this means that the artist freely articulates his or her subjective concept in image-forms (*Gestalt*) or narratives (*Erzählung*) that coincide with the objective forms (economic or evolutionary) of historical necessity.

It may seem odd, in this light, that Lukács proceeds to pass ethical judgment on Zola's method, instead of treating it as the objective revelation of historical necessity speaking through *Nana*. Doesn't the very coincidence of such similar contemporaneous novels signify anything about the paths of modernity, beyond Zola's willful deviation from realism? However, Lukács thoroughly rejects the notion that every work of art bears some truth about history, by means of some "immanent dialectic within artistic forms" (119/106). Instead, Zola's deviation from realism is grounded in the alienation of professionalized literature (reflecting the capitalist division of labor) and in the author's loss of belief in the possibility of social change after 1848: "Without an ideology [*Weltanschauung*] a writer can neither narrate nor construct a comprehensive, well-organized, and multifaceted epic composition" (143/114).[17] Articulation—as the key to epic narrative composition—is the hallmark not of art as such, but only of art that has been guided by a conscious striving to capture the totality within a sequence of seemingly chance events, i.e., of art that is intentionally and studiously realist.

Read retrospectively, Lukács's insistence on the author's conscious ideological stand may seem to be an apology for the Communist Party under Stalin and its coercive legislating of aesthetic style. From the time of the Russian revolution Lukács had consistently hewed to the Leninist line concerning the role of the Party as the proxy of proletarian consciousness, opposing those like Rosa Luxemburg, Aleksandr Bogdanov, or Lev Trotsky who imagined proletarian consciousness as arising spontaneously and dictating its own terms and forms. Already in a 1932 essay, Lukács called upon writers to jettison any notion of fellow travelers in art (what he calls "tendency") in favor of full-blown "partisanship," which he defines in the following way:

> what the class-conscious section of the proletariat wants and does, from an understanding of the driving forces of the overall process, and as representative of the great world-historical interests of the working class, portraying this as a will and a deed that themselves arise dialectically from the same overall process and are indispensable moments of this objective process of reality.[18]

In short, the Party does much the same work as realist artists, "portraying" diverse desires and events as part of a single overall pattern, i.e., articulating them as history. To articulate means to be articulated as a (Party) member (*Mitgleid*). At issue in "Narrate or Describe?," then, is the ability of literary form both to express and to produce class consciousness by articulating the world-historical significance of actually-existing material conditions.

3. Platonov and Lukács

The most conspicuous gap in "Narrate or Describe?" is the lack of any recent examples of realism, so that Lukács is forced to fall back on prerevolutionary models. For Lukács, recent bourgeois artists (both formalists and naturalists) have failed at realism in two conspicuous ways, both by trivializing reality and by deploying the wrong method for its artistic analysis. It is bad enough that modern artists "have diminished [*verkleinlicht*] capitalist reality, rendering its terror weaker and more trivial than it really is"; even more grave for Lukács that "the methods of observation and description diminish and distort the greatest revolutionary process of humanity."[19] Sinking even deeper than Zola into alienation, contemporary bourgeois writers suffer from two regrettable tendencies: objectivism and subjectivism. In spurious objectivism (i.e., naturalism), "the so-called action is only a thread on which still-lifes are disposed in a superficial, ineffective fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures" (144). The subjectivist (i.e., formalist) novel, typified by Proust, depicts a life so alienated from the world that it also turns into something "static and reified" (144). The case of James Joyce shows how extreme subjectivism ends up coinciding with extreme objectivism, producing a raw documentary record of merely subjective experience, leaving us with unanalyzed and unshaped surface data.

Soviet literature also presents a record of failure. In a final section on Soviet literature (included only in the German-language publication in *Internationale Literatur*, but omitted in the Russian-language publication earlier the same year), Lukács reports with indignation that novelist Iurii Olesha has expressed preference for Joyce over Gorky, which shows the lingering effect of the "late-bourgeois and Bogdanovite traditions" of conflating form with method. The choice between realism and its alternatives is ultimately "not literary in a technical sense";

Andrei Platonov, c. 1938. Copyright: Mariia Andreevna Platonova/Wikimedia Commons.

it is, rather, ontological: "The new person cannot be formed out of this episodism [characteristic of both formalism and naturalism]. We must know and experience in a human way *from where* it is to come and how it is to undergo its growth."[20]

In "Narrate or Describe?" Lukács gives little indication of how socialist realism might recover the power of realist articulation, creating the impression that the only path forward is to imitate the narrative techniques of the pre-1848 realist novel and of its later stalwarts Dickens and Tolstoy. Lukács's cursory endorsement of Maxim Gorky—the undisputed hierarch of Soviet literature—seems merely a half-hearted acknowledgement of Gorky's canonical position, especially in light of his recent death under suspicious circumstances in June 1936. The majority of Soviet novels, Lukács avers, foreground "neither human fates nor the relations among people, mediated by things," but rather "the monograph of a kolkhoz, a factory, etc."[21] What is needed in socialist realism is "a view [*Blick*] on life that exceeds the description of its vast surface and the abstract arrangement of correctly observed social impressions; a view that sees the *mutual dependence* [*Zusammenhang*] of the two [i.e., of life and its arrangement] and brings this mutual dependence together poetically as a story [*Fabel*]."[22] Lukács reports that the most significant Soviet writers are "striving for individual stories ever more energetically," but as evidence he names only Aleksandr Fadeev, an author whose authority was more administrative than artistic (he took over as head of the Union of Soviet Writers after Gorky's death).

But Lukács's reticence regarding socialist realism should not surprise us given the opening words of his essay. "We begin in medias res" not only in the sense that the analysis of Tolstoy and Zola requires prior knowledge of the texts, but also in the sense that socialist realism is still in the process of being defined and created. Within a year Lukács broke his relative silence about contemporary Soviet literature with an article about the protagonist of Andrei Platonov's "Immortality," presented as a contribution to a special issue of *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (a supplement to *Literaturnyi kritik* where Platonov frequently published critical texts) dedicated to "Heroes of Soviet Literature." Platonov's meek station chief Emmanuil Levin makes surprising company for such canonical protagonists as Chapaev and Pavel Korchagin (from Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*). Lukács's provocative canonization of Platonov's story not only demonstrates his unconventional view of socialist realism, but also confirms his argument for realist representation as a crucial phase within the historical unfolding of socialism.

Based on the parameters laid out in "Narrate or Describe?," Platonov's story is a far from predictable exemplum for Lukács's theory of realism. Not only is it a short story rather than the novels Lukács usually favors, but Lukács concedes that "Immortality" lacks suspense (*Spannung*) and even a "strong compositional backbone (*sterzhen'*)." However, the critic must avoid treating literary works "formalistically, according to outward characteristics," Lukács argues, focusing instead on how Platonov's story of the everyday remains free of "naturalistic greyness":

> Platonov's main task is to reveal the tendencies of the development of people fighting for socialism within a picture of Soviet workdays [*budni*] … People who build this economy consciously, by overcoming all outward obstacles and inward difficulties, become socialist people in the process of their work and thanks to it.[23]

Drawing on his arguments in "Narrate or Describe?," Lukács sees Levin as a "typical" character whose actions bring the elements of chance in socialist character-construction into a pattern of inevitability:

> Negative traits in and of themselves are incapable of vivifying a literary image. The living interaction between a person's virtues and mistakes; an understanding that these mistakes are no exterior contingency [*sluchainost'*], but very frequently emerge from those very virtues; an understanding that these positive traits, as a whole, are linked with a person's social fate and with the main problems of modernity: this is the only possible basis for creating a living literary image.[24]

Quirky as Levin is, he is no *sluchainost'*, but instead emerges from Platonov's story as *neobkhodimost'* —necessity:

> It is typical that both here and in other similar cases [*sluchai*], in his low assessment of his own personality Levin constantly upbraids himself for what is actually his best quality—for his passionate immersion in work. This is no contingency [*sluchainost'*], no purely individual trait, and even less is it Levin's simple eccentricity. This is a broad problem of the contemporary transitional period, a reflection of the social division of labor at the contemporary stage of the development of socialism—true, given in subjectivist distortion, but at the same time necessary [*neobkhodimoe*] in this very form.[25]

Platonov's Levin is not a two-dimensional character illustrating a static ideal, not a "wind-up doll" (in Lukács's phrase), but instead reveals the logic of his situation through conscious action, primarily labor: "Man is indeed, as dialectics teaches us, the product of his labor, in the broadest sense of the word."[26]

Levin's small-scale labor shows how the revolution is reversing the large-scale dynamics of chance in history, ridding the world of negative contingency. If the bourgeois novel showed the inevitability of accidents, then Platonov's Levin asserts control over contingency, or at least its consequences: "Shunting still seemed to entail any number of minor accidents and unfortunate moments with people. But Levin knew very well that every little chance misfortune was, in essence, a big catastrophe—only it happened to have died in infancy."[27]

It is therefore fitting that the story lacks suspenseful contingencies, relying instead on the drama of a protagonist existing on two scales at once, the personal and the world-historical: "On the small scale of this station he undertakes the program for the reorganization of the railway proposed by comrade L. M. Kaganovich."[28] The way in which small features of the portrait ramify into the larger productive processes are suggested by none other than Kaganovich, who calls Levin on the telephone in the middle of the night in order to make sure he is taking care of himself: "Listen, Emmanuil Semyonovich. If you cripple yourself at Red Peregon I will seek compensation as if you had ruined a thousand locomotives. I will check when you are sleeping, but don't make a nanny out of me ... "[29] For Lukács, the fulcrum of this drama is not a tragic knot, then, but a mechanical calculation of balance:

> Platonov's great artistry is evident in the way that the small, outwardly insignificant segment of life that he draws shows us an enormous multiplicity of processes that reveal this inner reconstruction of people. True, Platonov only charts the direction, the tendency of these processes, and—this is another strong side of his art—we do not see in his work any completely changed people, seeing only the "fulcrums of Archimedes" to which Levin applies his lever; we see the movement elicited by his stimulus and the wholly definite *direction* of this movement.[30]

Time might not be reversible, as Levin's cook reminds him, but perspective is, and the drama of Platonov's world is rooted in the constant oscillation of intimate and world-historical scales.

Though he does not use the term here, Lukács's analysis of Platonov's "Immortality" is clarified by the concept "articulation" from "Narrate or Describe?" Platonov's Emmanuil Levin is more than a product of his outward conditions, in which he struggles against remnants of capitalism and for the introduction of socialist order. Within these conditions he struggles also to manifest himself as a new subjectivity, free of the consequences of the division of labor, which are still so patently visible in his coworkers. Therefore, Lukács comments:

> His passion for technology and organization has never, not even for a second, given rise to the dry one-sidedness that is typical of managers of capitalist enterprises. For Levin the person and the machine, the person and technology, are inseparably linked to each other. The former controls the latter, and out of their fruitful interaction arises the socialist organization of the economy—and is born the new person.[31]

In contrast to the bourgeois-realist novel, where the protagonist is wholly conditioned by the external environment, ultimately by history, Platonov's Levin defines himself as an independent agent in his work on the world and on other people. As Lukács remarks:

> To expose "defects" in people's personal lives and to "repair" these defects ... exceeds the concrete tasks of organizing labor at the little station: they enable the growth of all of a person's abilities, not just his "railway" ones, and help him to escape the petty, narrow, crippling frames of the rural or urban petty-bourgeois world.[32]

As for Hegel, then, the subject's self-articulation renders its concept objectively, as history.

For Lukács, Levin's "sadness" stems from his consciousness of the lag of material history behind his concept of it, which expresses itself in "impatience" and a "mental leaping ahead," over the empty expanses of Soviet socialism in its anticipatory state, which separate him from his ultimate boss Lazar Kaganovich:

> The distant, thick and kind voice fell silent for a time. Levin stood silent; he had long loved his Moscow interlocutor, but had never been able to express his feeling to him in any direct way: all means were tactless and indelicate ...
>
> "Here I have to think up people anew, Lazar' Moiseevich ... "
>
> "That's the most difficult, most necessary thing [*nuzhnoe*]," said the distant, clear voice; one could hear the fine groaning hum of the electrical amplifier,

> reminding both interlocutors of the long space [*dolgoe prostranstvo*], of the wind, the frost and blizzards, of their common concern.[33]

The adjective " *dolgii*" is usually applied to time; the separation between the interlocutors—and the scales which they primarily inhabit—is both spatial and temporal. Overcoming the separation is not merely a goal to be attained in the future through labor in the present; it also requires an intimacy established through media, like the telephone, or like Platonov's story. The task of literature is to animate the life-system with energy, bringing "organization" into harmony with "feeling."[34]

Just as (in the words of Platonov's narrator) "any system of work is just the play of a solitary mind unless it is heated by the energy of all workers' hearts," so also does life need to be humanized.[35] "Oh, life, when will you get yourself organized so we don't need ever to sense [*chuiat'*] you!" Levin sighs. By articulating and amplifying the tensions of the "transitional" moment, Lukács suggests, Platonov's story works like the telephone that conveys Kaganovich's concern to Levin, easing him into world-historical existence and bringing this perspective to bear upon small outbreaks of contingency. And yet the story constantly returns to the elusiveness of feeling in a world pervaded by concern for technology and other inhuman things:

> But in the darkness of his mind, which was abundantly irrigated by blood, there glowed a single trembling point; it gleamed through the gloom of his eyes, half-closed by his eyelids, as if a lantern was burning at a distant guard post, on the entrance signal of the main route from reality, and this meek flame could turn at any instant into the broad glow of his entire consciousness and turn on his heart at full strength.[36]

The pilot light of consciousness flickers at the ready, protected from the chill winds of an obdurate world, watching for opportunities to articulate labor as history, as immortality. Literature not only awaits socialism, but also, for Lukács, socialist realism.

4. Lukács and Shklovsky

The alliance between Platonov and Lukács, I am arguing, was a signal event in Soviet cultural life in 1936, but it can only be understood by considering also the role of Viktor Shklovsky, as instigator and gadfly. Shklovsky is best known for his youthful work on literary theory, but he remained prominent throughout the Soviet period as writer and screenwriter, literary and film critic, and theorist of socialist realism. Having been one of the proponents of radical factography in the late 1920s, Shklovsky's niche continued to be the adaptation of documentary material in a constant stream of books and films, including the screenplay for the film *Turksib* (1930), about the construction of a rail line from Kazakhstan to Siberia, and an accompanying volume. After the dawn of socialist realism Shklovsky was closely involved in many of the most prominent documentary projects, beginning with the collectively researched and written volume *The White Sea–Baltic Sea Canal* in 1933–34 and *Metro* in 1935. At the beginning of 1936 Shklovsky became involved in the project "People of the Railway Empire," for which Platonov was already at work on "Immortality" and "Among Animals and Plants."

At organizational meetings at the Union of Soviet Writers on January 26–27, 1936—on the very eve of the anonymous article that condemned Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* and kicked off the anti-formalism campaign—a group of writers gathered to discuss "People of the Railway Empire" with professionals from the industry. True to the tenets of factography, Shklovsky strenuously disagreed with Vladimir Ermilov (one of the project's initiators) on the need to impose narrative shape on the raw data of reality, which (in Shklovsky's view) constantly outstrip the limits of our imagination: "Every day you read the newspapers and are surprised by what is happening there."[37] Shklovsky urged writers to take an example from champion locomotive driver Petr Krivonos, who consistently exceeded the speed and weight limits imposed by over-cautious bureaucrats. Against such "limitism," Shklovsky argues that norms have to be derived from direct observation of practice, which is every day rewriting the very laws of nature.

What would it mean for a writer to be a Stakhanovite? Writer Isai Rakhtanov complained of the draconian submission deadlines—Shklovsky's own contribution had been due already on January 10—but for Shklovsky "limitism" was just as pernicious in literary production as in rail transport.[38] Most forcefully Shklovsky took issue with Ermilov's insistence on writers' authorship, even their signature, as the source of "genuine" literature. It used to be that physical labor was "nameless" and, as such, sharply contrasted to that of writers. Now that laborers are becoming heroes, Shklovsky argues, writers need to work out new ways of appropriating that labor without imposing their own names or, most importantly, their own voices, as Shklovsky explained in a speech at a gathering of Moscow writers in March 1936:

> Take the people of "The Rail Empire." People write well. People have learned to speak. People think well. The transcripts of their speeches … improve from year to year. It is not that the stenographers have learned to take better notes: it is that the people have changed. The voice of people has changed.[39]

Page from the Soviet publication СССР на строике (USSR in Construction).

Faced with the task of recording Stakhanovite voices, Soviet writers have succumbed to a new division of labor and, Shklovsky suggests, a new alienation: "People have divided their life into two parts … : work for themselves—of a purely literary type—and what they write about transport, the Metro, and the White Sea Canal."[40]

Shklovsky's argument for the preeminence of the laborer's speech over the writer's composition is clearly directed against Lukács, who had dismissed "factography" already in his 1932 essay "Reportage or Portrayal?" The concluding section of "Narrate or Describe?," omitted in the Russian-language publication (as in later translations), renewed this polemic apropos of Sergei Tret'iakov's notion of "the biography of a thing" as the epitome of the convergence between naturalism and formalism, which has resulted in a compositional monotony among novels, united by the same narrative conceits: "The naked theme can only show the socially necessary path without representing it as the result of endlessly crossing contingencies [*Zufälligkeiten*]."[41] Caught at the center of all these contingent forces, for Lukács characters are reduced to bare schemata: "For people to receive true physiognomies and truly human contours, we must co-experience their actions." The Soviet documentary novel, in Lukács's view, is just as schematic as a naturalist one, only with the opposite sign: instead of novels ending with the inevitable crisis of capitalism, the Soviet novels end with the inevitable victory of the "hidden and suppressed correct principle." "The authentic writerly work of discovery, of composition," Lukács concludes, "should begin precisely at the point where the majority of our writers complete their work."[42]

Shklovsky, by contrast, insists on the necessity not of articulating a person's physiognomy as a historical forcefield, but rather of providing space for the person to articulate him- or herself. "The point is not to take a story and stuff it full of transportation," Shklovsky added. "One must transfer the sense [*oshchushchenie*] of labor into the work."[43] In his theoretical writings and speeches Shklovsky tended to make these arguments performatively, i.e., through quotation, adduction of examples, and verbal play. This was the case also with Shklovsky's own contribution to "People of the Railway Empire," namely "Petr Krivonos," a story-cum-documentary sketch published at the end of 1937 in the literary journal *Znamia*. Krivonos was the most illustrious of railway Stakhanovites and the main debunker of limitism in railway science, just as Shklovsky was in literary science.

Writing in his trademark telegraphic style, Shklovsky draws a consistent analogy between railway labor and literacy. Krivonos was raised in a poor family. His father Fyodor managed to build himself a house only through extreme parsimony. Having worked all his life, Fyodor knew the letters but never mastered the skill of combining them into words, leaving him in a world of acronyms:

> He didn't forget the letters because they walked alongside him on the rails, printed onto the locomotive: Ov, ChKZ, Shch [abbreviations of types of locomotives].
>
> People at the station—those who were a bit more important [*pokrupnee*]—were also called not by names and syllables, but by letters. There were various kinds: TCh, DS, DSP [abbreviations of posts on the railway].
>
> In the carpenter's family the letters remained linked to railway people and locomotives, but not reading.
>
> The carpenter taught his children literacy himself, showing them the letters.
>
> The first letters which the carpenter's son Petr learned were ChKZ [a four-axle locomotive from the Kolomensk factory].
>
> The locomotive on which these letters shone was the most cozy; even a small child could climb onto it.[44]

Therefore, Shklovsky writes,

> His father bought no toys, making them himself for his children, but only rarely. One time he made something like a model of a locomotive part.
>
> It was interesting to watch the wheel spin on a wooden shaft. Petr called this toy "ChKZ."[45]

Petr begins the art of combining language and the world when he begins to learn how to put trains together. Both skills are based on elementary montage, exercised on a scale model but transferable to full-scale mechanisms and processes.

As it expands, Petr's literacy—and the consciousness it brings—remain inseparable from his labor on trains:

> Finishing college, the pupil understands a locomotive just as one must understand a phrase in grammatical analysis.
>
> This here is a noun, with a certain gender, number, and case. This, for example, is a piston shaft; it's different on other locomotives, but here it is like this, playing the role of a connecting rod and serving to

> transfer movement from the piston to the crankshaft of the wheel; it turns straight movement into torque.
>
> These words open up a conscious relation to the machine.[46]

With his mastery of grammatical and mechanical montage, Petr can begin to put together machine-based labor in hitherto unseen ways. Having determined his vocation, Krivonos enters an apprenticeship with Makar Ruban, who shares his "passion for locomotives."[47] Together they overcome the "wreckers" who hold to the "fascist" theory of the limit, and imprint their names on railway labor.

Shklovsky's challenge is to find a verbal equivalent for Petr's feats of labor. Instead of shaping his material as narrative, Shklovsky constructs the biographical narrative out of contingent, almost random fragments, including biographical details, local color, personal memories, instructions on the proper upkeep of locomotives, statistics, news of the day, and comments on the weather. All of this is arranged in an order that also seems random:

> The days passed in a rising tempo.
>
> The aircraft USSR-1b took off on June 27 at 5:25am. It landed safely, having reached an altitude of 16,000 meters and having performed 50 tests on cosmic rays.
>
> 70,654 train cars were loaded. The Donbass railway was among those over-fulfilling the plan. There was a competition for best conductor.
>
> The glider pilot Kartashov took off, using a storm front. The storm cloud stretched for several hundred kilometers.
>
> Using a powerful thermal stream, the glider pilot rose to 2,000 meters and, together with the storm cloud, flew in the direction of Serpukhov.
>
> Man is adapted for success and happiness.
>
> Man can do much more than he has up till now.[48]

As it happens, the transcript of Krivonos's interview (with a writer named Kapustianskii) is the only such one known to have survived from the "People of the Railway Empire" project.[49] It bears underlinings that coincide with passages quoted directly in Shklovsky's biographical sketch, and which suggest how closely Shklovsky hewed to his source, in contrast to Platonov.

In a 1940 review of Shklovsky's book *On Mayakovsky* (O Maiakovskom) Platonov defines Shklovsky's signature "genre" by its "out-croppings" (*otvetvleniia*): "These outcroppings or tangential characteristics are so abundant that their tangle obscures the main trunk [*kriazh*] of the tree on which they grow."[50] But worst of all is that this "genre" becomes a "mechanism," and the writer a "builder": "Unless it is renewed, unless it is nurtured by living fate, writerly experience is the death of the artist … We have no need of mutually exchangeable details of the child's toy 'Meccano.'"[51]

The result of this mechanical style is that Shklovsky fails to capture the living subject:

> He fails to understand that in identical circumstances people's thoughts and actions will also be almost identical (and there is nothing bad or harmful in this), but their feelings always differ, their feelings are always individual and unique. Actions are stereotypical, but life is unrepeatable.[52]

For Platonov, Shklovsky's style is suited for stamping identical copies of a single exemplum, but not for resolving the inner dilemmas of socialism experienced as life.

But Platonov misses the point. What is most striking in Shklovsky's practice is not his style or his treatment of his subject, but rather his continual, full-blooded participation in the collective editorial process required by a project like "People of the Railway Empire." In this Shklovsky appears the polar opposite of Platonov, who maintained a silent presence at the meetings, intent on getting his work published in a form as close as possible to his original composition. By contrast, Shklovsky's socialist realism is a process that refuses to settle into a completed text, inhabiting instead a self-propagating (unfinalizable, one might say) cycle of commissioning, speech, recording, writing, discussion, reviewing, and new production. It gestures toward communism as a state not of history, but of language.

Shklovsky's concept of socialist realism as a discursive process can be difficult to reconstruct based on the fragmentary transcripts and polemics that have come down to us. But in our case it does help to see how Platonov's, Lukács's, and Shklovsky's writings can all be taken as links in a single chain of utterances about the conditions of realism under socialist construction.

The agit-train October Revolution included a car specifically outfitted for propaganda purposes. Photo: Vertov-Collection, Austrian Film Museum

5. Concluding Links

In his speech from March 15, 1936, responding to accusations of formalism, Shklovsky referred in his defense to his work on "People of the Railway Empire": "I took pains to rouse Andrei Platonov for this work and am proud that he has written such a piece as 'Red Liman' [i.e., 'Immortality']."[53] Shklovsky had reason to be proud, since it was he who first brought Platonov to broad public notice back in 1925 after he flew to Voronezh and interviewed Platonov for a documentary sketch with photographic illustrations, later adapted for inclusion in the book *Third Factory* (Tret'ia fabrika).[54] Depicting Platonov as an eccentric irrigation engineer from the provinces suited Shklovsky's idea of how industrial labor would produce its own distinct, truly proletarian intellectual culture.

Coming a full five months before the story's publication, Shklovsky's casual comment about Platonov's "Immortality" also illustrates the kind of circulation that texts enjoyed in manuscript, especially via the writers' unions and other organizations. It is possible that Lukács's "Narrate or Describe?" also circulated in manuscript as part of the same broad discussion. In any event, comments by Shklovsky and others at a July 13, 1936 workshop called to critique Platonov's other railway story, "Among Animals and Plants," suggest familiarity with Lukács's argument concerning realism in "Narrate or Describe?" before the essay was published. This is particularly true of critic Fyodor Levin, who in his critique of the story's bleakness at the writers' workshop seems to adopt Lukács's terms as he complains about the lack of motivation in the events of the story:

> The signals engineer has no joy in life. Joy occurs only because an accident occurred and someone performed a feat [*podvig*], moreover not a feat that he had prepared for, but simply a contingency [*sluchainost'*]. It might have worked out that the carriage that he was guilty of releasing had not been stopped, and then instead of an award he would have received a punishment. He let the carriage go and stopped it himself. This is an accident [*sluchai*] that could have ended in two ways … There is no hero,

> no feat, there is just a accident [*sluchai*] that allowed him to look with one eye into this other life, and then he again returned back; and the place he has returned to is a quite meaningless life.[55]

Platonov is defended by Semyon Gekht, who says: "An accident can also provoke a person, if there is something in his character."[56] He continues: "I am not against accident. Every narrative [*rasskaz*] has accident. The accident of Anna Karenina meeting Vronsky in the train. There as many such accidents in life and in an artwork as you like. But there is a pernicious kind of accident."[57]

Not only does Gekht insist (like Fyodor Levin) on the terminology of "contingency" and "accident" when discussing Platonov's railway story, but he also makes the connection to *Anna Karenina*. All of this confirms that Lukács's essay "Narrate or Describe?" and Platonov's two railway stories were understood to be links in a single extended discussion about realism in 1936.

If one assumes that Platonov and Lukács were in direct contact, one might even go so far as to read "Among Animals and Plants" as Platonov's direct response to Lukács's key notion of articulation. It tells of how provincial pointsman Ivan Fyodorov works his way up, first to the more central station of Medvezh'ia gora (Bear Mountain), and then earns himself a promotion to the position of coupler (*stsepshchik*). Throughout the story Fyodorov is depicted as saddened by the profound alienation persisting between human and animal, human and machine, human and media. He desires renown, but achieves it only by causing an accident that maims his right arm. Fyodorov's world-historical action, in short, comes at the cost of his own disfiguration, his own dismemberment (which in Russian is the same word as articulation, *raschlenenie*).

Again we are brought back to *Anna Karenina*, this time its finale, where the heroine also has a brutal encounter with a train. "Narrative establishes proportions," the English translation reads. "Narrative articulates," says Lukács in my reading. Given the ambiguity of the term *Gliederung*/ *raschlenenie,* however, there is also a morbid possibility: "Narrative dismembers [*gliedert/raschleniaet*]."[58] Is one supposed to think of Anna's suicide at this moment in Lukács's essay? Perhaps Lukács's editor or censor did, which would explain why this sentence was struck from the Russian version of "Narrate or Describe?" published in *Literaturnyi kritik* in August 1936, against the backdrop of the first Moscow show trial.

But to articulate means also to clarify linkages, and in his essay Lukács supplements the principle of *Gliederung* with that of *Verknüpfung*— linkage. For instance, with the death of Fru-Fru, Lukács writes:

> Tolstoy has made the coupling of this episode with the central life-drama as tight as possible. The race is, on the one hand, merely the occasion for the explosion of a conflict, but, on the other hand, through its coupling with Vronsky's social ambition—an important factor in the subsequent tragedy—it is far more than a mere incident.[59]

Lukács is no doubt consciously echoing Tolstoy's famous description of his practice in *Anna Karenina*, in a letter to Nikolai Strakhov from April 1876:

> In everything, almost everything that I have written, I have been governed by the need to gather together thoughts coupled with each other, for expressing the self; but each thought expressed in words separately loses its meaning, is terribly denigrated, when it is removed from the coupling in which it is located. The coupling itself is composed not by thought (I think), but by something else, and it is impossible to express the basis of this coupling directly through words; you can do so only in mediation, by describing images, actions and situations in words.[60]

What is realist in the realist novel, then, is not its style or even its genre, but its operations of articulation and coupling, just like working on the railway.

How, Lukács asks, will the realist novel, this machine of articulation and linkage, be retooled for the aims of socialism now that history has made its ultimate turn? Lukács's answer, I have been arguing, is that Andrei Platonov's modest story "Immortality" provides the clearest indication of how his model of socialist realism will produce—indeed, is already producing—a literature for socialism, one that works by coordinating intimate and world-historical scales together without eliding the friction, even the violence, of their encounter.

X

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1
Substantial links between Lukács and Platonov have long been suspected, but have never been examined in depth. In general terms Natal'ia Poltavtseva has proposed that "Platonov's art was a metacommentary not only on socialist realism ... but also on 'the movement' (of Lukács, Lifshits et al.)"; "Platonov i Lukach (iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstva 1930-x godov)," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 107 (2011): 253–70. While acknowledging that Lukács was "Platonov's supporter in the 1930s," Nariman Skakov has recently proposed to read Platonov's novel *Dzhan* (translated as *Soul*) through Lukács's early books *Soul and Form* (1912) and *Theory of the Novel* (1916); Nariman Skakov, "Introduction: Andrei Platonov, an Engineer of the Human Soul," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 722–24. Keen to preserve the notion of Platonov as an outcast, A. Mazaev has dismissed "Immortality" as an "opportunistic" story and diagnosed Lukács's interest in it as a symptom of his "inability to distinguish genuine art from its counterfeit"; A. Mazaev, "O 'Literaturnom kritike' i ego estesticheskoi programme," *Stranitsy otechestvennoi kul'tury. 30-e gody* (Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia, 1995), 179, 181.

2
M. Platonova, "...Zhivia glavnoi zhizn'iu (A. Platonov v pis'makh k zhene, dokumentakh i ocherkakh)," *Volga* 9 (1975): 161. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the original for this text has never been identified or dated.

3
"Priem rabotnikov zheleznodorozhnogo transporta v Kremle," *Pravda*, August 2, 1935, 1.

4
In issues 4 and 12 for 1936. A second version of "Among Animals and Plants" was printed under the title "Life in a Family" in the journal *Industriia sotsializma* (The Industry of Socialism) (no. 4, 1940). The story has been published in English in: Andrei Platonov, *Soul*, trans. Robert Chandler et al. (New York Review Books, 2008), 155–83.

5
Literaturnyi kritik 8 (1936): 113.

6
Literaturnyi kritik 8 (1936): 113.

7
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 74.

8
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 6.

9
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 6.

10
RGALI 631.2.140 l. 10. An overview of films planned for 1937 includes screenplays by both Andrei Platonov ("Transport" at Mosfilm) and Viktor Shklovsky ("Mashinist," at Lenfilm, based on the biography of locomotive driver Petr Krivonos); see V. Usievich, "Plan iubileinogo goda," *Iskusstvo kino* 7 (1936): 12–13. Platonov also adapted "Immortality" for the radio, published in: N. Duzhina, "Stantsiia Krasnyi Peregon," *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: Problemy tvorchestva* (IMLI RAN, 2011) 521–38. There is no record of any of these adaptations being produced.

11
Letter to M. A. Platonova from February 12, 1936; Andrei Platonov, *"...la prozhil zhizn'": Pis'ma (1920–1950 gg.)* , 410.

12
A. Platonov, "Bessmertie," *Literaturnyi kritik* 8 (1936): 114.

13
Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," *Writer and Critic and Other Essays,* ed. and trans. Arthur D. Kahn (Grosset and Dunlap, 1971) 111; Georg Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben? (Zur Diskussion über Naturalismus und Formalismus)," *Internationale Literatur* 11 (1936): 102. Further references to the English translation and first installment of the German original will be given parenthetically in the text.

14
On the ways in which socialist realism was originally an open-ended, dialectical aesthetic method (instead of a prescribed style) see: Harold Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946–1959* (Harvard University Press, 1962), 13–14; Christina Kiaer, "Lyrical Socialist Realism," *October* 147 (2014): 56–77; Robert Bird, "Sotsrealism kak teoriia" (Socialist Realism as Theory), *Russkaia intellektual'naia revoliutsiia 1910–1930-kh gg* ., eds. Sergei Zenkin and E. Shumilova (NLO, 2016), 205–21.

15
G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969–79) Bd. 9/II. S. 371, 429; cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature* , trans. A. V. Miller, with Foreword by J. N. Finlay (Clarendon Press, 1970), 303, 350. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

16
Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* , trans. with a Foreword by Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Books, 1973), 105. On "articulation" in Marx, Althusser, and Balibar see Aidan Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy," *New Left Review* 107 (1978): 53–54.

17
Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 143; "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" *Internationale Literatur* 12 (1936): 114. In subsequent notes this source will be given as Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2.

18
Georg Lukács, "'Tendency' or Partisanship?" *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. David Fernbach (MIT Press, 1981), 43.

19
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 122.

20
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 120.

21
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 118.

22
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 120.

23
Georg Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 19–20 (1937): 56. My full translation of this essay appears in the present issue of *e-flux journal*. As far as I know the German text has been published only once: Georg Lukács, "Die Unsterblichen," *Werke* 5: 472–83. The lack of editorial comment and the incorrect title (Olga Halpern's translation of Platonov's story was published as "Unsterblichkeit" in *Internationale Literatur* 3, 1938: 15–29) raise questions about the provenance of the German text.

24
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 59.

25
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 60.

26
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 58.

27
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 131. An English translation by Lisa Hayden and Robert Chandler of this story also appears in the present issue of *e-flux journal*, under the title "Immortality." On "negativity" in Lukács's reading of Platonov see also: Artemy Magun, "Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 106 (2010).

28
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 56.

29
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 125.

30
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 57–58.

31
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 56.

32
Lukács, "Emmanuil Levin," 58.

33
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 125.

34
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 118.

35
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 118.

36
Platonov, "Bessmertie," 116.

37
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 45.

38
RGALI 631.15.78 ll. 70–71.

39
V. Shklovskii, "Vzrykhliaia tselinu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 15, 1936, 3.

40
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 45.

41
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 119.

42
Lukács , "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" pt. 2, 119.

43
RGALI 631.15.78 l. 45.

44
V. Shklovskii, "Petr Krivonos:

Ocherk," *Znamia* 12 (1937): 56.

45
Shklovskii, "Petr Krivonos: Ocherk," 57.

46
Shklovskii, "Petr Krivonos: Ocherk," 60.

47
Shklovskii, "Petr Krivonos: Ocherk," 63.

48
Shklovskii, "Petr Krivonos: Ocherk," 66.

49
RGALI 2863.1.699; this is the personal collection of documentary writer Aleksandr Bek.

50
Andrei Platonov, *Fabrika literatury* (Vremia, 2011), 463–64.

51
Platonov, *Fabrika literatury*, 467.

52
Platonov, *Fabrika literatury*, 467.

53
Shklovskii, "Vzrykhliaia tselinu."

54
See Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory* , trans. Richard Sheldon (Dalkey Archive Press, 2002). Cf.: A. Galushkin, "K istorii lichnykh i tvorcheskikh vzaimootnoshenii A. Platonova i V. B. Shklovskogo," *Andrei Platonov: Vospominaniia sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii* (Sovremennyi pisatel', 1994): 172–83; Michael Finke, "The Agit-Flights of Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Pil'niak," *The Other Shore* 1 (2010): 19–32.

55
N. Kornienko, "Soveshchanie v Soiuze pisatelei," *Andrei Platonov*, vol. 1 (Sovremennyi pisatel', 1994), 333.

56
N. Kornienko, "Soveshchanie v Soiuze pisatelei," 343.

57
N. Kornienko, "Soveshchanie v Soiuze pisatelei," 343.

58
The homonymy between articulation and dismemberment was earlier recognized by the formalists; see Il'ia Kalinin, "Istoriia kak iskusstvo chlenorazdel'nosti (istoricheskii opyt I meta/literaturnaia praktika russkikh formalistov), *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 71 (2005): 103–31.

59
Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 112; "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?" *Internationale Literatur* 11 (1936): 102.

60
L. N. Tolstoi, *Sobranie sochinenii v 22 tomakh* (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978–85), vol. 18, 784.

iLiana Fokianaki

Redistribution via Appropriation: White(washing) Marbles

It is now almost three years since the June 2015 referendum in Greece, and these three years have demonstrated an alarming acceleration of the multiple crises that Europe faces. Nationalism and the far right have rediscovered their power in the streets and parliaments of Europe, in both North and South. Even in the contemporary art world, we see the emergence of the alt-right, which audaciously presents itself as revolutionary and progressive, shouting at the top of its lungs about its right to exist.[1]

At the same time, long-delayed, urgent discussions on decolonization in Europe are taking place not only within governments and the mainstream media, but also within museums and the cultural field at large. There has finally been the addition of much-needed voices and positions from outside the Western canon. Nonetheless, these voices are usually framed not only by white people but by white logics. Institutions, biennials, and mega-exhibitions attack colonial pasts, but not presents. They are quick to be politically correct and "host" the Other—while often maintaining an all-white staff, and a clearly rigidly Western approach as to how to institute.[2]

Before attempting to address what is to be done, one must first understand the limitations of the contemporary art institution and the mega-exhibition. These forms fail to escape the mechanisms of power they wish to condemn, since they cling to a notion of "civilization" with roots in modernism that continues to structure particular modes of discourse.

Imperialism, nationalism, and capitalism form the corners of a triangle built and sustained to this day by what I call the WWW (White Western Westphalian) order of patriarchy. The three components of the triangle—are in fact communicating vessels that are deeply interconnected—and they define, ignite, sustain, and perpetuate crises. As with most institutions of the capitalist state, the contemporary art institution cannot escape these three components.

In the center of the triangle lie crises, whether ethical, financial, or democratic. I will look into contemporary art discourse in relation to the three components of the triangle, attempting a reading from the geographical perspective of Greece, in order to explain why this particular country offers a pathway to dismantle the "universal truth" of civilization that the WWW patriarchal order seeks to impose. Greece is unique in that it has been appropriated throughout modernity as the mother of the Western canon—as the country on whose "fantasy" the contemporary WWW order was built.[3]

Håvard Bustnes, Golden Dawn Girls, 2017. Film still. Copyright the director and Upper North Film.

Imperialism, Nationalism, and Greece: Guest Nation from Past to Present

The country is currently impoverished; citizens and residents feel alienated and betrayed by their state and are unwilling to deal with their uncertain present—let alone look toward the future. Capitalism and its discontents have led to the fierce rise of nationalism within the country. The neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn is growing, operating for some as an outlet for anger and frustration.[4] A recent documentary by filmmaker Håvard Bustnes, titled *Golden Dawn Girls*, follows the life of three women: a wife, a mother, and a daughter of three different Golden Dawn members of parliament. "What has happened to Greece?" wonders Bustnes out loud at the start of this disturbing documentary. When I asked Bustnes what shocked him the most while filming these women, he replied: "That they believe in the same old conspiracy theories as the Nazis during the Second World War."[5] Bustnes demonstrates how the triptych "family, religion, country"—(*πατρίς, θρησκεία, οικογένεια*) a favorite slogan of Greece's military junta in the 1970s—has shaped the rhetoric of Golden Dawn and lured in desperate Greeks.[6] This triptych taps into the national identity of "Greekness" as defined and embedded within Orthodox Christianity and the fantasy of an ancient lineage leading back to the golden age of Pericles. It symbolizes strength for citizens who feel lost, forgotten, or toyed with by the EU—and even more so by their own corrupt politicians.

This phenomenon is visible across the peripheries of Europe. In recent trips to Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Kosovo, and the Czech Republic, through discussions with locals and colleagues, I traced common factors forming the sentiment that has greatly influenced recent elections and the rise of the far right: unhappiness with the capabilities and functions of the governments of these countries, leading to a desire on the part of many citizens to align with the European ideal of the strong sovereign state. This ideal state is functional and transparent, provides welfare benefits to its citizens, but fights off EU "meddling" with its supposed sovereignty. The desire for this state results is a simultaneous attachment to a (fictional) national identity, and a resentment towards the Other. This Other is both the "better-off" Other (rich Northern Europeans) and the disenfranchised Other (refugees and migrants). The latter of course is the easiest to attack and blame for all the ills of the world.

When examining the European identity myth, which by default encompasses Christian whiteness and the supposed universal of civilization, we need to remember

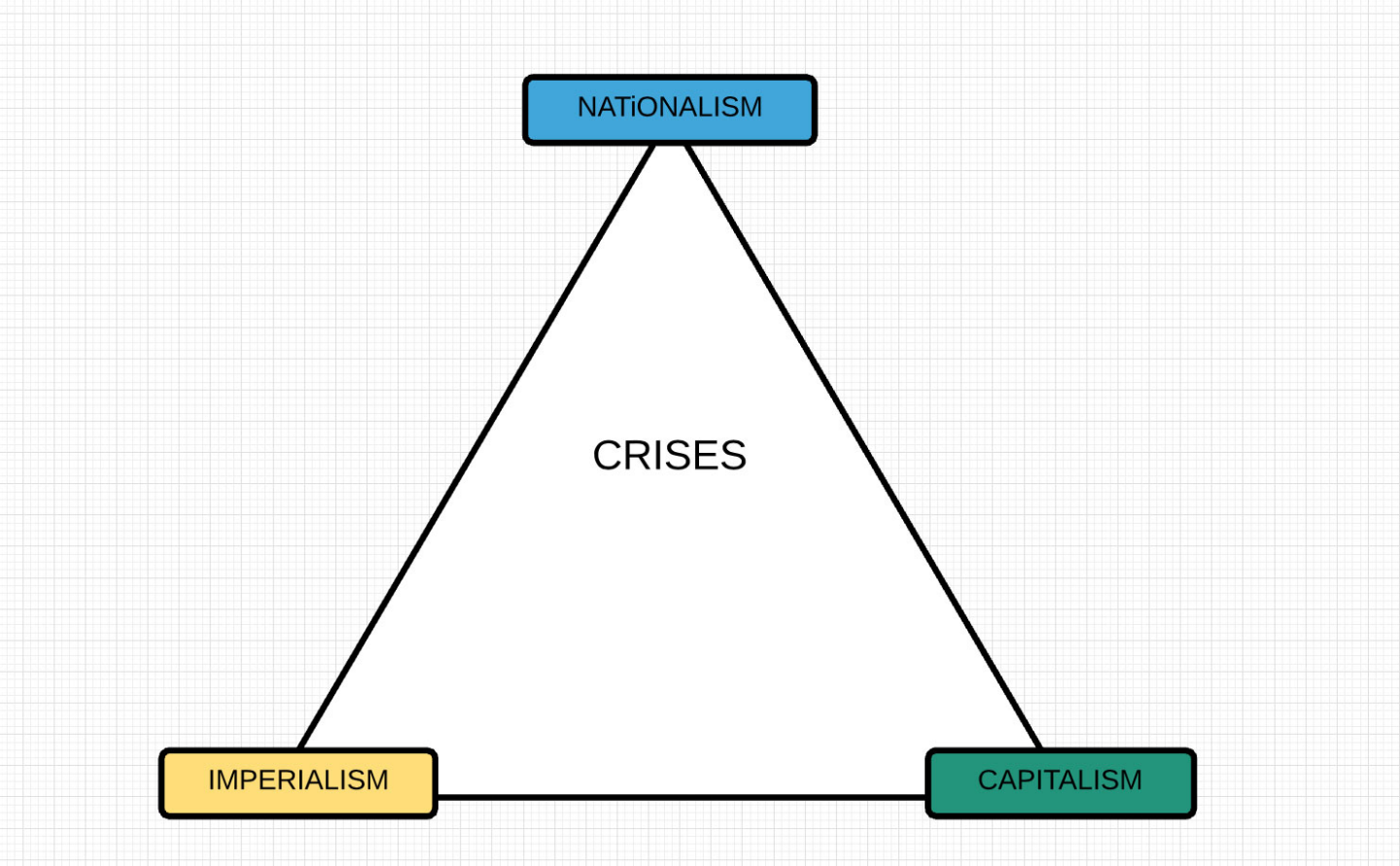
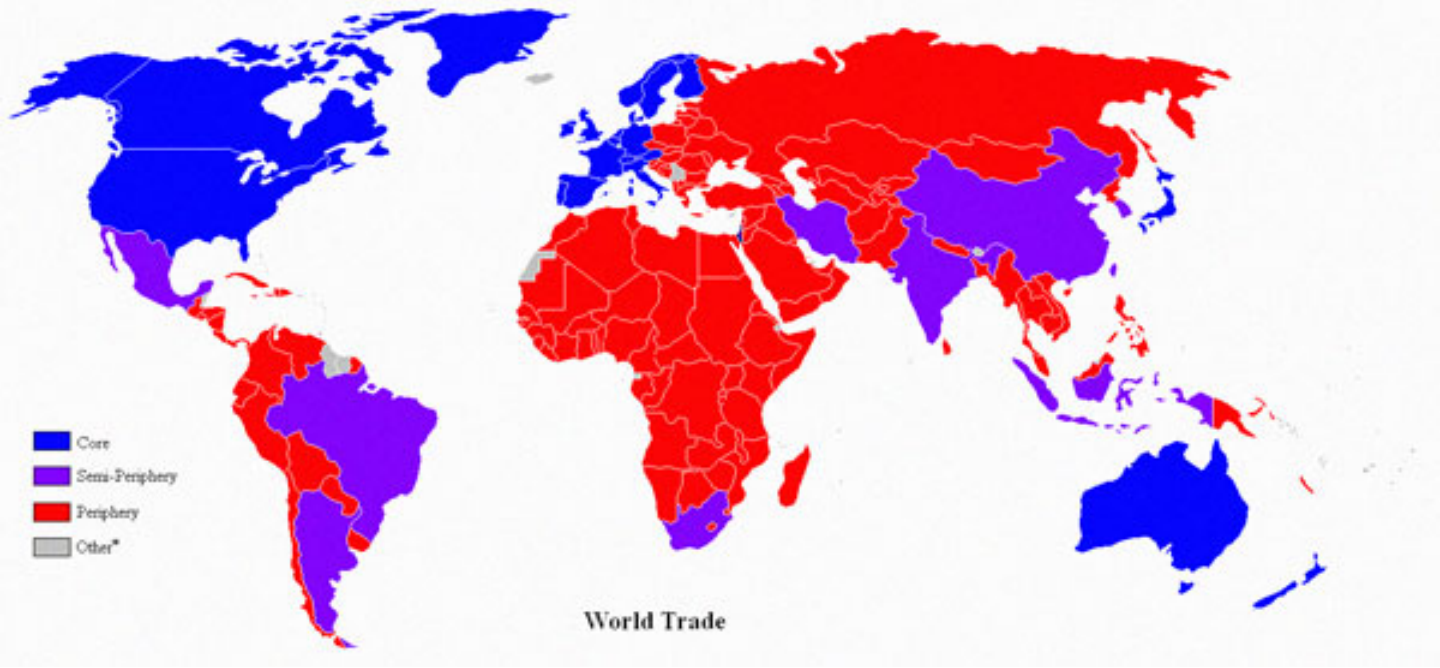


Image copyright of the author.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos's description of "internal colonialisms" in Europe, as well as his distinction between different kinds of colonizers. Santos categorizes colonizers into two groups: core countries of the continent with a colonial past that produced their wealth, but which also sustains this wealth today through internal colonization of weaker EU members; and semi-peripheral countries like his native Portugal, which used to be colonizers but are now financially weak and internally colonized.[7] I add here a third category to his useful schema: the peripheral countries of Greece and most of the Balkans that have no colonial history and sit largely outside the Catholic/Protestant club. Their financial weakness and constant lack of sovereignty (among other factors) blocks them from becoming core countries.[8]

The creation of the modern Greek state in 1832 involved the de facto lack of sovereignty of the country, when the Great Powers appointed the seventeen-year-old Bavarian Otto as the king of the newly founded state. This lack of independence in state affairs would continue throughout the following centuries: via the genocide of Greek minorities in Asia Minor in 1922, or during the resistance against Nazi occupation from 1940–44, when the British funded Greek leftist guerrillas to fight Hitler.[9] Churchill then "gave" Greece to the US so as to halt the spread of communism to the Mediterranean, thus causing an extremely bloody civil war (1944–49), considered to be the first proxy conflict of the Cold War. Remnants of this conflict still politically divide the country today. Social turmoil following the assassination of progressive politicians by paramilitary forces led to the US installing a dictatorship in Greece in 1967, which deepened the divide and created the core leaders of today's Golden Dawn. After the reinstatement of democracy in 1974, the deals made by Greek politicians to secure a place in the EEC (now the EU) involved shady arrangements, extraditions, and "exchange deals," demonstrating not only a lack of Greek sovereignty but its true role as a proxy state. Greece's desire to finally be accepted by the white Western club is encapsulated by Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis's infamous 1976 speech: "Greece politically, defensively, economically, culturally, belongs to the West … Be it traditionally or because of interest, of course we belong to the Western world."[10]

When it comes to the East/West divide, Greece has historically only been concerned with the extent to which it does or does not belong to the West—meaning there is a denial of any connections to the East, be that the Middle East, Turkey, or Asia Minor. This is the reason for the phrase "our own East" (′μ), which marks a geographical and cultural break with the East.[11]



A world map with countries differentiated by color, according to their role in global trade. Countries that constitute the "core" are blue; countries in the "semi-periphery" are purple; and countries in the "periphery" are red. Based on Christopher Chase-Dunn, Yukio Kawano, and Benjamin Brewer, "Trade Globalization since 1795," American Sociological Review 65, no. 1 (February 2000).

In 1996, Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations* claimed that Greece has never belonged to the West because it is predominantly Orthodox Christian.[12] The majority of Greek intellectuals and politicians rushed to dismiss Huntington's idea with a nearly existential anxiety, insisting that Greeks do not belong to the category of otherness.

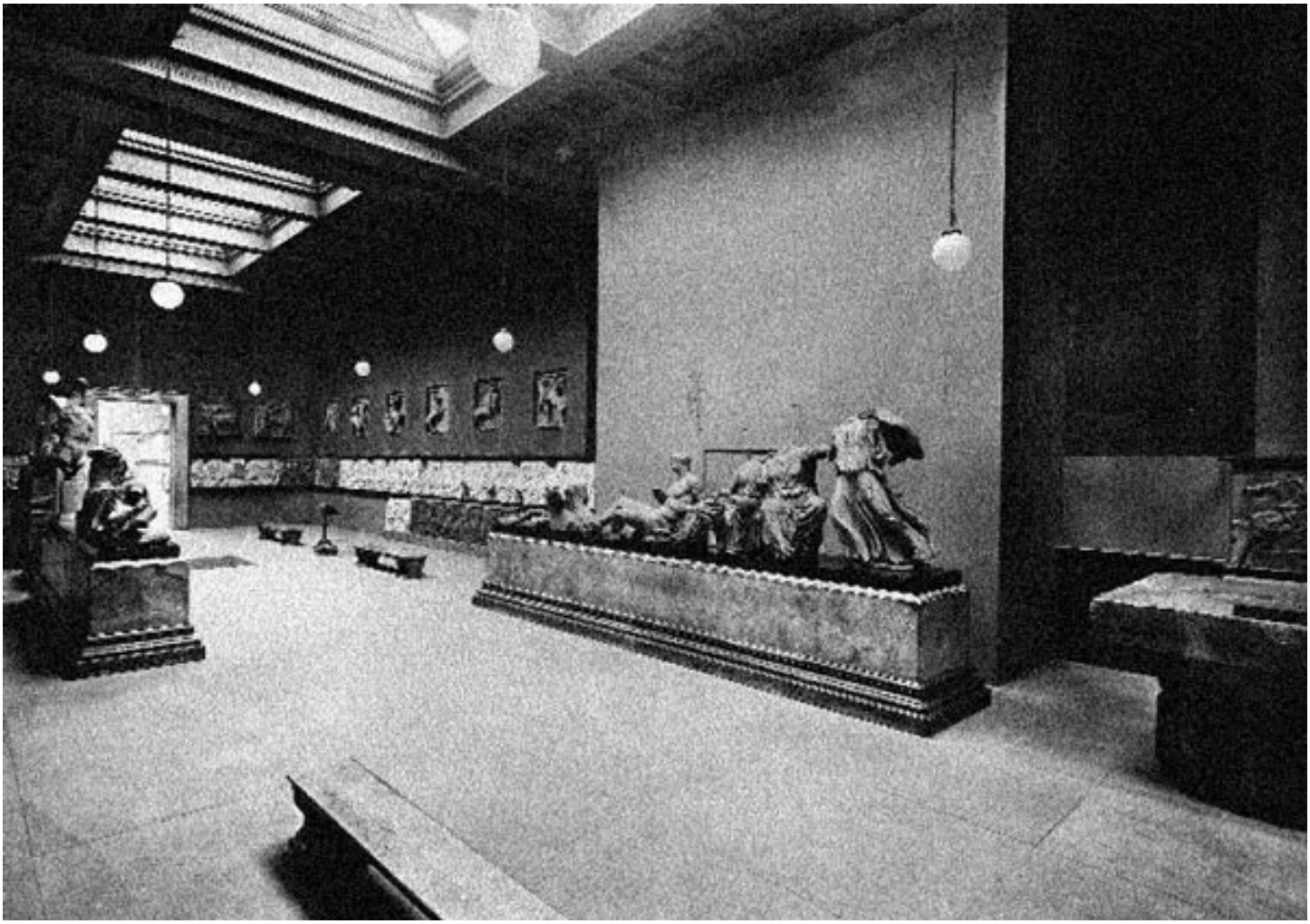
Today, after a failed referendum and many memorandums, after being ridiculed for not yet becoming civilized enough, European enough, orderly enough, financially balanced enough, or in fact white enough, contemporary Greece is counterposed to the image of its "ancient glory."[13] This ancient glory has proven dangerous not only in the hands of neo-Nazis, but also in the hands of the leftist intelligentsia of the EU, which has reprimanded Brussels not for imposing policies that violate human and citizen rights, but for mistreating the "mother of the European idea."[14] But Greece's self-image has gone through the blender of the West and mutated into something alien, to then be redistributed as the ultimate root and example of civilization's "universal truth."

Host Versus Guest, via the European State

With Greece's unsovereign pasts and capitalist histories in mind, its newfound nationalisms are to be expected. This January, Greece's Syriza government brought the naming dispute over Macedonia again to the fore of public discussion. The dispute led to marches that same month in the city of Thessaloniki (capital of the prefecture of Greek Macedonia) and later in the capital Athens, against FYROM—the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, commonly referred to as Macedonia. It is not by chance that this issue has resurfaced today, after initially flaring up in the mid-1990s, when diplomatic incidents with both FYROM and Turkey strengthened the presence of Golden Dawn, a then-marginal paramilitary group that slowly gained enough traction to become, in 2015, a political party with representatives in the Greek parliament.

Somehow, the links between Europe's core financial countries, their meddling in peripheral countries, and their influence on what I call the "Extra States" (the IMF, Troika, etc.) has remained opaquely addressed or completely bypassed in recent discourses during and after mega-exhibitions that landed in the city of Athens and elsewhere.[15] The last two editions of Documenta are prime examples; in addition to the central exhibition in Kassel, the 2012 edition also held a show in Kabul, and the 2017 edition in Athens. Documenta 14's approach to Greece's relation to modernity and nationalism was myopic at best.[16] Like imperial powers, mega-exhibitions tend to arrive as they please, in different permutations in different locations around the globe, translating local realities for the sake of their (curatorial) narratives. Crises are sexy, after all. In juxtaposition to these intentions, which are naive and irresponsible at best and dangerous at worst, lies the disenchantment and hostility of locals toward the arrival of these "foreign bodies." These feelings

Gottlieb Bodmer, Portrait of King Otto of Greece, c. 1835. Copyright: Wikimedia Commons.



The Elgin Room at the British Museum, 1937. Copyright: Wikimedia Commons.

are not unlike the aforementioned sentiments of contemporary EU nationalist supporters. This charged interaction results from a collision of different interpretations of civilization, rooted in modernity.[17]

To examine these power structures that manifest through the binary of guest and host, it is useful to turn to Jacques Derrida's neologism "hostipitality," which might most strongly resonate when considering hospitality and its performance within the societal structures that define citizenship today in Europe, as contoured by the state.[18] Within the microcosm of the art world, the same logic exists. With the term he coined, Derrida proposed that hospitality contradicts its own definition by necessarily entailing hostility:

We could end our reflections here in the formalization of a law of hospitality which violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it, in de-termining it: "hospitality is certainly, necessarily, a right, a duty, an obligation, the *greeting* of the foreign other [l'autre étranger] as a friend but on the condition that the host ... remains the *patron*, the master of the household ... maintains his own authority ... and thereby affirms the laws of hospitality."[19]

In European culture, the politics of hospitality are usually settled through state discourses on multiculturalism, where tolerance and inclusivity (or the rather abhorrent "integration policies" of the 1990s) are demonstrated via fixed notions of "diversity."[20]

Yet this discourse of multiculturalism remains inhospitable toward behaviors that operate outside European "superior knowledge." In the cultural field, and specifically in cultural institutions, the mechanism is clear: European and Western cultural hegemony imposes upon institutions a certain "civilized" way to behave. The presentation and discussion of this behavior is undeniably reminiscent of older Western notions of how a civilized host should perform toward an exotic, uncivilized other. The overintellectualization of cultural discourse, tied into Eurocentric academia, leaves all those who are not trained to write and think with excellent English skills or advanced

knowledge of critical discourse—often the case in Greece, where the production of contemporary art discourse and critique is minimal—feeling irrelevant.[21]

her position is not a nationalistic one, but rather "a plea to reconsider situation and location as important historical positions that problematize the legacy of modernity," stating the obvious: there was never one modernity as

Alexandra Pirici, Parthenon Marbles, 2017. Work performed on the Acropolis Hill in Athens. Commissioned by KADIST and State of Concept Athens, under the auspices of Future Climates. Photo: Alexandra Masmanidi.

Host Versus Guest in Contemporary Art

Unsurprisingly, the Western "universal" canon of contemporary art always remains the host—setting the rules and terms of discourse—even when it is a guest. Discussions on decolonization, de-modernization, and the art world's current obsession (bordering on fetishistic) with "the Other" via indigenous artists were prevalent at a recent conference called "Collection in Transition: Decolonising, Demodernising and Decentralising" at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.[22] At the conference I was reminded of how Greece embodies the root of all modernity's evils. In one conference presentation entitled "Demodern: Why?" Geeta Kapur looked at modernity from the topos of India: "When I say 'Demodern: Why?' one needs to understand that this question comes from a particular situation, from a particular location … I speak from India and this is important." She then clarified that

such. Reflecting on my own locality, I would like to note that although Greece's appropriation throughout modernity as the mother of the Western canon is documented, not much has been said about how its ancient histories have been so consistently mutated and translated according to the desires of that order. Could this focus on the appropriated, mutated, and mistranslated notions of a place and its histories, particularly in the case of Greek antiquity and its culture, provide a way to deconstruct the very root of the signifiers of the Western canon, and unravel the narrative of the WWW order of patriarchy? Could it be retold as a story of mimesis?

During the late period of Greece's colonization by the Ottoman Empire in the 1800s, the WWW patriarchal order started literally extracting the "glorious evidence" of the past with which it identified: ancient sculptures, temples,

and artifacts. To protect the objects and keep them safely away from the ignorant and careless hands of the Greeks, the British and French transferred them to the truly civilized topos of their Empire (the British Museum, the Louvre, etc.). Possibly the most famous example is the case of the Parthenon Marbles, known as the Elgin Marbles after Thomas Bruce, the seventh Earl of Elgin. While traveling in Ottoman-occupied Greece, Elgin removed parts of the Parthenon frieze, using chain saws, and sent them to Great Britain. This activity was framed as preservation: redistributing cultural capital throughout Europe as a means of preserving the roots of civilization. Such capital was then further appropriated, not only via the proliferation of cultural artifacts in museums but also via the development of architecture that simulated the same ancient temples from which the columns and statues were plundered. Proof of this process can still be widely seen on buildings and museums in London, Berlin, Vienna, and Paris—providing a visual connection between the extraction and mutation of the political ideals of Ancient Greece by the Western cultural canon.[23]

Museums in rich European capitals, symbols of the history of Western culture as host, were and still are responsible for establishing and reaffirming the status of Western culture as a universal truth, igniting the universal canon of modern and contemporary art. The painful—and truly absurd—scandal of the damage of the Parthenon Marbles by the British Museum in the 1930s stands as the cause célèbre of this attitude. The marbles retained the residue of their original bright colors. British Museum conservators—somehow unaware that Ancient Greeks painted their statues—cleaned the marbles with strong chemicals to make them as white as possible, damaging the artifacts beyond repair.[24] This whitening and whitewashing—in both a literal and metaphorical sense—can be seen as a great performative act of imposing, reconfiguring, and universalizing Western ideology through art.[25]

"Redistribution," a term taken from economics, serves to explain how this ideology performs its power. Economist Dennis C. Mueller describes redistribution as one of the "major activities of the state that seems to benefit one group at the expense of another."[26] One of the main categories of redistribution in economics is what is widely described as "redistribution as taking." Typically this process entails the removal by an agent (in most cases the state, and usually by force or with the threat of force) of goods or money owned by one person or group, followed by the granting of these goods or money to another person or group. This can be done, for example, in the form of taxation or recalculation of pensions. We have seen current manifestations of this in recent governmental policies in Greece, where, as I write, another cut in pensions has been decided, the fourth in the last five years, leaving 40.62 percent of pensions in the country at a monthly gross amount of 500 euros.[27]

Redistribution as taking also occurs in the context of culture via the symbolic and commodity value that cultural production generates (cultural goods, intellectual property). For the purposes of the argument here, I would like to invite the reader to look at "redistribution as taking" as the performative act of a WWW patriarchal order that expropriates and appropriates goods and property, under the name of preserving and consequently redistributing universal truth. Many have offered ways to dismantle this thinking. Achille Mbembe recently highlighted how, in situations of colonization, slavery, and apartheid, "juridical and economic procedures … lead to material expropriation and dispossession, and … to a singular experience of subjection characterized by the falsification of oneself by the other. What flows from this is a state of maximal exteriority and ontological impoverishment."[28] Greece, together with many other countries of the European periphery, has provided a grounds for expropriation in a different but similar way to the contexts Mbembe describes. Its cultural histories have been employed in order to map out the origins of Western civilization, and its artifacts used to embody the West's aesthetics and legacies, while its people have been excluded from the superior all-white club. This is a paradigmatic form of cultural appropriation through means of redistribution as taking.[29]

This form of appropriation was clearly exposed in spring 2017, when Romanian artist Alexandra Pirici presented a piece titled *Parthenon Marbles* in both Paris and Athens. The piece was what the artist calls a "living human sculpture," a choreographed tableau vivant with five performers imitating the poses of figures from the Parthenon frieze. The work references the Acropolis Museum's ongoing request for the British Museum to repatriate the looted marbles back to Athens. This repatriation has been an active request of the Greek people since the reinstitution of democracy in the country in 1974. Pirici's work also involves a textual component, produced in collaboration with curator and writer Victoria Ivanova, which is read out loud by the performers. The text narrates the story of the Parthenon Marbles and uses the notion of the derivative as a tool for identifying concrete socioeconomic advantages when it comes to holding prized artifacts (here in the case of the British Museum) and suggests a means for redistributing the value generated by the artifacts through recirculation. In Athens, Pirici chose the Acropolis rock as the site for the work, effectively proposing a performative repatriation.[30]

Pirici's work is a contemporary testimony to a familiar process that has been occurring globally for more than two hundred years. The infamous case of the Parthenon Marbles in fact represents hundreds of cases of looted artifacts, operating as a metaphor and an entry point into a larger discussion about capital, accumulation, circulation, redistribution, and the role of the arts within today's economies.

Artist Kader Attia has long addressed the notion of reparation, particularly through the activities of the space La Colonie, which he founded in 2016 in Paris's 10th arrondissement. The space is a home to cross-disciplinary, anti-academic, artistic thought and discussions, with a variety of events that focus on art, music, critical thinking, and cultural activism. According to Attia, its main agenda is to focus on the stories of minorities in an open-ended, inclusive way. Attia's sociocultural research led him to propose the notion of "repair," which he believes is a constant in any system, social institution, or cultural tradition. The infinite process of repair is closely linked to loss and wounds, to recuperation and reappropriation.

Attia's recent two-part film *The Body's Legacies* (Part 1: *The Objects*; Part 2: *The Postcolonial Body*) is an extensive account of testimonies by academics, scholars, collectors, and museum directors from Canada, the US, Ivory Coast, and many other locations, relating the histories behind bodies and artifacts from the world over. Attia is currently planning on conducting more interviews in Athens, looking at the case of Greece as another ground of expropriation and cultural appropriation.

Through these two paradigms of practice, both artists underpin not only the magnitude of injustice linked to cultural heritage (and the socioeconomic and political benefits it carries) but the need for contemporary institutions to look at the legacies the modern museum has bequeathed—not simply by facilitating and presenting questions and discussions on looted and dubiously acquired artifacts, but by actively engaging in the efforts for their return.

Kader Attia, The Body's Legacy, P. 1: The Objects, 2018. Single channel video projection, 58'21" minutes, exhibition view The Field of Emotion, The Power Plant, Toronto, 2018, Photo: Tony Hafkenscheid, Courtesy of the artist

Geographies of the Other, or How to Dismantle the WWW Order of Patriarchy

Notions of whiteness are part of the sinister triangle of imperialism-nationalism-capitalism and are nearly inextricable from the notion of the West. Admittedly, the way the West is defined has changed a lot over the years. Scholars such as Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen identify at least seven different versions of the "West," and many could argue for more.[31]

When departing on a quest to define the Western and the white, one needs to take into account that the notion of "white" carries socioeconomic and political weight. The propaganda of the WWW order has always counted on including as many countries as possible in the definition of this Western whiteness, "modernizing" and "civilizing" them throughout the centuries, via globalization and capitalism, but simultaneously exploiting them.

Nonetheless, a clear trajectory belongs to particular countries that have always been part of the West, and another trajectory belongs to others that have hopped in and out of the Western wagon. They are not equally "white." From testing the intelligence of immigrants—which was proposed by French psychologists Alfred Binet and Théodore Simon and employed on all Ellis Island immigrants (no matter how pale their skin) for a period of time—to Ralph Waldo Emerson's distinction between the Irish and the "Caucasian Race," the constructing of white Western identity has always been a twisted myth costing millions of lives.[32] One thing is clear: whatever defines White Western Westphalia today, its de facto imposition of a supposed superiority is certainly to blame for the current socioeconomic and political realities of Europe and the world. So how could one dismantle the narrative of the WWW patriarchal order through the spectrum of culture?

Greece is only one example, but it is unique in having a particularly perverse idiosyncrasy: that of having given birth to the WWW patriarchal order's fantasy of superiority. Paradoxically, it remains the unwanted child of an unwanted union: West and East. In light of all the discussions of the colonial past of some countries in Europe, we need to face the reality of the geo-historical positioning of modernity and its evolution up to today.

Cultural producers need to carefully reconsider the following: How can we decolonize and demodernize the very institutions we work in and with, if we continue to operate under this WWW patriarchal order that has set the rules of the institution itself? How can we decolonize and demodernize unless we look into not only the content institutions produce, but also *how* this content is produced: Under what rules? How is it translated into discourse? How is it displayed? In other words, "educating" and "learning" about the Other has sometimes proven uncomfortably didactic in recent

contemporary art exhibitions. Since their very foundations, most Western institutions have stood as concrete reaffirmations of the universal that the WWW patriarchal order imposes. We need to admit that this order's gaze still dictates the very way we operate within and outside of cultural institutions, excluding all other modernities. Instead of tokenizing and whitewashing the histories of cultural artifacts, artworks, and cultural producers by inserting them into the "civilized" and "enlightened" environment of the Western artistic canon, instead of "giving voice" by presenting and narrating in the name of the Other, it's time to consider the unspoken hypocrisy of those who charitably include all yet remain within this existing narrative, forcing the Other into a Eurocentric academic description of its otherness, into a Western display method, contemporary language, or "artspeak." If we depart from this premise, then the Western mandate for the universal—which has corroded our varied and complex cultural histories just as the chemicals corroded the surface of the Parthenon Marbles—might finally collapse.

X

Thanks go to: Gabriëlle Schleijpen for the invitation to curate "On Guesting," an installment of the recurring public symposium Roaming Assembly, at the Dutch Art Institute in September 2017, which provided ground for the initial notes of this essay. To colleagues and friends that offered their thoughts and support: Kader Attia, Dora Budor, Håvard Bustnes, Angela Dimitrakaki, Galit Eilat, Charles Esche, Maria Hlavajova, Victoria Ivanova, Hito Steyerl, Kate Sutton, Yanis Varoufakis, Hypatia Vourloumis, W.A.G.E., and the curatorial collective WHW. Most importantly, to my partner, Jonas, for challenging my writing in the most insightful manner.

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1
See, for example, the situation around the LD50 gallery in London, as recounted by J. J. Charlesworth in his article "The strange case of the 'alt-right' art gallery," *Art Review*, March 3, 2017 https://artreview.com/opinion/opinion_3_march_2017_the_strange_case_of_the_alt-right_gallery/ .

2
Here I use the verb "institute" in reference to Maria Hlavajova's call for "instituting otherwise." lease refer to her talk at CCA Singapore "The Making of an Institution — Reason to Exist: The Director's Review. Instituting Otherwise" March 22nd, 2017. Video soon to be available on the CCA website.

3
Of course, the Roman Empire is another signifier used by the WWW order—Ancient Greece being its predecessor.

4
A poll from January 13, 2018 shows that support for Golden Dawn has fallen 0.2 percent, but it is still the fourth-largest party in parliament, with 6.7 percent of the vote.

5
Private conversation with Håvard Bustnes, March 2018.

6
The phrase "country, religion, family" first appeared in 1851 in the writings of the Greek theologian Apostolos Makrakis. He claimed that in a vision, Christ and the Virgin Mary appeared before him to ask for the salvation of men—especially Orthodox Greeks, so they could strengthen their glorious nation. To do this, said Makrakis, the "Western ideologies" should be rejected and an Orthodox Christian state should be established. From 1880 onwards, "country, religion, family" was a common phrase in pious Christian circles in Greece, and by 1936, during the first dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, the phrase was widely known. The colonels of the 1967 dictatorship used the phrase as an official campaign motto, making it even more popular. Golden Dawn has continued this trajectory.

7
Santos states in his lecture "Epistemologies of the South and the Future": "By the eighteenth century, Portugal was an informal colony of England: it was an imperial centre that, in financial terms, was dominated by, or subordinated to, the hegemonic control of the British Empire. In addition, we also witnessed a rise of differences within the 'Western World.' Southern Europe became a periphery, subordinated in economic, political, and cultural terms to northern Europe and the core that produced the Enlightenment. This has been my debate with some postcolonial thinkers, particularly in Latin America, but also in Europe, who think that there is just one Europe or just one Western modernity. I think that the situation shows that from the very beginning there has been an internal colonialism in Europe. This has now become very visible with the financial crisis. In one of my studies, I argue that the Portuguese and the Spanish in the seventeenth century were described by the northern Europeans in the same terms that the Portuguese and the Spaniards attributed to the indigenous and native peoples in the New World and Africa. They were described as lazy, lascivious, ignorant, superstitious, and unclean. Such descriptions were applied to them by the monks that came from Germany or France to visit the monasteries and the people in the South." See http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/media/Epistemologies%20of%20the%20south%20and%20the%20future_Poscolonialitalia_2016.pdf .

8
Here, "core," "semi-peripheral," and "peripheral" are terms borrowed from world-systems theory and economics.

9
It's worth recalling Winston Churchill's famous phrase: "It is not Greeks that fight like heroes, but heroes that fight like Greeks." This was propaganda proper, but Churchill shortly changed his tune, collaborated with the conservative right that had formerly worked with the Nazis, and these leftist "heroes" were exiled to concentration camps on Greek islands, where they were tortured for years, or deported to Russia after being denied their passports and nationality. For the past few years I have been conducting interviews with the remaining survivors of this conflict, collecting oral histories and testimonies. See this interesting article on the British involvement in Greece in *The Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/athens-1944-britains-dirty-secret .

10
Konstantinos Karamanlis, June 12, 1976, speaking at the Greek parliament on Greece's entry into the EEC. Video of the speech (in Greek) can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-51DbXntgII .

11
This phrase first appeared in 1842, with the formation of the "Great Idea" in a text by Markos Renieris, later the head of the first Greek National Bank.

12
Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

13
For more information on US categorizations of Greeks and other migrant communities in relation to their skin color, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

14
See, for instance, an interview with Günter Grass from 2012 entitled "Shame Europe!" (in German) http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/gedicht-von-guenter-grass-zur-griechenland-krise-europas-schande-1.1366941 .

15
Europe's core financial countries heavily influence the decisions of the IMF and the Troika, and in turn the IMF holds power over them and the EU parliament. The private banking sector also holds a great deal of influence in relation to all these Extra States and their decision-making. The idea of "Extra States" is developed in my upcoming curatorial project *Extra States: Nations in Liquidation* for Kunsthal Extra City, Antwerp.

16
Please see my previous text co-authored with Yanis Varoufakis https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/we-come-bearing-gifts-iliana-fokianaki-and-yanis-varoufakis-on-documenta-14-athens/6666

17
See María Iñigo Clavo, "Modernity vs. Epistimodiversity," *e-flux journal* 73 (May 2016) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/73/60475/modernity-vs-epistemodiversity/ .

18
Derrida's neologism is derived from the merging of "hostility" and "hospitality." For more, see Jacques Derrida, "Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad/From the Foreigner," in *Of Hospitality,* eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford University Press, 2000).

19
Jacques Derrida, "HOSTIPITALITY," *Angelaki Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (December 2000): 3–18.

20
For more on European integration policies towards migrants from 1973 onwards, see J. Doomernik and M. Bruquetas-Callejo, "National Immigration and Integration Policies in Europe Since 1973," in *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe* , eds. B. Garcés-Mascareñas and R. Penninx (Springer, 2016).

21
Apart from the rare appearance of engaging critical discourse in the Greek press and public sphere, critique in Greece is usually conducted by male academics. They hail from various disciplines (often referring to themselves as "curators"), and they have a tendency to overestimate and abuse their power. They provide dated, dusty academic analyses of art, in which they exclusively quote long-dead white Northern European males, reinforcing the WWW patriarchal order.

22
The conference, which was organized by L'Internationale, took place on September 22, 2017.

23
In a cruel historical irony, these buildings designed to represent ancient glory were constructed by the same hands that had been emptied of their cultural property by the West. From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, cheap imported labor arrived in Northern Europe from the colonies to sustain the wealth of empires. From the 1950s onwards the labor came from Greece, Turkey, Italy, North and sub-Saharan Africa, the Eastern Bloc, and the Middle East. If one reframes instances of economic "redistribution" as purposeful taking, such expropriation is clearly in line with longstanding European policies.

24
For extensive analysis on the 1930s cleaning of the Parthenon Marbles, see http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/parthenon_sculptures/1930s_cleaning/cleaning_the_sculptures.aspx .

25
Among other things, the term "whitewashing" refers to the practice in Hollywood of casting white actors to play the roles of POC. (Please see definitions on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitewashing_in_film and the Merriam-Webster online dictionary https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/whitewashing-words-were-watching .) I use the term here to indicate the traditional meaning of the term in international English (to cover up and minimize an action) but also to address the action of whitening—both literally in the case of the Parthenon Marbles, but also figurative in the "whitening" of Ancient Greece by the white European order.

26
Dennis C. Mueller, *Reason, Religion, and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

27
Paper published by the Ministry of Labour of Greece, December 2017.

28
Achille Mbembe, "Difference and Self-Determination," *e-flux journal* 80 (March 2017) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/80/101116/difference-and-self-determination/ .

29
This is what Clelia O. Rodriguez calls an "appropriation for intellectual masturbation." See https://www.academia.edu/35885848/Ethics_After_Defeat_in_Kaiera_2_Curating_Research_and_the_Political .

30
The action took place on April 5, 2017 in front of the Parthenon on the Acropolis Hill in Athens.

31
Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (University of California Press, 1997).

32
Painter, *History of White People*.

Michael Baers

A First Step Towards a Regional Risk Assessment

Preface

Late in March of this year I attended a lecture by Professor Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, where she presented a collaborative project, the Feral Atlas, an online repository of stories about the Anthropocene and how humans and nonhumans together make worlds at scale. In her introductory remarks, she spoke of the demand often put forward by humanist colleagues to tell hopeful stories about the Anthropocene rather than view it as an undifferentiated destructive force slowly approaching a zero hour, a reckoning that will come too late.

In her talk, Tsing spoke of the Anthropocene as "patchy," with development arising in specific places and through specific human interventions, producing unforeseen ancillary effects (a conceptual framework that also structures her recent book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World,* an anthropological study of the international trade in matsutake mushrooms, a delicacy in Japan, that grows in "disturbed" forests). Tsing takes "patch" from "patch dynamics," a term first coined by scientists in the 1940s to describe the interactive structure and dynamics of plants occupying discrete ecosystems, since used by ecologists when referring to the mosaic of heterogeneous, interactive sub-ecosystems found within specific biotopes. In Tsing's usage, "patch" embraces both plant and human interactions resulting from capitalist disruption of natural habitats and modes of production: monoculture cotton farming (with the plantation as a model for industrialization) that transformed the boll weevil from minor nuisance to a major pest throughout North and Central America; or global trade, as in the recent introduction of the parasitic water mold *Phytophthora* from Germany to the Western United States, where it has killed off natural woodlands. The Anthropocene is "patchy" because capitalism directs the long-distance destruction of specific locales; because disturbed landscapes disrupted in the process of capitalist wealth accumulation make humans and nonhumans into resources for investment across scales; because supply chains snake from one capitalist patch to another, necessitating "acts of translation across varied social and political spaces." She terms this process "salvage accumulation," where differing environmental and labor standards are effaced in the process of turning goods into computer-managed inventory, the cornerstone of accounting.[1]

"Patch" may be a useful term to establish a distance from monolithic conceptions of the Anthropocene and capitalism alike (and to refrain from the "crippling assumption" of progress as a single hegemonic current). Yet it is deficient in modeling that other feature of the Anthropocene: climate change. It may be unnecessary to repeat the scientific consensus that a mean temperature

Illustration by Rutger Sjogrim used in the original publication of "A First Step Towards a Regional Risk Assessment," Antipyrene Publishing, 2015.

increase above 2 degrees centigrade will lead to unpredictable disruptions to the environment—adding a further degree of complexity into an already stochastic world—but the question of how to avoid the most disastrous effects of climate change explicitly involves scalar considerations that pose the specific and the local against the far-reaching and endemic. Thus, absorbed as I was by Tsing's stories of the ways in which global commerce and industrial agriculture remake ecosystems, another part of my mind had cycled back to a question prompted by her introductory remarks: What is this imperative put forward by humanists to tell hopeful stories?

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live," Joan Didion, a writer not known for an excess of optimism, wrote long ago:

> We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.[2]

Thinking of the news stories that had caught my attention over the course of the past year, this was certainly the case. The wildfires in California and the landslides that followed; the series of catastrophic hurricanes visiting disaster on cities ringing the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean islands; the mass bleaching events across Australia's Great Barrier Reef; baleen whales slowly starving to death, their bodies tricked into satiation by an overabundance of micro-plastics suspended in the sea; reports of unprecedented and accelerating shrinkage of

Arctic winter sea ice; and a single video, widely distributed across the internet, of a starving polar bear loping across the Arctic tundra, perhaps only hours from death—these had melded together in a narrative arc producing a singular vision of ecological collapse, to which my response was, invariably, melancholic paralysis or terror. Whether things will end badly or well, the fact that things *will* end already imposes a narrative line, separating a before from an after, or an inside from an outside.

Tsing's work appears to offer a corrective to this prevailing habit—or at least my own prevailing habit—of viewing climate change through the scrim of eschatological thinking. But this does not prevent the contrary response—to seek out hopeful stories about the Anthropocene—from evading conceptual bias. As much as I understand the wish for hopeful stories Tsing ascribes to her humanist colleagues as, in some sense, a corrective to the terrifying onslaught of the daily news cycle, there is an element of denial in it; a denial as well of that other strand of the Western humanist tradition exemplified by Aby Warburg, who sought with his *Mnemosyne Atlas* to bring to light an encrypted historical memory of trauma in the persistence of gestural motifs transferred from classical antiquity to Renaissance painting, fashioning a model of the mnemonic where even the most limpid depictions of beauty become colored by death and disaster, and, per Benjamin Buchloh, "in which Western European humanist thought would once more, perhaps for the last time, recognize its origins and trace its latent continuities into the present."[3] "The tendency to reproduce the language of gesture in clear outline," wrote Warburg in his introduction to the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, "which only *seemed* to be purely a matter of artistic appearance, led, by its own inner logic, bursting out of its chains, to a formal language that was suited to the submerged, tragic, stoic fatalism of antiquity."[4] Warburg's *Atlas* suggests human resilience and cultural continuity do not function in spite of social upheaval but because of it. For all the other dangers climate change presents to human and nonhuman life forms, it also threatens this repository of past disasters codified in cultural artifacts.

A conundrum appears: the threat presented by the future is also a threat to past recollections of danger and disaster, to the sum total of human experience. Perhaps it is possible, I thought while sitting in the packed lecture hall of HKW, to extend this idea outside the gestural realm of pictoriality. Perhaps a preoccupation with disaster, regardless of scale, is a way of preserving memory against the depredations of those forms of forgetting that secure history for its victors—to brush history against the grain, to borrow Walter Benjamin's famous formulation. Perhaps this preservation begins by salvaging what Sebald called "the recurrent resurgence of images which cannot be banished from the memory, and which remain effective as agencies of an almost pathological hypermnesia in a past otherwise emptied of content."[5] Disaster is infrequently a blameless event. It is the concern of certain cultural producers to return disaster to human cupidity, indifference, malice aforethought, petty self-interest, and so on, as part of this project of brushing history against the grain. Could pessimism be considered a hopeful form of resistance rather than an ironic means of consigning hopefulness to the immobility of despair?

Amongst the disjointed notes penned during Tsing's lecture, I had written down this phrase: "to grieve and hope at the same time." Perhaps we need to cultivate a notion of resistance indifferent to futility or foreclosure, I thought, including our resistance to those forms of economic exploitation addressed in Professor Tsing's intellectual project that pay no heed to the different unique, particular, non-scalable ways of doing or being threatened by globalized capitalism: to make and do and resist in the face of the near impossibility to alter a disastrous historical trajectory. As I wrote in an unsolicited e-mail I would later send Professor Tsing:

> Your talk reminded me of the example of Jean Améry, how he speaks about the importance of resistance, and its ethical challenge as well. As W.G. Sebald, a writer not prone to an overabundance of optimism, writes: "One of the impressive aspects of Améry's stance as a writer is that although he knew the real limits of the power to resist as few others did, he maintains the validity of resistance even to the point of absurdity. Resistance without any confidence that it will be effective, resistance *quand même*, out of a principle of solidarity with victims and as a deliberate affront to those who simply let the stream of history sweep them along, is the essence of Améry's philosophy."[6] I have tried to keep these words present in my mind and to act in accordance with them, even though I am often discouraged, especially when confronting a topic as difficult and depressing as the Anthropocene. The thought that we are not only confronting the profound and ongoing destruction of the natural world but the possible obliteration of an existential horizon of possibilities is a thought I wrestle with. How can I make art, an activity presupposing human culture as something enduring through time, despite periodic disasters, when that presupposition has been so radically destabilized?

With this e-mail, I attached the text you are about to read (with minimal revisions), developed during a residency at the International Programme for Visual and Applied Artists (IASPIS) in Stockholm in the winter of 2013–14, when the discourse on climate change was relatively marginal in artistic circles. [7] It takes its title from a 2012 position paper drafted by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency—written at the behest of the EU in an effort to "gain more knowledge on cross-border risks and dependencies among Member States."[8] My text is a

peculiar composite—part science fiction scenario set in a notional Stockholm in the year 2040 (an ironic play on a city-boosting publication from 2007, *Vision 2030*, that set out to position Stockholm as the future capital of Scandinavia), part work of citation, and part oral history, extracting from interviews conducted during my IASPIS residency with a heterogeneous group of Stockholm-based activists and researchers.

My original text was motivated by concerns similar to those expressed in my e-mail to Professor Tsing, as well as an intuition felt at the time that the only way to deal with my free-floating anxiety about climate change was to face my fears head on—thus, to ask: What happens to knowledge when it becomes knowledge of the disaster? Its composition was also driven by a curiosity regarding how climate change remediation and disaster preparedness was being approached in a specific national context such as Sweden, a country that has long prided itself (sometimes to an irritating degree) on being eminently sensible. Whatever its blind spots, the Swedish approach stands in stark contrast to the willful ignorance of the current American administration, which has abrogated federal responsibility for climate change by leaving policy on disaster remediation, resiliency, and risk abatement up to individual states and private actors.[9] In contrast, the policy paper authored by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency reviews a comprehensive list of "Identified Risks," including not only extreme weather events, but cyber and terrorist attacks, civil unrest, and general societal instability, suggesting possible responses and strategies for risk abatement. Not included in this list, however, were the possibility of an influx of climate refugees, the collapse of international trade, or, less easily calculated, widespread social anomie.

Edmund Husserl writes in his *Cartesian Meditations* that there is "a horizon of the past, as a potentiality of recollection that can be awakened; and to every recollection there belongs a horizon, the continuous intervening intentionality of possible recollections … up to the actual Now of perception."[10] Behind the other intentions motivating my research lay this final question: When deprived of a stable collective horizon of possibility, how will cultural producers react to climate change once they face it as a present catastrophe and not some distant, statistical uncertainty? Will the result be a general state of inanition and withdrawal, or will something of Améry's "resistance even to the point of absurdity" galvanize creators to action, just as the horrors of World War I inspired the Zurich and Berlin Dadaists in their efforts to upend polite society? Admittedly, this question is only briefly addressed outright in the text that follows, although it remains omnipresent on a methodological level, a kind of gravitational force orienting the direction of my thinking.

I would like my piece to be read as pre-apocalyptic epic poetry, conceived somewhere between scavenging and parasitism, gleaning dialectical images from our modern and postmodern detritus. It is an embodied form of "writing the disaster," a notion emblematized in some lines from book three of William Carlos Williams's epic poem *Paterson*, quoted extensively in what follows: "Papers / (consumed) scattered to the winds. Black / The ink burned white, metal white. So be it."[11] It can also be a guide of sorts for negotiating the two forces, stochastic complexity and invariant regularity, that are the two poles around which our comprehension of the contemporary world oscillates.

This narrative about Stockholm's historical past and future is also intended to function synechdocically, standing in for the uncertain, patchy heterogeneity of the future metropolis. It cannot stand for all the environmental challenges different cities or countries will face, and it was never my intention that it do so. Suffice it to say that it was a first step in an exercise of imagining. Other steps necessarily must follow.

—Michael Baers, April 2018

0.

> The past above, the future below
> and the present pouring down:[12]

During the first days of the crisis at Chernobyl nuclear power station, Valeri Alexeyevich Legasov, deputy director of the Atomic Power Institute, at great personal risk, flew by helicopter over the site to better appraise the situation, passing repeatedly through the radioactive cloud billowing from the wrecked fuel reactor. Legasov's ceaseless efforts during the disaster transformed him into a national hero, but behind the optimistic veneer he maintained while on site, Legasov was deeply disturbed. He had realized the disaster was a sign of deeper systemic problems—in the education of engineers, and in the Soviets' general attitude to technology. Some months after the accident, Legasov gave an interview to a Moscow paper in which he was quoted as follows:

> It's easy to think or imagine that the enemy is the nuclear reactor. But the enemy isn't technology. I have come to the paradoxical conclusion that technology must be protected from man. In the past, in the time that included the older actors, the time ended with Gagarin's flight into space, the technology was created by people who stood on the shoulders of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. They were educated in this period of the great humanitarian ideas, in this period of a beautiful and correct moral sense. They had a clear political idea of the new society they were trying to create; one that would be the most advanced in the

world.

But already in the generations that succeeded them, there were engineers who stood on their shoulders and saw only the technical side of things. But if someone is educated only in technical ideas, they cannot create anything new, anything *for which they are responsible*. The operators of the reactor that night considered they were doing everything well and correctly, and they were breaking the rules for the sake of doing it even better. But they had lost sight of the purpose, what they were doing it for.[13]

Legasov would play a leading role in the committee formed to address the Chernobyl disaster's long-term consequences. Later, he testified in Vienna before the International Atomic Energy Agency, although on that occasion he did not share his distress over the secretive nature of the Soviet Union's nuclear power protocols. Two years to the day after the accident, he committed suicide.

1.

Stockholm 2040:

When the storm surges come from the east, and the Nacka levee sing its metallic song under the wind's ministrations, an atmosphere of anxiety sweeps over the city, over the glittering city center—Södermalm, Norrmalm, Östermalm, and Gamla Stan—and the outlying suburbs, their skyscrapers rocking in the wind, a wind that cuts through you as if you hardly exist. People read the weather for omens, just as in the age of Classical Greece oracular priestesses crooned over sacrificial doves, divining signs of the future in strings of entrails. When the sky takes on a yellowish cast, and dogs and birds become skittish, people know a storm approaches and think: Will this be the one? The one that upends everything, inundates everything, overwhelms the civil authority's ability to cope and the individual citizen's capacity not to give in to despair?

Everything happens more quickly now. The psychic insulation from natural shocks provided by humanity's technological armature no longer taken for granted, one feels the weather acutely, as an inimical force from which there is no protection. Nobody is sure when disaster will strike, but now it is perceived, in ways difficult to express, as an inundation threatening the interior of the self, an invasion of weather into the core of being.

a secret world,
a sphere, a snake with its tail in
its mouth
rolls backward into the past[14]

Karin Bradley (assistant professor of urbanism, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan, Stockholm): If you're supposed to picture a future that is desirable, it becomes, of course, very personal, and maybe also forces one to ask what will happen to existing social problems? When you imagine a future, are you ignoring all society's structural problems? It's important to train yourself in thinking alternative futures, because we don't do that so much. We are taught that we cannot remake the future.

Stockholm 2040:

Sweden has not suffered greatly from climate change. As predicted in a government white paper published in 2007 entitled "Sweden Facing Climate Change—threats and opportunities," Sweden has indeed benefited from longer summers and a corresponding increase in arable land and lumber yields.[15] *Also, as predicted, coastal erosion, flash floods, and storm surges, algae blooms on Sweden's lakes and rivers, and the restricting of the reindeer population to the very north of the country have all come to pass. On the other hand, no one could have predicted the total collapse of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, which by 2030 had turned into a vast acidic sink where jellyfish are the predominant life form.*

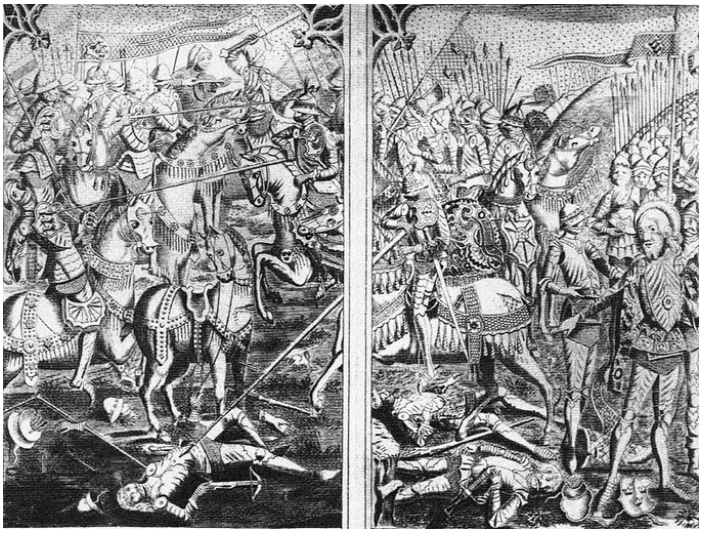
Despite the surrounding upheaval, Sweden has become an industrial force, a leader in renewable energy technology, biotech, digital surveillance and encryption, and weapons manufacturing. A tenuous stability has turned Stockholm into a new center of international finance, data storage, and international diplomacy. The most significant change, however, is that which has occurred in the collective psyche of Sweden's population.

2.

If disaster means being separated from the star (if it means the decline which characterizes disorientation when the link is cut with fortune from on high), then it indicates a fall beneath disastrous necessity.[16]

Stockholm 2040:

On sunny days one is dazzled by sunbeams reflecting off solar panels mounted on fifty thousand rooftops. To the east of the city, a ring of giant locks fitted with innovative fuel-efficient reverse-osmosis filters stretch across the archipelago, protecting the integrity of the Lake Mälaren water supply. Weather and social instability have become a twinned threat. The waterfront has been heavily fortified against storm surges, and the city center transformed into a series of gated enclaves where bands of privately contracted security agents patrol the fortifications



Battle of Brunkenberg, artist unknown.

separating the city center from the outlying areas. Control centers monitor the banks of CCTV cameras that survey the streets with blank, sardonic eyes from atop metal traffic standards.

Stockholm's most privileged citizenry have gradually adapted to these changes, becoming accustomed to the retinal scans required for entry to the center zone and the constant construction work necessary to keep municipal services functional under the pressure of severe winds and storms; just as they became accustomed to periodic shortages in essential goods, power failures, the omnipresent threat of social turmoil lurking just beyond the carefully circumscribed boundaries of daily life. But despite the sensation of something having become tenuous and provisional in the sphere of the everyday, the streets are still crowded with shoppers patronizing cafes and restaurants, clothing boutiques and retail outlets selling computer gadgetry and the latest in personal security hardware. Something of social life continues, unaffected by the vagaries of social transformations, but something has also changed, made brutal and strange in the face of contingent circumstance.

In the suburbs, too, life carries on, provisionally. Kitchen gardens have sprung up on every rooftop, in the courtyards, the median strips along sidewalks and roadways. Goats are kept in the courtyards of apartment blocks or forage in the outlying strips of forested area. But people ask: Where is the state? Self-organized militias augment a feeble police presence, municipal services are scant and irregular, and in the vacuum created by this withdrawal, self-governance has become the rule.

Owen Gaffney (director of communications, International Geosphere-Biosphere Program): After the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) produced their 2007 report, one of the big gaps identified was in the way it handled future scenarios, and some problems with how they did it in the past.[17] They sent out a challenge to the scientific community to improve those scenarios, to work out what would be more policy relevant and more practical for the scientists … For a whole load of reasons, the scenarios that were created made it difficult for a lot of scientists from different disciplines to work logically on them to produce useful results.

So the IPCC asked the IGBP and the World Climate Research Program to coordinate a new initiative. We created a series of four scenarios, called the "Representative Concentration Pathways"—RCPs.[18] And in our work, we tried to model some different emission scenarios. What would the climate look like in the future? We had a high-emissions future—business as usual—two medium-emissions futures, and one very low-emissions future that, in fact, involves taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere somehow. And this low-emission future is the scenario we need to get on if we want to reach the two-degree target. So when the latest report came out last September, it had these new RCP's in them. Since those emissions scenarios came out, the IPCC was able to use them to show what the impact would be on the global climate over the next hundred years.

One of the worrying things about the scenarios is that the higher emissions scenarios were deemed by the scientists and the policy makers who created them to be the maximum; we would not be able to go higher than that. Since they were developed— four or five years ago now—the world is actually charting above them year by year. We are actually going above what was said to be the highest possible scenario. That's deeply concerning for the scientific community … that there's no political change and in fact emissions are growing, not reducing.

To read what was never written.[19]

Isadora Wronksi (nuclear coordinator, Powershift Europe, Greenpeace): The European Union was doing their 2050 scenario.[20] They had decided that we need emission cuts in the frame between 80–95 percent reductions to 2050, and then they started a process to look into what kind of scenarios can we look at in order to achieve those emission reductions. So they looked into five different scenarios and one reference scenario. And also Sweden was looking into doing a 2050 scenario for itself, so we wanted to feed into that process and show that a 100 percent removal system is possible. You can't say it's impossible just

because you don't want to calculate it.

Karin Bradley: Every fourth year Stockholm has a large survey of what they call "environmental behavior." They have sixty different questions about what you do in terms of being related to the environment. And these questions deal with lots of details about exactly what material you recycle, how you get to work, whether you buy ecological products, whether you buy fair-trade products, how much time you spend in nature, etc. But there are no questions about your overall consumption level—no questions about air travel, which is strange. If you're looking at ecological footprints, *that* is a big thing. And nothing about the size of housing—how large your house is. It's rather what kind of heating you have in your house. All of these factors that are actually the biggest part of an ecological footprint—size of housing, consumption, and air travel—are not even looked at. I think if you have a consumption-based perspective, then that also leads you to look particularly at high-income groups, because there's a statistical link between income and emissions or resource use. You can see that in the national statistics: higher income correlates with more consumption, more transportation, more everything.

And if you consider the rise in terms of consumption levels, imported goods, and flying, then we have increased the amount of emissions in the last ten years. In the official politics we say we have "decoupled" our economy, we have both had economic growth and less greenhouse gas emissions. But, I mean, we haven't. That's simply not true. It depends on how you calculate.

This is how the reporting system is. It's not only Sweden; it's the whole UN system that needs to be changed.

3.

Tor Lindstrand (architect, assistant professor, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan): If there will be bigger shifts in catastrophe, what will happen eventually is that the city will fortify itself. First there's a surge and then there's a cleansing movement.

One of the oldest documented fires to ravage central Stockholm occurred on April 14, 1297. Conflagrations then erupted in 1330, 1344, 1407, 1411, 1419, 1445, 1458, and 1495. The cause of a 1407 fire was said to be lightning strikes. Sources claim it caused sixteen hundred deaths.[21]

Beautiful thing
—the whole city doomed! And
the flames towering[22]

After 1501, no wooden houses were allowed within the city walls. In 1552, the ban against fire hazards was tightened—wooden houses in the town center were demolished and replaced with stone structures. However, flammable wooden buildings remained in all the yards.

In 1555, a fire started by burning pitch at the new fort along the shore on Stadsholmen's west side destroyed all the houses from the Great Gråmunkegränd to Kornhamnstorg, just outside the city wall. Citizens had to run clear to the east side of Stadsholmen to collect water.

Ah!
rotten beams tum-
bling,
an old bottle
mauled[23]

Aaron Malthais (postdoctoral fellow, University of Stockholm): Politically, we're not really very good at dealing with these slow-onset, long-term problems. When we think about the nature of the problem of climate change, people often describe it as a "super-wicked problem." This is a technical term in political economy and economics. They're basically talking about the incentives that actors face, and that there's a combination of incentives … Climate change has this characteristic that you need to make large cuts in greenhouse emissions now to have a positive effect quite far into the future. And once you're having large climate effects, at that point you're not able to improve your situation by making large cuts in emissions. So any time you make large cuts in emissions, those benefits largely land in the future, and that's just a basic structural problem in dealing with this kind of environmental threat.

Karin Bradley: Stockholm claims that it has decreased its greenhouse gas emissions. Basically, the official story is that we are on a very good track, we have solved *all* environmental problems, the world should look at us; we're well on the way to being fossil-fuel free, which is not true at all. There is some kind of idea about being the best in the class—general equality, most things, somehow. And if you listen to most of the politicians, they say, "Yeah, Sweden's really a forerunner in terms of environment. Now it's about helping others, and this clean development mechanism." We want to make investment in green technology in other countries, but don't see that we actually overconsume resources.

Illustration by Rutger Sjogrim.

4.

Stockholm 2040:

Air traffic from the Arlanda, Nyköping, and Bromma airports is a fraction of what it once was. One no longer hears the familiar roar of jet turbines passing overhead, commercial jet traffic having been outlawed in 2035. The hybrid solar/hydrogen fuel cell gliders that have replaced the outmoded jet fleets remain prohibitively expensive, restricting air travel to all but the very affluent. In any case, there are fewer reasons to travel and fewer places to travel to, the population of continental Europe having been reduced by a third due to famines following a series of catastrophic crop failures. The EU still nominally exists, although the mobility promised by the Eurozone and the Schengen agreement have turned out to be a temporary aberration to the normative urge of states to control their borders. Greece, Spain, and Portugal left the Euro in 2019. The Schengen agreement was modified, reinstating border controls not long after, an attempt to control northerly waves of migration from a beleaguered southern Europe and beyond …

As the weather becomes increasingly unpredictable, regional conflicts multiply, usually stemming from disputes over shared natural resources, or the expropriation of resources from adjacent territories. No industrial production is entirely free from the ethical taint of warfare.

Karin Bradley: Sweden has a lot of non–fossil fuel energy sources—water and our three nuclear power plants. What we don't think of when considering nuclear energy is that it's dependent on imports of uranium. And to expand solar energy, you need silicon, and rare earth metals for wind power and wind power shields. So a lot of the green technologies are reliant on scarce resources that at some point will become unavailable. For instance, rare earth metals are found in China and they're restricting their exports because they need it themselves.

Now we're thinking that basically we could keep the same kind of lifestyle but replace the energy sources and the materials.[24] I think we need to think about reduction, too.

But I think it's very unclear what to do about this. Because then you come into very difficult questions, since our whole economic growth is very much reliant on increasing consumption, and if you look at where the new jobs are created, a lot of them are within retail. So, to get people to consume is important for the whole economy but also for jobs in the retail sector. Some would argue that, okay, we can have a more service-based economy. But even though we have a lot of service jobs, material-goods consumption has gone up as well. It's not that easy to have an economy based only on services.

There are two sides to each man's life: his personal life, which is the more free the more abstract its interests, and his elemental swarmlike life, where man inevitably fulfills the laws prescribed for him.[25]

Isadora Wronski: Throwing away thirty percent of all food, that's not very resource effective.[26] Taking up huge amounts of land in Brazil, planting soya beans, feeding them to European cows, and then throwing away the milk or meat … We need to take an even bigger systems perspective. In the end the approach that is needed is internalizing the costs, that you have a product pay also for the emissions it's producing, because in the end the society and the taxpayer will have to pay for the harm those emissions will cause. Then you will see a completely different price for that item than if its cost had been determined only by production costs … We need to see the *actual* production cost.

5.

Stockholm 2040:

In 2045, military patrols guard the southern borders of Belgium, Germany, and Poland, partially financed by the Scandinavian countries, who have come to view Western and Central Europe as a first line of defense against migration. Despite these attempts, fortress Scandinavia could never be more than a dream. Immigrants still attempt the passage across the Baltic Sea in converted fishing trawlers run by gangs of coyotes operating along the Baltic coast, hoping to join the throngs crowded into shantytowns on the outskirts of Stockholm's suburbs.[27] Here one can find representatives from nearly every country on the planet. And whereas in the world of 2014, the distinction between developed and underdeveloped worlds was a function of geography, today one finds the latest technological innovations alongside practices going back millennia: electric cars share the streets with rickshaws and donkey carts; inner-city apartments come equipped with computer systems monitoring every aspect of the domestic environment while a few kilometers away, clothes are washed by hand in scavenged plastic tubs.

These new shantytowns nourish a burgeoning informal economy retaining something of the appearance of a global bazaar. Population groups have reconstituted

themselves in miniature, configuring the favelas as an archipelago of tiny ethnic islands—Gambians next to Tamils, Bangladeshis abutting Mongolian tribesmen. Different peoples bring with them their traditional foods, religious practices, and modes of social organization. In kitchen gardens are grown fruits, vegetables, and medicinal plants that fifty years ago could never have grown in Sweden's mild summer weather, and people trade and barter fresh produce and scavenged goods, while tradesmen like electricians and plumbers (many of whom trained as engineers and architects in their native countries) occupy a privileged place in the social hierarchy.

A profusion of religious practices flourish and intermingle in a syncretistic orgy of heterodoxy. Ecstatic Christian millenarians join in prayer with Central Asian shamans, West African voodoo practitioners, Sufi dervishes. In Gamla Stan it is rumored that in the favelas magic is practiced as commonly as personal hygiene, a fact confirmed by a team of anthropologists hired by the city of Stockholm, some of whom fell victim to mysterious ailments in the course of their research. But despite the risk, efforts to infiltrate the favelas' complex social structure continue, as they have become essential to Sweden's industrial and agricultural sectors, an important reservoir of surplus labor. After the contraction of mainland China's industrial output following widespread ecological failure and a series of catastrophic famines (African states having long ago expropriated China's agribusiness colonies), domestic industrial output has, for the first time in generations, assumed a prominent role in the Swedish economy. Emergency orders, drawn up long ago and continuously extended, allow laws governing industrial labor to be habitually suspended on account of "extraordinary circumstances." Extraordinary conditions have become the norm. This has led to the resumption of labor conditions not seen in Scandinavia since the nineteenth century.

Periodically, labor agitation sweeps through the shantytowns—sit-down strikes and walkouts, demonstrations where shamans cast spells to defeat the industrialists and mullahs oversee hit-and-run attacks against the city-center defenses. This has led to a protracted cat-and-mouse game between émigré labor organizers, their allies on the Swedish left, and the intelligence forces of the combines who effectively control domestic industrial production and maintain their own private police force.

Karin Bradley: As the current welfare system is constructed, if Sweden were to accommodate really large shares of climate refugees, you would need to reform the economic and welfare system. There are those who argue that the welfare system will be put under so much stress that at some point there won't be a welfare system, which is not that strange.

I think of course for many people who come as immigrants or refugees to Sweden, either they *must* flee or they seek a better life. But the reason for that is often because they can't find a good enough life where they live … It's not that people dream about the *goods* so much necessarily.

And of course there are also these scenarios that maybe the Gulf Stream will change its course, which could then make Sweden very, very cold, a less desirable place even for native Swedes.[28]

6.

The past haunts the present; but the latter denies it with good reason. For on the surface nothing remains the same.[29]

From 1397 to 1523, Danish and Swedish forces battled for control of Sweden. Possessing Stockholm was crucial to this enterprise and various Swedish/Danish factions regularly besieged the city. In 1471, Sten Sture the Elder defeated Christian I of Denmark at the Battle of Brunkeberg, losing the city twenty-six years later to Hans of Denmark. Sture managed to seize power again in 1501, and a lengthy Danish blockade ensued.

In January 1520, Hans's son, Christian II, backed by a mercenary army of French, German, and Scottish soldiers, again besieged the city, felling the regent Sten Sture the Younger, who was unceremoniously dragged from his horse and pierced through the chest by a lance as he lay squirming on the ice of Lake Mälaren.

Hastily gathered in Uppsala, leaders of the Swedish nobility quickly agreed to capitulate, provided amnesty was granted Christian's political opponents.

Meanwhile, Sture's widow Dame Kristina Gyllenstierna had regrouped the remnants of her army, defeated by the Danes at the Battle of Uppsala, behind Stockholm's city walls. The Danish forces, camping outside the city gates, waited for the Danish fleet's return. In May, Stockholm finally was encircled from land and sea. For four months Dame Kristina's forces rebuffed the Danes, until in the fall, Christian, wearying of the protracted siege, delivered a proposal offering advantageous terms in exchange for the city's surrender, swearing all acts against him would be forgotten. Gyllenstierna herself was enticed with the offer of a large fiefdom.

After a document agreeing to these terms had been drafted and signed, Stockholm's mayor handed Christian the keys to the city and his forces marched through the city gates as the assembled citizenry watched in silence. He then sailed back to Denmark.

Aaron Malthais: Something people are talking about now concerns a philosopher named John Broome, who is one of the lead authors at the IPCC. He has this idea—it's not part of his IPCC work—where he says, "Well, basically we're creating an externality when we pollute the atmosphere, and that creates costs on future generations and this current generation takes the benefits." His idea is we could borrow from the future to finance reducing emissions today.[30] And there are various proposals about how you could do that, various ways of taking on national debt, but especially changing behavior. We could work less so we would also pollute less, and we could consume more low-carbon types of natural goods and use less fossil fuel. We could invest less in buildings and roads and more in new energy sources, and so on. We could try to make this transition in a way that would not really affect our welfare that much.

Now, that raises this question: Is it legitimate to borrow from the future to finance not imposing this environmental problem on them? Some people say: well, yes, it's not only legitimate but that's the way it should work, because the future is going to be richer than us. So it's a kind of cost-benefit analysis. (They have this assumption that they're going to be richer than us!) And some people say, well, it's not really the best, it's kind of like extortion, but given that we're having such a hard time getting political action now, maybe this is really a good strategy. It's a way to do something. It's not the nicest thing, but on the whole, it's a good second-best option.

And my reaction to this idea: I just doubt we can borrow from the future in that way.

In this sense, the past devours
the future.[31]

Aaron Malthais: So, the worry is that no generation has a strong enough self-interest to cut emissions, because they're not able to alter the climate change they'll experience over their lifetimes to a very significant degree. And the worry is that if, let us say, this generation—the decision-makers, the adult taxpayers—doesn't invest heavily in mitigation, then our children and their children will come and think, "Wow, this is really terrible, they didn't have our interests in their political decisions" … and so forth. But they will be faced with the same kind of decision we have, that we didn't invest because it wasn't going to make a large difference to our lives. And when they're sitting there with a bunch of climate impacts, they'll have to deal with them, of course, but they'll be faced with the same question: "Do we invest heavily in mitigation and cutting greenhouse gas emissions, or we do invest in adapting to these climate problems we're facing now? Because the investments we'll make in mitigation, that's not going to help us that much it's going to mostly help people in the future."

On November 4 1520, pro-unionist archbishop Gustavus Trolle (whose fortress at Stäket had previously been besieged by Sture the Younger's troops) crowned Christian II of Denmark king inside Stockholm's *Storkyrkan*.

Christian's celebratory banquet lasted three days. On the evening of the third day, he summoned a group of Swedish leaders to a private conference at the palace. It lasted through the night and into the next day. That evening, as the invited guests suffered through another meal, Danish soldiers entered the great hall of the royal palace, removing several noble guests. Several hours later, more guests were led away. The following day, a council headed by Trolle began charging the Danish king's political enemies with heresy. By noon, the anti-unionist bishops of Skara and Strängnäs were being led out to the *Stortorget*, where a raised platform had been erected. The executions continued throughout the day: chief executioner Jörgen Homuth counted eighty-two killings in all.

When Gustav Vasa conquered the city three years later, he noted that every second building in Stockholm was abandoned.

(so close are we to ruin every
day!)[32]

Aaron Malthais: And so you can see how each generation gets stuck in this motivational problem, and so the real worry is that we'll be perpetually in this situation of delay that is, of course, bad for humanity as a whole, but for each generation makes sense in terms of their own time perspective.

7.

The disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated—the immemorial, perhaps. To remember forgetfully: again: the outside.[33]

Stockholm 2040:

The changes to the environment have above all affected distinctions between inside and outside, interiority and

exteriority, the endogenous and exogenous—between the natural world and the impulses of the central nervous system; between Stockholm and its surrounding zones; between Sweden, its regional neighbors, and the world at large. It is not that distance had been abridged, but that the magnitude of catastrophe has created its own collapse, as if the wind itself could transport the residue of distant events directly into the city. This is how it feels. Weather and its ancillary effects have no conception of national boundaries. Whatever Stockholm does to mitigate new climate risks, the possibility remains that these measures will be insufficient.

Karin Bradley: I've been thinking a lot about urbanization, because the mainstream discourse is that Stockholm will continue to grow, while smaller towns in the countryside are losing people and that will just continue, like it's a natural law. I'm not sure of this, because as David Harvey has shown, urbanization and capitalism and economic growth are different sides of the same coin.[34] If you had a serious economic crisis, you might also see a de-urbanization process beginning. Some researchers like Richard Heinberg argue that everything today is reliant on cheap fossil fuels.[35] In addition to relying on fossil fuel, industrial agriculture relies on phosphorus as well. I don't know if we've seen peak phosphorus or are close to it, but when the price of phosphorus rises, so will fertilizers. Large-scale agriculture will not be as profitable as before. He argues that within fifty to hundred years we'll see a process of ruralization, actually. People will have to live closer to the land … You'll need more manpower in food production.

I think, in fact, there's something risky in losing all these skills and knowledge about how to produce food. And not only food but basic crafts—knitting, doing practical things. It's very important to keep it alive somehow, even though we'll not necessarily be self-sufficient. Now I think these skills are being forgotten and it's gone quite fast really. It's a difficult process to reverse once its begun.

8.

The disaster: stress upon minutiae, sovereignty of the accidental. This causes us to acknowledge that forgetfulness is not negative or that the negative does not come after affirmation (affirmation negated), but exists in relation to the most ancient, to what would seem to come from furthest back in time immemorial without ever having been given.[36]

Stockholm 2040:

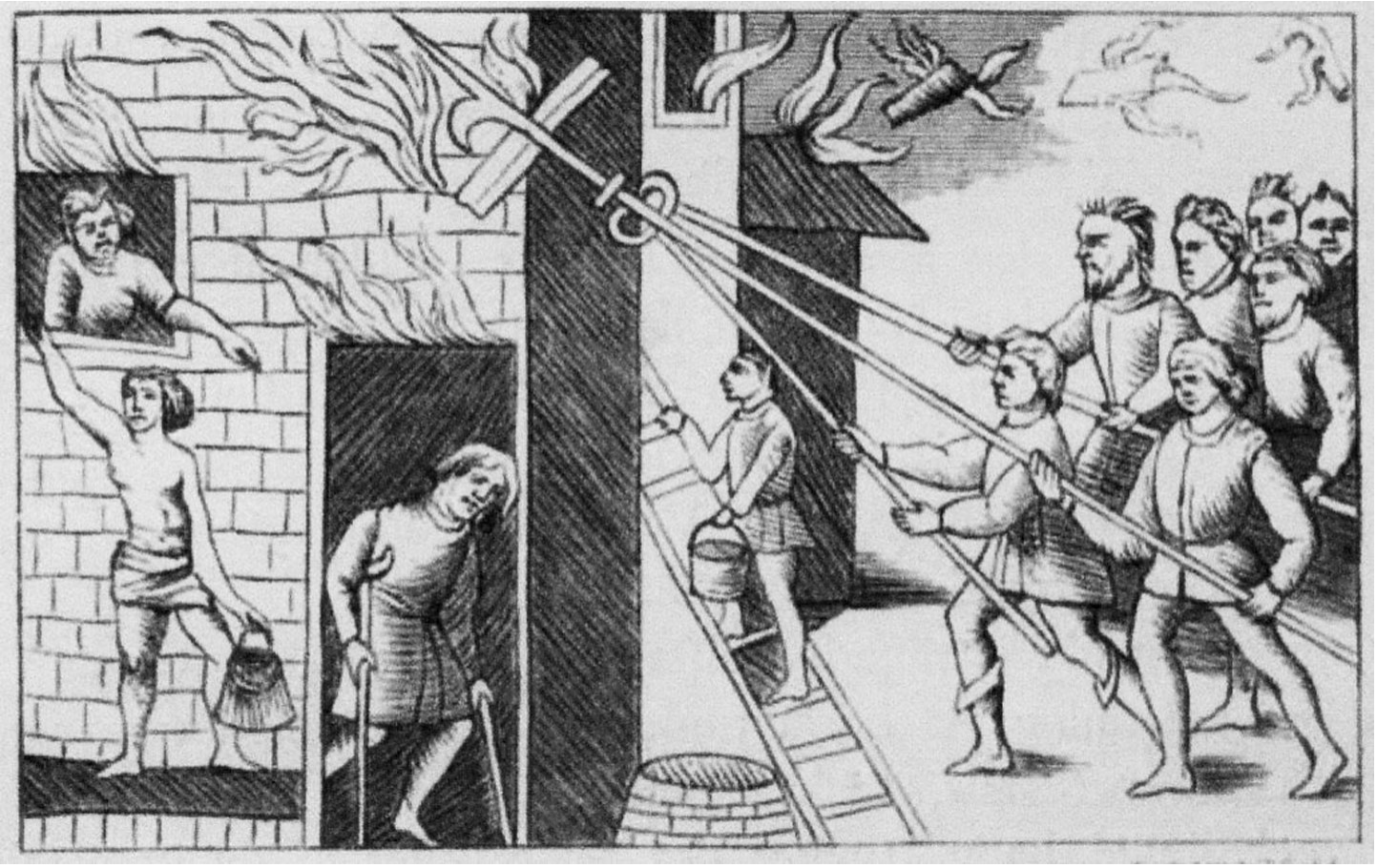
Long ago, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency released a document on risk assessment which contained chapters on the following subjects: floods, landslides, storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, solar storms, heat waves, forest fires, vermin infestation (pests), infectious disease outbreaks, resistant bacteria and resistance to antivirals, disruptions in the supply of medicines, risks associated with nuclear and radioactive materials, risks associated with chemicals, dam failures, disruptions to food and drinking water supply, extensive fires in buildings and tunnels, disruption in electronic communications, disruptions in energy supplies, disruptions in payment systems, oil spills, disruption of transport and major transport emergencies, terrorism, cyber-attacks, risk of societal instability and civil unrest.[37] *This list is now updated on a routine basis and new chapters are added according to circumstance.*

As a meditative practice, people have been known to browse through the report on their digital readers, trying to imagine in the mind's eye the different scenarios. Again: the outside.

In 1710, refugees from Livonia and Estonia fleeing the Great Northern War brought a ferocious strain of plague to Central Sweden. By June it had arrived in Stockholm, most probably via a ship from Pärnu. The Collegium Medicum denied there was a plague outbreak for another two months, despite buboes being visible on the bodies of victims from both ship and town.

The plague continued for a year, primarily affecting women and children in the poorer quarters outside the Old Town. "They died by the hundreds, both day and night, and all were thrown in ditches and covered with earth," wrote a Stockholm merchant. "As soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. So many died that all believed it was the end of the world. And I, Magnus Brandel Norling, buried my five children with my own hands." Another Stockholm chronicler wrote: "The condition of the people was pitiable to behold. They sickened by the thousands daily, and died unattended and without help. Many died in the open street; others, dying in their houses, made it known by the stench of their rotting bodies. Consecrated churchyards did not suffice for the burial of the multitude of bodies, which were heaped by the hundreds in vast trenches, like goods in a ship's hold and covered with a little earth."

From Stockholm, the plague began to spread in late summer to other places in Uppland. The court was hurriedly evacuated to Sala, the *riksrådet* to Arboga a month later. From Uppland, it spread southward with equally devastating effect. People cast about for a cause: Was it the foul mists, or did domestic animals transmit the disease? Orders were promulgated forbidding peasants and burghers from keeping livestock inside the towns, and



Ol. Magni, Eldsvådor, c. 1500s. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

an abundance of stray pigs that thrived on the garbage discarded in the streets were killed. People fled to the surrounding countryside, and in the towns, trade in linen and woolen goods was suspended, or they lit huge bonfires in hopes of driving off the bad air.

> The night was made day by the flames, flames
> On which he fed—grubbing the page
> (the burning page)
> like a worm for enlightenment[38]

9.

The "climate change sublime," a contemporary manifestation of eighteenth-century philosopher and politician Edmund Burke's Enlightenment-era cross-referencing of aesthetic experience with physiological affect:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other.[39]

Stockholm 2040:

Something is out of kilter. The seasons still pass, one after the other, but those old enough to remember what weather was once like, despite its stochastic variations, react to an unidentifiable haze in the air, or an exceptionally hot summer day with horror, as another proof of nature knocked irreversibly askew. Horror, terror, panic. Some people react by deadening their awareness of the experience of the external world, keeping to controlled environments, focused on screens. Others develop a hypersensitivity to external stimuli so that every abnormal occurrence—birds singing too loud, birds entirely still; a gust of wind, a sudden, violent rainstorm; an unexplained clamor, an unnatural calm—is taken as a harbinger of the coming disaster.

In his *Outline of a Theory of the Emotions*, Jean-Paul Sartre differentiated between horror, which occasions

feelings of revulsion, a contraction inward, and terror, which on the other hand is characterized by a feeling of radical exteriorization, of being "invaded" by the external world—a sudden collapse of distance between inside and outside. This distinction was first made by the Romantic-era writer Ann Radcliffe, who characterized horror as an unambiguous reaction to atrocity, while connecting terror to "obscurity" or indeterminacy in our reaction to potentially horrible events that expand the soul and awaken the faculties—an indeterminacy leading to the sublime. Burke had written earlier:

> With regard to such things as affect by the associated idea of danger, there can be no doubt but that they produce terror, and act by some modification of that passion; and that terror, when sufficiently violent, raises the emotions of the body just mentioned, can as little be doubted. But if the sublime is built on terror, or some passion like it, which has pain for its object; it is previously proper to enquire how any species of delight can be derived from a cause so apparently contrary to it.[40]

Herein lies the sublime's ambivalence: awe and aesthetic appreciation are prompted by the very thing that terrifies, as if Freud's repetition compulsion could be displaced onto aesthetics. Something of this is apparent in the futurists' aesthetic appreciation of World War I's depravities—the smoke and noise, the blinding speed of munitions, and the white light of explosions. Something of this is apparent in our morbid fascination with the visible evidence of the climate's unravelling.

Burke has come down to the twenty-first century as a conservative philosopher, a traditionalist—a vocal opponent of the French Revolution who, by the time he wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, had transferred what was once a nonmoral analysis of aesthetic categories (because, as David Bromwich writes, "they were planted in us, we could not imagine human life without them, and to call them good or bad would be superfluous").[41] His response to revolution comes down to us in our horror when the beautiful things of the past are threatened with ruination, no matter their iniquitous origin. His appreciation of the sublime comes down to us in our awestruck reaction to glaciers calving enormous icebergs, despite the awareness such events lead directly to sea-level rise.

10.

Stockholm 2040:

And what of Stockholm's artistic community—the theorists, curators, and artists, with their training in aesthetic sensitization—how will they react to the climate change sublime? Will Stockholm's artists and culture workers respond to environmental and societal pressures with radical engagement, retreat into solipsistic fantasies of denial, or, in the face of an abiding existential uncertainty, lose faith in the artistic project altogether? These are predicaments both practical and philosophical in nature. Stockholm's art scene persists at a greatly reduced scale, and in the face of the diminished social currency of cultural heritage. A smattering of public and private galleries remain in Stockholm's center zone, while the city's two art schools, Konstfack and Kungliga Akademien för de fria konsterna, operate with a reduced faculty and a greater emphasis on applied arts and design . After graduation, Swedish artists are confronted with degrees of financial instability not seen since the Great Depression, but according to the sociologists who have studied the matter, the level of psychological resiliency within the artistic community echoes that of the broader population. As in every era, some artists remain sequestered in their ateliers, some give up art altogether for reasons of economic necessity or psychological despair, and some seek patronage from the government or from tech, environmental-remediation, and risk-management companies. Others have joined the exodus from the city to alternative communities in the countryside—who eke out a living from the soil, and by resuscitating handicrafts and local folk traditions—or by uniting in small scavenger collectives to occupy vacant buildings in the city center, living off the refuse of the affluent. Others have adapted the communication skills learned in art school to labor and environmental activism in the suburbs and shantytowns—the latest incarnation in a long tradition of radical negation, practicing art as a strategy of withdrawal. Yet others have chosen a middle path, continuing to operate within the "official" art system while joining secret clandestine societies that make common cause with radical groups to undermine the prevailing "technocratic inclination" keeping the city's surface normalcy in place.[42]

Twenty-five years earlier, a Berlin-based researcher had written, "In confronting our possible futures, whether for artists or the broader society, there is a negotiation I continually find myself making between an anticipated and a hoped-for outcome. The problem is this: on the one hand, no one who really thinks about it would advance chaos and social disintegration as a desirable future. On the other hand, there are so many patently unsustainable aspects of present-day society that I find myself resistant to positing its continuation as desirable." Having forsaken an image of the "good life" as a possible telos for artistic projects, most of Stockholm's artists in the year 2040 find themselves in an ambivalent negotiation between utopianism and bricolage, scavenging in the debris of the present moment to construct a vision of a future anterior, wondering all along whether their efforts will suffice.

Illustration by Rutger Sjogrim.

11.

Those of us who have not lived through war or known hardship suppose something vaguely resembling the present will continue indefinitely. Trained by cinema and television, we cannot imagine a world where disaster—whether natural or man-made (here including the realm of politics as a category of the catastrophic)—do not follow a narrative arc but follow one after the other, without resolution, like an occupying army who first harass then ultimately exhaust a civilian population. We cannot imagine this world for, at least those of us in the West (although many elsewhere know all too well the predicament of being caught up in endless conflict and its attendant miseries), have not lived through such protracted periods of chaos, the sort of degradation described by C. V. Wedgwood in her history of the Thirty Years War:

> In ten years of war, more than half the empire had borne the actual occupation or passage of troops, the immediate disaster leaving a train of evils behind—disease among the cattle, famine for man and beast, the ineradicable germs of plague. Four bad harvests in succession between 1625 and 1628 added their burden to the tale of German misery. Plague took terrific toll of the hungry people and wiped out whole encampments of wretched refugees. … In Tyrol in 1628 they ground bean stalks for bread, in Nassau in 1630 acorns and roots … The harvest of 1627 on the banks of the Havel had promised well, but retreating Danes and pursuing imperialists destroyed it.[43]

If something like a climate change sublime exists, it would be a crystallization of the terrifying capacity of nature to overwhelm human subjectivity.

History as the ruin of nature could not be given meaning.[44]

What sort of person will the future deliver? What sorts of stories will be told, what coalescence of forces will push people into conflict or cause them to align in pursuit of a common project? To read what was never written is to divine a future anterior. Without risking the dark alterity of difference, we cannot imagine a world shaped according to a better set of principles than those currently in play—principles in line with Legasov's "beautiful and correct moral sense." Instead we are living history as a phenomenon in which a multitude of persons are driven "to fulfill the will of isolated and weak men and be brought to that by a countless number of complex, diverse causes."[45]

> **Owen Gaffney:** One of the problems with the international assessments on climate change, for example, if we carry on business as usual, sea level might be forty-eight centimeters to eighty-five centimeters higher than presently. But it's not going to stop there. The thing is, they only looked to 2100; sea-level rise is going to continue past that. And if emissions continue, we get into hitting danger zones, potentially destabilizing elements of the earth's system, creating feedback loops that accelerate the change.
>
> These are the big worries. Policy-makers say, well, we need to know what's going to happen in the next ten, twenty, thirty years—that's what's relevant to policy-makers. But the scientists are saying, what's relevant to humanity is this huge long-term shift that the human race is going to have to face, including policy-makers. Policy-makers will minimize economic losses if they deal with climate change now. But there's a huge disconnect.

We are failing in our effort to imagine, much less construct, a viable future world.

If we were to withdraw our faith in endless technological fixes, perhaps we might then surrender ourselves to the necessary dimension of myth in our efforts to imagine a world that has not yet come into being. This might be our last tool in confronting the future.

X

Michael Baers is an American artist and writer based in Berlin. He has participated in exhibitions throughout North America and Europe, usually with drawings or offset publications exhibited sculpturally. He has also contributed comics and essays to many publications and print initiatives.

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Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 62.

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Joan Didion, *The White Album* (Simon & Schuster, 1979), 11.

3
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive" *October* 102, no. 88 (Spring 1999): 122.

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Aby Warburg, "The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past," trans. Matthew Rampley, *Art in Translation* 1, no. 2 (2009): 282.

5
W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* , trans. Anthea Bell (Penguin Books, 2004), 153.

6
Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* , 159. Speaking of Maurice Blanchot's irony with respect to a categorical faith or trust (*confiance*) in language, Ann Smock writes in her introduction to *The Writing of the Disaster* that it is a defiance—distrust—" *of* language, situated *in* language, which finds within itself the terms of its own critique." Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* , trans. Ann Smock (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), vii.

7
My text was subsequently published in Swedish as part of the book *Reform*, a collaboration between publik (Copenhagen), Bergen Kunsthall, Konsthall C (Stockholm), and Antipyrene Publishing in Aarhus.

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As Director General Helen Lindberg phrased it in the foreword to *A First Step Towards a National Risk Assessment* (MSB, 2011), 3.

9
In his 2018 budget blueprint, Trump has proposed a $600 million cut to the budget of the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), even as the sixteen extreme weather events visited upon the United States in 2017 affected 47 million people and cost an estimated 300 billion dollars. See Ron Nixon, "Trump's Leader for FEMA Wins Praise, But Proposed Budget Cuts Don't," *New York Times* , July 21, 2017 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/us/politics/trumps-leader-for-fema-wins-praise-but-proposed-budget-cuts-dont.html .

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Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* , trans. Dorion Cairns (Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 44, 45.

11
William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New Directions Paperbook, 1963), 117. Ann Smock, again, in words that succinctly encapsulate the difficulty of putting down in words our possible future: "'The writing of the disaster' means not simply the process whereby something called the disaster is written—communicated, attested to, or prophesied. It also means the writing done by the disaster—by the disaster that ruins books and wrecks language. 'The writing of the disaster' means the writing that the disaster—which liquidates writing—is, just as 'knowledge of the disaster' means knowledge as disaster, and 'the flight of thought' the loss of thought, which thinking is." Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster,* ix.

12
Williams, *Paterson*, 144.

13
My italics. This episode is recounted at the conclusion of episode six ("A is for Atom") of Adam Curtis's BBC series *Pandora's Box* . For the full text of the interview, see https://archive.org/stream/DTIC_ADA350993/DTIC_ADA350993_djvu.txt .

14
Williams, *Paterson,* 214.

15
See http://www.government.se/sb/d/574/a/96002 .

16
Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* , 2.

17
See http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm .

18
See http://www.igbp.net/news/features/features/oneplanetfourfutures.5.1b8ae20512db692f2a680002917.html .

19
Line jotted down in my notebook during a talk by W. J. T. Mitchell.

20
See https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union/2050-energy-strategy .

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22
Williams, *Paterson*, 116.

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Williams, *Paterson*, 117.

24
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Rebecca Smithers, "Almost half of the world's food thrown away, report finds," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2013 http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jan/10/half-world-food-waste .

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Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (MIT Press, 1991) 292.

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John Broome, "The Ethics of Climate Change: Pay Now or Pay More Later?" *Scientific American*, June 2008 http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-ethics-of-climate-change/ .

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See Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (University of Wesleyan Press, 1985), 262–72.

32
Williams, *Paterson*, 45.

33
Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* , 3.

34
David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Jason W. Moore, "Ecological Crises and the Agrarian Question in World-Historical Perspective," *Monthly Review* , November 1, 2008 http://monthlyreview.org/2008/11/01/ecological-crises-and-the-agrarian-question-in-world-historical-perspective .

35
See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Heinberg .

36
Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* , 3, 4.

37
See https://www.preventionweb.net/organizations/4466/view .

38
Williams, *Paterson*, 117.

39
Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* , ed. J. T. Bolton (Routledge, 2008), 57.

40
Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* , 132.

41
David Bromwich, "Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ," in *A Companion to Romanticism* , ed. Duncan Wu (Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 113.) to a defense of the types of society that provide a place for beauty and guarded the survival of lovely things for their own sake, even if these were an outcome of aristocratic privilege or gross inequality. Burke opposed the revolution in France on the basis of aesthetics and a distaste for excess and vulgarity, a "disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve" being his "standard of a

statesman."[footnote Burke, *A Phi losophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* , 266–67.

42
These models for culture workers' response to climate change and societal instability were originally developed in my contribution to *Art Workers: Material Conditions and Labour Struggles in Contemporary Art Practice* , eds. Airi Triisberg, Erik Krikortz, and Minna Henriksson (2015), 199–229 http://www.art-workers.org/download/ArtWorkers.pdf .

43
C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (Anchor Books, 1961), 247, 248.

44
This line appears in my notebook from the period of my Stockholm research.

45
Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 605.

Eva Díaz

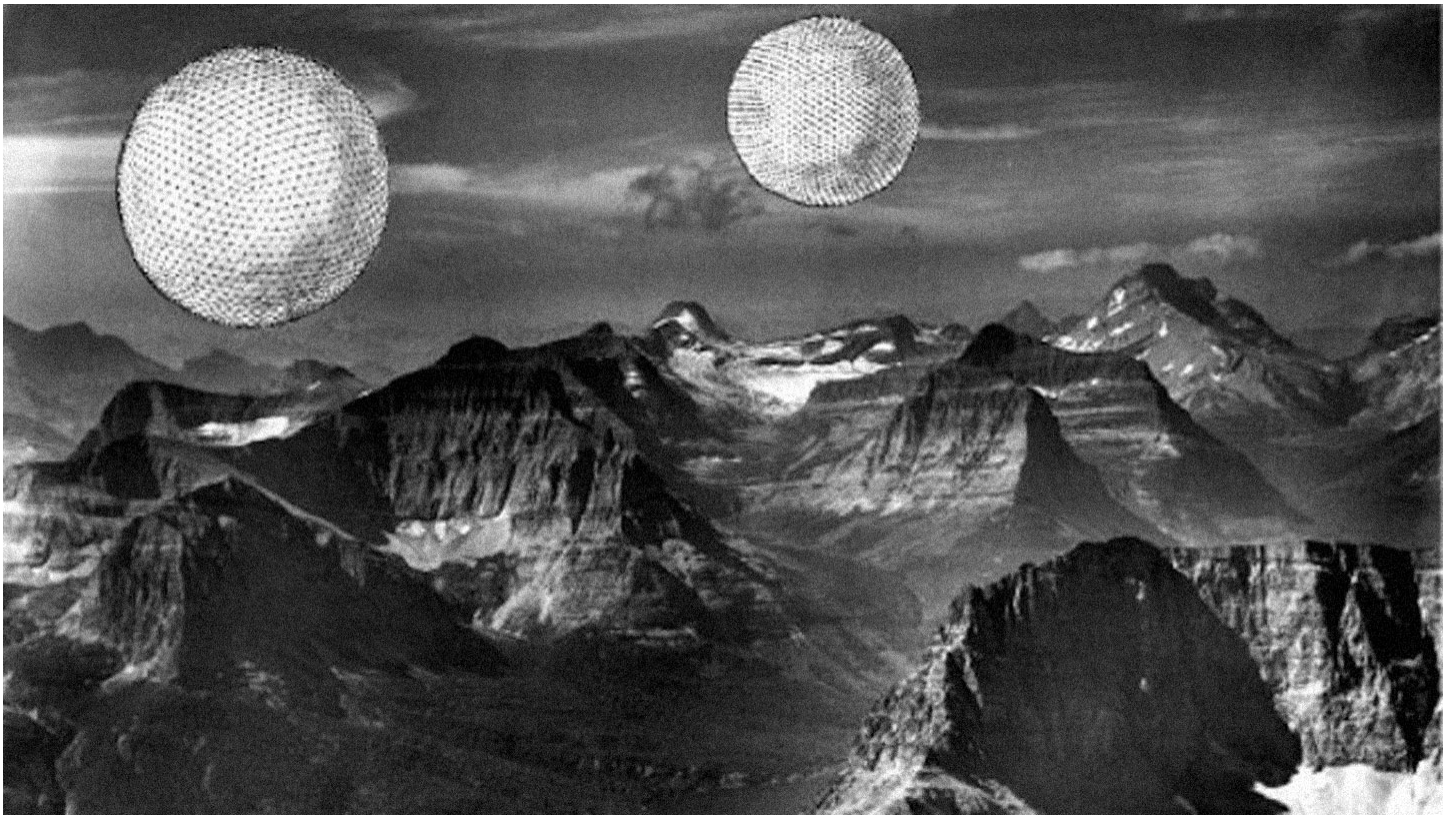
We Are All Aliens

> You're on the Spaceship Earth [...]
> You'd better pay your fare now
> You'll be left behind
> You'll be left hangin'
> In the empty air
> You won't be here and you won't be there.
> —Sun Ra, 1968[1]

For some, contemporary art has become a kind of alt-science platform for research and development projects that offer alternatives to the corporate control and surveillance of outer space. Artists working on issues about access to space are at the front line of a critical investigation about the contours of the future, both in its material form and social organization. Many of these artists are challenging the current expansion of capitalist and colonial practices into outer space, particularly that of so-called "primitive" accumulation: the taking of land and resources for private use. They recognize that much of the tremendous capital amassed in the early 2000s e-commerce and tech boom is now being funneled into astronomically costly "New Space" projects such as SpaceX, a company funded by PayPal cofounder Elon Musk, and Blue Origin, the space enterprise of Amazon's Jeff Bezos.[2]

In response, quite a few visual artists are exploring visions of "free" space, of outer space as a public commons and place of projective imagination. To contextualize and understand such work, this essay draws on R. Buckminster Fuller's (1895–1983) concept of "Spaceship Earth" and his "We are all astronauts" rhetoric of engineered bodies and technologized nature.[3] In recent German and US curatorial projects charting the influence of Fuller on the work of contemporary artists—including MARTa Herford's "We Are All Astronauts: The Universe of Richard Buckminster Fuller as Reflected in Contemporary Art" (2011); Haus der Kulturen der Welt's "The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside" (2013); and the Walker Art Center's "Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia" (2015)—the manner in which Fuller's techno-utopianism is a touchstone in present day art practice has been examined.[4] Fuller hoped to reorient mundane life towards a greater awareness of Earth as embedded in the wider cosmos, yet the eccentricity of his metaphor of Spaceship Earth, which characterizes architecture as an advanced technological vehicle that can supplant natural ecologies in sustaining life, has had lasting effects in how the future is envisioned as human-authored and technologically dependent.

Countering Fuller's optimism about humanity's orientation to outer space, a post-Apollo-missions generation of artists, born in the late 1960s to the 1980s, reckons with its own belatedness to a conception of space exploration as an aim of public culture in the current era of New Space



R. Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao, Project for Floating Cloud Structures (Cloud Nine), c. 1960.

privatization. Many of the artists in my discussion, who include Paweł Althamer, Halil Altindere, Frances Bodomo, Cristina de Middel, Larissa Sansour, Tomás Saraceno, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, engage in explicit criticisms of Fuller's techno-futurity.[5] They register an elegiac sense that the era of space exploration as a program of knowledge acquisition, interspecies communication, and even intergalactic colonization—in short, the epoch of cosmic optimism—has receded if not ended. They join slightly older artists born in the 1950s, such as John Akomfrah, who reconsider how the applications of technologies in near and outer space, once billed as progressive, are rife with negative effects such as resource depletion and privatization, racial domination, and economic inequality. Given the fact that environmental damage, which is already prompting climate migrations, is being used to justify future off-planet colonization, space travel and space architectures have become central preoccupations of artworks made in the last decade or so.[6]

As important as Fuller to artists today is the influence of musician and impresario Sun Ra (1914–93) and his influential space fascination in the 1960s and 1970s, a project that can be summed up as "We are all aliens."[7] Ra's landmark afrofuturist works such as the 1972/74 film *Space is the Place,* and his albums and performances with his band the Arkestra, continue to be immensely popular, often-cited works in contemporary art, his experiments with modal polytonality and polyrhythmic beats looms large in contemporary culture.[8]

Space is the Place, scripted in part from lectures Sun Ra gave while teaching a course in 1971 at UC Berkeley titled "The Black Man in the Cosmos," follows Ra's attempts to recruit African-Americans to a distant planet he hopes to settle. The plot centers on the menace of white scientists eager to obtain Ra's interplanetary travel technology. Journeying back in time to a strip club in Chicago where he played piano in the 1940s, Ra meets a black "Overseer," a Cadillac-driving pimp played by Ray Johnson, who proposes a wager to offer black Americans "earthly delights" against Ra's hopes for their "altered destiny" in space. Ra eventually wins the bet and he raptures much of the black population of Oakland, California to join his space colony on Saturn.

In promoting a separatist vision of African-American culture as anticapitalist and technologically savvy, Sun Ra turned the function of black music and culture, traditionally exploited as entertainment, into a conduit for black advancement beyond white domination. For Ra, outer space became a utopian outside to segregation and white supremacy, a parallel dimension in which to model a life beyond discriminatory histories of colonization and injustice on Earth.[9]

Cristina de Middel, The Afronauts, 2012. Digital C-print, 39 x 39 in. Courtesy the artist.

Just as access to technology is always fraught with power inequalities (when a Theremin refused to work, Ra joked, "Even machines can be racist. We got to be ready for the space age"), to Ra the many injustices committed against African-Americans by scientists, including unethical scientific studies on black bodies, also extended to dominant culture's diminishment of black accomplishments in acts of historical whitewashing.[10] Ra led others to question the claims of universality in exploratory space travel and to make links between the history of slavery, the scarce resources available to the oppressed, and hopes for interplanetary travel: "What we never had for so long, space, outer space. Or no space at all. Squeezes so tight. From the slave ship to the shack to the tenement. No space to really move. No space to really function. Sun Ra & Co. herald Space to Come, Freedom, to move, to live again as ourselves. Expansion."[11]

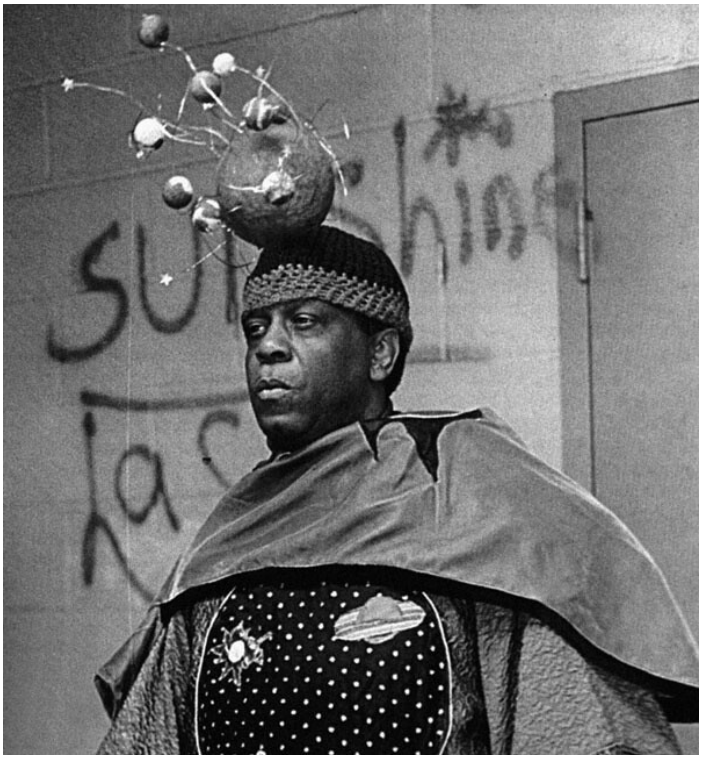
Like Janus's two faces, Fuller's euphoria about technologies expanding human access to the universe is inextricably linked to Ra's sense of whites having robbed others of a place on Earth, thereby necessitating the flight into outer space. One important proposal of neo-afrofuturist artworks is to temper the vision of the future as a frontier of exploration and technological progress with recognition that the loss of history for enslaved and subjugated peoples was the defining condition of previous colonial endeavors.

The Argentina-born, Berlin-based artist Tomás Saraceno invents DIY tools to actually physically access the stratosphere. Saraceno tests the capacity of individuals to lift off the Earth without the institutional apparatuses of once-dominant nation-based programs or the immense private wealth of tech oligarchs' current space enterprises. Fuller was fascinated with space capsules and space colony architecture, and the geodesic dome became the ur-object of his vision of the Earth as a mobile, streamlined, spherical media-receptive cabin. Like Fuller, Saraceno believes that a synthesis of humble, ad hoc prototypes and grand visions can generate concrete data for future experimental models. His *Cloud Cities* project (2009–present) is named after Fuller and Shoji Sadao's 1960 *Cloud Nine*, a speculative proposal for floating structures intended to rise above planetary surfaces. As part of *Cloud Cities*, Saraceno traveled to remote Salar de Uyuni in southwest Bolivia, the world's largest salt flat, to conduct trials of his *Space Elevator*, essentially a camping tent tethered to a clear plastic hot-air balloon.[12] Though it goes beyond Fuller's proposal by actually taking flight, Saraceno's *Space Elevator* is a decidedly low-tech DIY bricolage construction, intentionally conjectural in its hope to keep the imagination of outer space open as a projective space for all.[13]

Space Elevator is part of a project Saraceno initiated called the Aerocene Foundation, the aim of which is to construct airborne vehicles sustained by solar energy alone, to access "space without rockets … free from borders, free from fossil fuels."[14] Saraceno hopes these balloons will eventually be tethered together as floating cities, to "contest political, social, cultural, and military restrictions that are accepted today."[15] For him, the paradigm of the floating city transgresses nation-state borders that, especially in the case of Latin America, reinscribe the power dynamics of colonialism onto the bodies of undesirable migrants, and reinforce land ownership as the criteria of citizenship. Saraceno's *Space Elevator*, though as implausible as Fuller and Sadao's speculative *Cloud Nine* in its current prototype form, echoes the immense heuristic potential of Fuller's project to fire curiosity about social and political forms beyond the geo-territorial norms of Earth-bound citizenship.

The "space race" of the 1950s to the 1990s unabashedly employed the language of competition. But what of the individuals and nations that did not qualify for the race? Had they no purchase on the vision of the future promised to the winners? Whereas Saraceno's *Cloud Cities* attempts to create institutions and infrastructures that bypass wealthy nations' and now billionaires' monopolies on space travel, two separate but related projects by Cristina de Middel and Frances Bodomo address earlier moments of DIY space exploration. De Middel and Bodomo use the same historical incident—the founding of the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy in 1960—as a starting point for their investigations of non-Western space programs and the aspirations to self-determination following decolonization.

Edward Festus Mukuka Nkoloso, a school teacher who



Sun Ra, ca. 1969. Photo: Thomas Hunter.

joined the Zambian resistance against British colonial rule, started the academy intending to beat the space programs of the US and the Soviet Union by sending a Zambian cadet there first. Nkoloso named the twelve Zambian cadets he selected for the mission the "Afronauts," from which both a 2014 film by Bodomo and a 2012 photographic series and book by de Middel borrow their titles. Eventually Nkoloso settled on a seventeen-year-old girl, Matha Mwambwa, and her two cats, as candidates for travel to the moon and Mars. He asked UNESCO for seven million Zambian pounds to prepare for a 1964 launch, and requested over a billion dollars from private foreign funders. He was unsuccessful on both counts. Without resources, he nonetheless improvised a launchpad and trained his Afronauts. Bodomo's film recreates Nkoloso's unsophisticated launch equipment and restages his decidedly low-tech training techniques, which involved rolling down a hill in an oil drum to simulate g-force, and swinging from a tire to simulate weightlessness. Alongside archival documents, de Middel's square-format color photographs restage scenes of Nkoloso's efforts and recreate the improvised costumes of the Afronauts, with actors donning motorcycle helmets paired with raffia collars, duct tape, vacuum tubing, and Kente cloth to present visually outlandish yet wholly impractical space costumes. De Middel's work emphasizes the artfulness of Nkoloso's endeavor, his appropriation of the visual codes of astronauts' suits and helmets, and the sleek look of rockets, all of which stood in for the actual journey. One can think of Nkoloso's project as a proleptic performance of sorts: creating elaborate props and putting on a play acts as a morale-building exercise towards a collective vision of outer space unencumbered by expensive, functional transportation technologies.

Nkoloso's unrequited quest for funding for Zambia to participate in the space age underscores the unequal allocation of global resources that stymies universal access to outer space, a zone legally unpossessable by international treaty but in practice monopolized by elites. Just as one could call for "socialized technology" to redistribute the benefits of advances among global populations, one can contest the ways racial exclusivity figures in the escape plans of "New Space" private enterprises.[16] The big funders of all New Space companies are white men.[17] Given the lack of diversity of powerful figures then and now in science research, exploration, and entrepreneurship, it isn't surprising that socialist, not capitalist, countries put the first woman (Valentina Tereshkova, Russia, 1963) and black man (Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez, Cuba, 1980) into space. In this sense the racial and gender dimensions of the Afronaut proposition are striking in that all the actors used by de Middel and Bodomo are black, as were the original Afronauts, creating a cast of space travelers akin to Sun Ra's all-African-American Arkestra, one never seen in actual space voyages.

Ra deployed the image of an ancient Egyptian ark as the vehicle for reaching outer space; any vision of future travel relies on elements of material culture available today and in the past. In John Akomfrah's fifty-three-minute, three-channel film installation *The Airport* (2016), the central character is a besuited and helmeted astronaut, who, at various moments, is seen through his helmet visor to be a black man. He wanders through an abandoned airport in Athens, comingling with waiting passengers in Edwardian garb as well as those in postwar 1950s fashions. The anachronism of these travelers, all stranded in the ruin of a transportation hub, suggests the instability caused by the exodus of capital during the Greek financial crisis that began in 2010, and also older histories of migration. Akomfrah argues that the airport is a site of both memory and futurity. The film, according to Akomfrah, explores "the sense that there's a place that you can go where you're free from the shackles of history. The airport can stand for that because it's a kind of embodiment of national—maybe even personal—ambition. The space where flight, or dreams, or betterment, can happen."[18] Akomfrah's astronaut moves not only between spaces but between eras—one of his sources for *The Airport's* palimpsest of historical references was Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, whose concluding "stargate" sequence depicts the astronaut Bowman existing in various moments of the past and future simultaneously. Cultural theorist Tisa Bryant has stated of afrofuturism that it is "about space in the most literal of terms, just actual space, a continuum of boundary-less space where there is encounter and exchange across time."[19] Though these vectors across

Tomás Saraceno, Space Elevator, 2009–10. Courtesy the artist.

space and time often have to do with colonial legacies of slavery and the middle passage, afrofuturism is also a lens by which to refract unresolved contemporary struggles of domination and repression, and an argument for equally distributed resources.

Two works by Paweł Althamer— *Astronaut 1* (1995), filmed in Bydgoszcz, Poland, and *Astronaut 2* (1997), performed during Documenta X in Kassel, Germany—have also explored the estrangement from contemporaneous time and space that the figure of the astronaut represents. In *Astronaut 1* the artist traversed the city of Bydgoszcz in a homemade space suit, recording the local scene with a video camera as though it were an extraterrestrial civilization. In the follow-up piece *Astronaut 2*, Althamer engaged an itinerant man, costumed as an astronaut, to live in a trailer on the grounds of the Orangerie Palace, one of the central venues for the Documenta exhibition. On view in the trailer was a reperformance of *Astronaut 1* filmed in Kassel. Continuing to explore how socially ignored or undesirable humans are treated as aliens on Earth, in 2009 he invited one hundred sixty of his neighbors from Tower 13 of his housing block in Bródno, Warsaw to dress in metallic gold space suits and board a gilded 737 airplane. They traveled to Brasilia, Brussels, Bamako in Mali, and Oxford, England as though they were representatives of another planet. The project, titled *Common Task*, was partly a celebration of the twenty-year anniversary of the 1989 victory of Polish solidarity, and the "alien landing" in Belgium served as a reminder of the continuing outsider status of Poles in Europe, in spite of Poland's 2004 inclusion into the European Union.[20]

Reminiscent of Althamer's space-suited homeless person living in a mobile home as though it were a space capsule, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's eight-channel film and sculptural installation *Primitive* (2009–11) also employs a roughshod spaceship, in his case to probe now-repressed political events in Southeast Asia. A follow-up to his 2006 film *Faith*, in which two Asian astronauts, each allotted his own channel of a two-screen projection, suffer the isolation of a blinding white spaceship, *Primitive* brought Weeresethakul's interest in outer space to the improbable location of the small community of Nabua in remote northeastern Thailand. In 1965, Nabua was the site of the first confrontation between communist fighters and Thai Army forces that began a long and bloody insurgency, and

John Akomfrah, The Airport, 2015. Three-channel HD color video installation, 7.1 sound, 53 minutes. Copyright: Smoking Dogs Films. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

the village suffered enormously during the brutal anti-communist mass killings in 1971–73 that left countless thousands dead and many tortured. Weerasethakul noted how the eradication of significant numbers of the population during these actions created a generation gap between teenagers and village elders, and he was struck by how the violence became shrouded in traumatic silence. He expresses doubt that recent discussions of species extinction have sufficiently accounted for the tremendous intra-human slaughter of recent wars and violent conflicts: to him, *Primitive* is in large part "about the elimination of many things, of species, of ideologies, of beliefs."[21]

The films document life in Nabua from the perspective of the town's young: their joyrides on pickup trucks and their game with a flaming soccer ball, for example. Two of the films portray the construction of a domed "spaceship" in the village that eventually lifts off the ground. "What better time to be able to leave Thailand?" Weerasethakul asks, pondering the driftlessness and confusion of the teens' lives in a place that has tried to bury its past.[22] The teens use the completed spaceship as a place to play music, drink, and get high, changing the interior into a blood-red crash pad. Elders in the village want to use the ship to store rice. Like Bodomo and de Middel's work recovering the history of the Afronauts, Weerasethakul underscores the cultural meaning of the spaceship as more than a vehicle capable of transporting bodies across space, instead seeing it as a mnemonic architecture that sutures past to future, like an ark bridging traumatic histories to future hopes.

For nations like Thailand, Poland, and Zambia, lacking resources to participate in the space age compounds perceptions of technological "backwardness" already present in stereotypes of third-world nations as primitive or folkloric. Exploring the "frontier" in space exploration—a project pioneered largely by whites from wealthy nations with racist colonial histories—can easily be read as a form of domination that substitutes the distraction of "conquest" in the future for responsibilities to the "conquered" of the past. Artists are finding ways to address the uneven distribution of technological advancement by examining progress both geographically as well as temporally, returning to precolonial histories

Paweł Althamer, Common Task, 2009. Courtesy the artist and Modern Art Oxford.

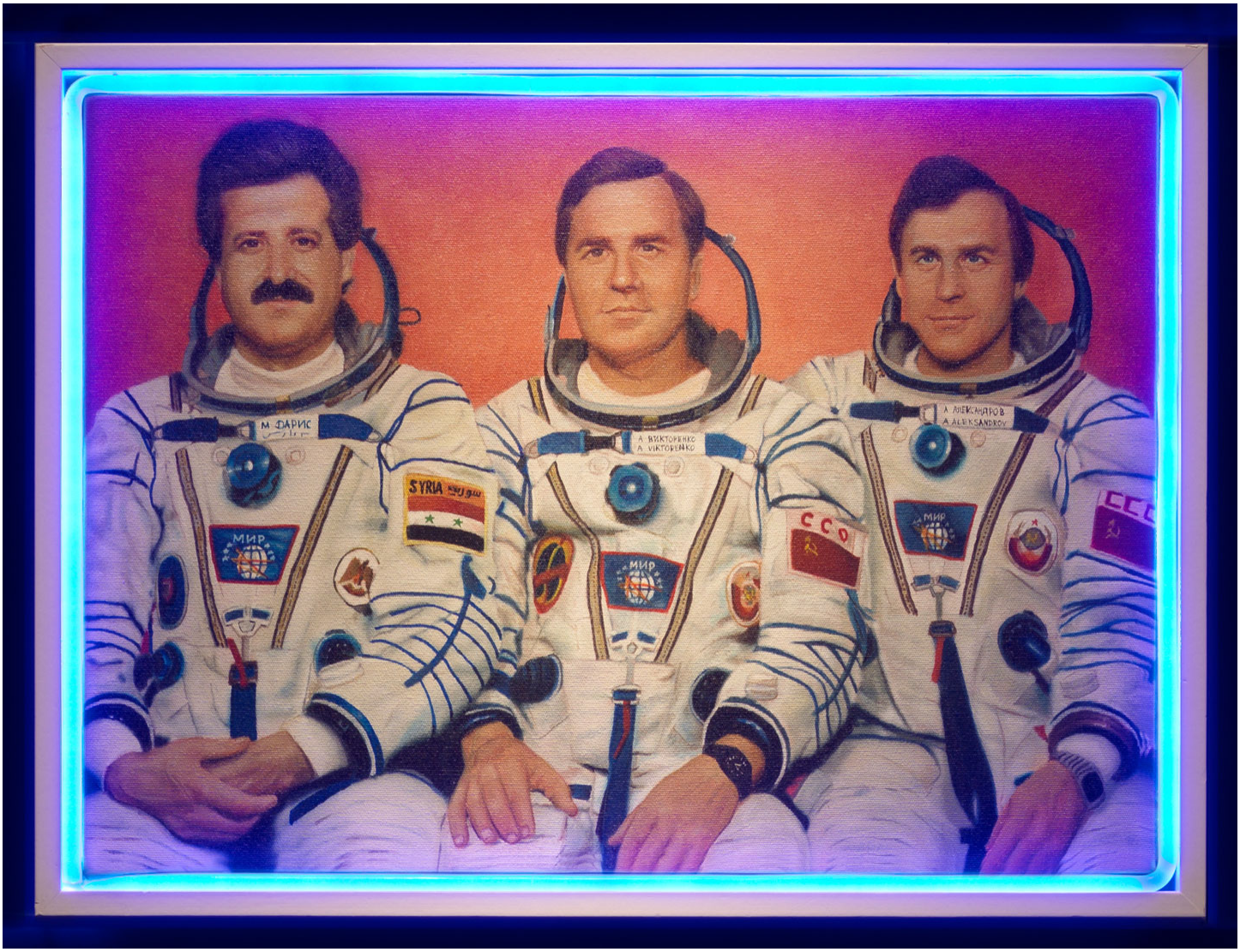
and readdressing legacies of colonial violence.[23]

In contrast, New Spacers like Musk and Bezos treat outer space, ostensibly free of indigenous peoples, as a new frontier exempt from the exploitation that characterized earlier colonial projects. And yet voluntary, touristic travel remains an experience of privilege; for many around the globe, travel is undertaken in forced and dangerous circumstances. Halil Altindere's 2017 installation *Space Refugee* focuses on cosmonaut Muhammed Faris, who became the first Syrian to travel to space in 1987. The work is anchored by a curving wall-sized photo mural of Faris, replete with 1980s bushy mustache, performing a space walk outside the Mir space station, the scene embellished with colorful nebula and planets. Facing the mural is a small oil and acrylic portrait of Faris with two Russian cosmonauts, fully suited but for their helmets in their laps. The painting is framed by a blue neon-like LED light that lends the painting a garish, retro-futuristic look reminiscent of Ridley Scott's 1982 movie *Blade Runner*. Shown alongside these works is the twenty-minute film *Space Refugee* (2016), elaborating Faris's plight as a stateless exile and envisioning outer space as the ideal sanctuary for homeless and refugee populations.

A Russian-trained cosmonaut who traveled to the Mir space station in 1987, Faris spoke out against the Assad regime and joined the armed opposition in 2011. Eventually, he and his family fled Syria, illegally crossing into Turkey. In the film, Faris describes the discrimination against refugees he and others experience, and reveals his hope that "we can build cities for them there in space where there is freedom and dignity, and where there is no tyranny, no injustice."

The film intercuts shots of astronauts—later revealed to be kids in child-sized space suits—walking amid rovers in rugged terrain, with talking-head interviews with NASA/JPL scientists, an aviation lawyer speaking about colonizing Mars, and an architect designing underground shelters for the harsh Martian climate. In a talk addressing a group of schoolchildren, Faris proclaims that "space belongs to whoever wants to learn and has power. Space does not belong to anyone. But whoever has the technology can go, and those who don't, can't."

Three of the child-astronauts teleport into a red cave. One of the scientists explains that life on Mars will take place in shelters and underground, and the film pans across a



Halil Altindere, Muhammed Ahmed Faris with Friends #1, 2016. Oil on canvas, LED, 40.5 x 54.4 x 6 cm framed. Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and Pilot Gallery, Istanbul.

colony of barracks complete with three geodesic domes silhouetted against a distant Earth. The architect speaks about how to build such habitations to avoid surface radiation, lauding 3-D printing as a means to construct entire buildings, and his digital renderings show the elegant, spacious interiors, verdant with greenery. Suddenly Mars has become a tidy but sterile corporate atrium.[24] As the film ends Faris proclaims, "I will go with [the refugees] to Mars, to Mars, where we will find freedom and safety … there is no freedom on Earth, there is no dignity for humans on Earth."

Larissa Sansour's work *A Space Exodus* (2009) likewise portrays space travel as a means to process the *nachträglichkeit,* repression, and displacement of now stateless migrants in the Middle East. Sansour's five-and-a-half minute film depicts the artist as an astronaut taking off in a shuttle and eventually landing on the Moon to plant a Palestinian flag on its surface. Seen in a white space suit with bulging visor, a close-up of her face shows her waving goodbye to the distant Earth. As she turns to hop away in the low-gravity environment, an Arabic-inflected version of the heroic Richard Strauss orchestral work "Also sprach Zarathustra," famously used in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey,* plays. Evoking afrofuturists' yearning to find in outer space freedom beyond histories of racial subjugation, Sansour's outer space is also a haven, a place to establish a state for Palestinians who have been denied reparations for the loss of their land and resources.

Outer space, where so few have been, remains a preeminent projective space in the cultural imagination: the place wherein reside fantasies of rebirth, of reinvention, of escape from historical determinations of class, race, and gender inequality, and of aspirations for

just societies beyond the protection of the Earth's atmosphere. The imagination of space itself frequently exceeds any known spectatorial experience, and therefore envisioning it is a speculative political project in the sense that Frederic Jameson has written of science fiction:

> The apparent realism, or representationality, of [science fiction] has concealed another, far more complex temporal structure: not to give us "images" of the future—whatever such images might mean for a reader who will necessarily predecease their "materialization"—but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization.[25]

Rather than dismiss "imaging" the future as a form of literalization, however, it is important to consider how visual artists use images and material to effectuate the defamiliarization about which Jameson writes. We don't often speak of visual art using the language of science fiction in this critical sense. Yet the visions of our future in space in the projects I have addressed are self-aware about how the problems of the present may blossom into the possible triumphs or catastrophes of tomorrow. Though scarce resources may be used in better ways than for moving bodies into space for tourism or colonization, space provides a speculative zone to imagine how to organize resources on Earth, including those used to fund scientific projects of exploratory character.

In considering how space exploration is treated in visual art, Fuller's call to explore near and outer space using the rhetoric of "Spaceship Earth" has fascinating repercussions, both for visualizing the Earth as a technologized object as well as conceptualizing its "evolutionary" development as merely the first among several future human colonies in the universe. Reclaiming the civic and utopian project of space exploration in art, in the current era of privatization, tourism, and surveillance technologies, is one of the key stakes for those returning to Fuller's vision. To this, Ra's demand to diversify access to space and space fantasies opens up Jameson's project of defamiliarization to the hope of a more equal tomorrow: "Hold it people, I see a flying saucer comin', guess I wait and see. Yeah, a spaceship comin', guess I wait and see. All I know they might look just like me."[26]

X

Eva Díaz has taught at the Pratt Institute in New York since 2009. Her book *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* was released in 2015 by the University of Chicago Press. She is currently at work on a new book titled *After Spaceship Earth*, analyzing the influence of R. Buckminster Fuller in contemporary art. Her writing has appeared in magazines and journals such as *The Art Bulletin*, *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *Art in America*, *Cabinet*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Frieze*, *Grey Room*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, and *October*.

1
Quoted in John F. Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Life and Times of Sun Ra* (Pantheon Books, 1997), 261.

2
In a forthcoming essay titled "Art in the 'New Space' Age" I take up the privatization of space exploration, the hardship of capsule life, and artificial ecologies in the work of contemporary artists Matthew Day Jackson, MPA, Rachel Rose, Tom Sachs, Connie Samaras, Tavares Strachen, and Jane and Louise Wilson. My work on feminism, space ecologies, and climate change will soon appear in *Texte zur Kunst* as "Feminist Futures in the Anthropocene," in which I consider works by Dawn DeDeaux, Sylvie Fleury, Aleksandra Mir, and Martine Syms. The relationship between satellite technologies, surveillance, and the corporate occupation of near space focusing on projects by Trevor Paglen and Hito Steyerl is the topic of another chapter of my book-in-progress, *After Spaceship Earth* , about the legacy of Buckminster Fuller in contemporary art.

3
Fuller coined the phrase "Spaceship Earth" in 1951, according to Claude Lichtenstein. See *Your Private Sky: R. Buckminster Fuller* , eds. Joachim Krausse and Claude Lichtenstein (Lars Muller Publishers, 2001), 279. Fuller foregrounded the concept in his book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (E. P. Dutton & Co., 1963). Further speculations about life in outer space were propagated by Fuller's acolyte Stewart Brand, the founder of the *Whole Earth Catalog* and editor of the 1977 volume *Space Colonies* (Penguin Books, 1977). Brand is discussed in depth in my essay "Feminist Futures in the Anthropocene" (forthcoming in *Texte zur Kunst*).

4
These projects join my earlier effort, published in the fall of 2010, that explored Fuller's influence in contemporary art: Eva Díaz, "Dome Culture in the Twenty-First Century," in *Grey Room* 42 (Winter 2011), 80–105. *We Are All Astronauts: The Universe of Richard Buckminster Fuller as Reflected in Contemporary Art* , ed. Markus Richter (Kerber Verlag, 2012); *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside* , eds. Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (Haus der Kulteren der Welt and Sternberg Press, 2013); and *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* , ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Walker Art Center, 2015).

5
A longer version of this essay includes a discussion of works by Neil Beloufa and Daniel Ortega.

6
My project focuses on works that go beyond imaginatively depicting outer space or fantastical space journeys, and that see in outer space stakes further than futuristic style. Several recent exhibitions have tackled topics of space exploration and colonization, most notably *Space Is the Place*, a 2006–08 exhibition that traveled to multiple venues throughout the US (Alex Baker and Toby Kamps, curators and editors, *Space is the Place* , Independent Curators International and Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, 2007), and *Space: About a Dream*, a 2011 exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien (Cathérine Hug, curator and editor, *Space: About a Dream*, Verlag für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2011). These shows placed a not-insignificant emphasis on artworks representing the starry heavens as a kind of transcendent site of sublime but inhospitable beauty and vastness.

7
Sun Ra proclaimed himself an alien from Saturn. He also used the phrase "Spaceship Earth," often coupled with a near mystical sense that leaving the Earth would inaugurate humanity's spiritual redemption. See Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 261. For recent scholarship on Ra and afrofuturism, see Paul Youngquist, *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of afrofuturism* (University of Texas Press, 2016). For more about the legacy of afrofuturism in contemporary art, see *The Shadows Took Shape* , eds. Naima J. Keith and Zoe Whitley (Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013). For a consideration of the fascination with futurity and space travel from a Latin American perspective, see the catalog for the Bowdoin College Museum of Art show of the same name: *Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas* , ed. Sarah J. Montross (MIT Press, 2015). Though more focused on afrofuturist literature, the issue of the journal *Social Text* (no. 71, June 2002) dedicated to the topic is of interest.

8
The term "afrofuturism" was coined in 1993 by cultural critic Mark Dery in his interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose titled "Black to the Future," in *Flame Wars: Discourses of Cyberculture,* ed. Dery (Duke University Press, 1994).

9
That this flight to outer space for Ra often involved apocalyptic musings about the end of life on Earth as punishment for the vicious treatment of Africans by Europeans is part of the trajectory of forms of radical black millenarianism that Aria Dean has termed "blacceleration." See her "Notes on Blacceleration," *e-flux journal* 87 (December 2017) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/87/169402/notes-on-blacceleration/ . Ra's proposal differs greatly from the vision of outer space promoted by white rock groups in the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasized, as Diedrich Diederichsen has written, a "structural connection between the trip to outer space and the journey inward to the self … in which outer and inner cosmos comingled." The new vantage provided of the Earth from outer space was revolutionary in this connection between identity and cosmos. Diederichsen, "Pop Music and the Counterculture: The Whole World and Now," in *The Whole Earth* , eds. Diederichsen and Anselm Franke, 20–31, quote is on pages 22 and 24. See also Päivi Väätänen, "Sun Ra: Myth, Science, and Science Fiction," *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* 1, no. 4 (2014): 39–46.

10
A large part of Ra's cosmic mythology draws on his views about the technological and philosophical advancement of ancient black Egyptian Hamitic culture, which predated Judeo-Christian ideologies of white supremacy that claimed Hamitics as a Caucasian tribe. To Ra, understanding the glory of the African past could allow blacks to reclaim their heroic blackness and build a future in outer space. Quote is Ra in 1969, Szwed, *Space Is the Place* , 276.

11
Joe Gonçalves, "Sun Ra at the End of the World," *The Cricket*, no. 4 (1969): 9–11, quoted in Szwed, *Space Is the Place* , 140. Gonçalves was reviewing the Arkestra's first West Coast appearance in 1969.

12
Saraceno chose the Salar de Uyuni as the site for the project in part because of the reflective qualities of the lake bed, which after rainfall becomes covered with a thin layer of water that creates the illusion of a limitless landscape of clouds.

13
The concept of a space elevator is credited to Russian rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who in 1895 published a design for a compression-based tower that would reach a height of geostationary orbit. Fuller, in a conversation with sci-fi writer Arthur C. Clarke, claimed that in 1951 he came up with an idea for a tensile structure that would act as a "ring-bridge" to be accessed by a future space elevator. See Fuller's sleeve notes for Clarke's audio book *The Fountain of Paradise* (1979) recording (Caedmon TC 1606).

14
From aerocene.org https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/aerocene.org .

15
Sueli Ferreira Lima Fortin in conversation with Saraceno, published August 6, 2012 in *CO2* Art and Sustainability* http://www.co2-art-sustainability.blogspot.com/2012/08/conversation-with-tomas-saraceno.html .

16
For a discussion of a socialism of technology, see pages 45–46 in Liu Cixin, *The Dark Forest* (Tor Books, 2016), originally published in China in 2008.

17
David Valentine, "Exit Strategy: Profit, Cosmology, and the Future of Humans in Space," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 1066 fn. 6. See also my essay "Art in the 'New Space' Age."

18
Akomfrah, in Tess Thackara, "John Akomfrah Summons the History of Migration in Chillingly Beautiful New Films," *Artsy*, June 23, 2016 https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-john-akomfrah-reawakens-history-in-chillingly-beautiful-new-films .

19
Bryant, video interview in KCET and Martin Syms, "Artbound Episode: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto," November 18, 2015 https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/kcet.org/shows/artbound/artbound-episode-the-mundane-afrofuturist-manifesto .

20
"Alien landing" is the phrase employed to describe the project by the Polish Institute of the Cultural Service of the Polish Embassy in Belgium, which helped sponsor Althamer's project. See http://www.culturepolonaise.eu/3,4,51,en,Pawel_Althamer_A_Common_Task .

21
Excerpts from video interview with Weerasethakul at Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2009 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZO_uTA9vKw .

22
Aily Nash, "We Are Primitive: Apichatpong's Ineffable Experience of Nabua," *The Brooklyn Rail* , July 11, 2011 https://brooklynrail.org/2011/07/artseen/we-are-primitive-apichatpongs-ineffable-experience-of-nabua .

23
What artist Robert Smithson called "Where remote futures meet remote pasts" in his essay "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," (1968), discussed in Sarah J. Montross, "Cosmic Orbits: Observing Postwar Art of the Americas from Outer Space," in *Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas* , ed. Montross (MIT Press, 2015), 14–47.

24
A work such as Erik Sanner's *Mars Tea Room* (2016–17), in which a modest mobile geodesic structure is offered for drinking tea crops to be grown on Mars, may serve as a counterpoint to the slick visions of Mars presented by the interview subjects in Altindere's film. Felicity D. Scott provides a brief genealogy connecting "controlled interior spaces" like greenhouses and corporate atria, see Scott, "Earthlike," *Grey Room* 65 (Fall 2016): 17.

25
Fredric Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia: or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 1982): 151.

26
Henry Dumas, "Outer Space Blues," poem dedicated to Sun Ra, c. 1965–68. Henry, or Hank, Dumas, wrote the liner notes to Sun Ra's 1967 album *Cosmic Tones* , and was a close associate of Ra's, especially between 1965–66. Henry Dumas, "Outer Space Blues," in *Knees of a Natural Man: The Selected Poetry of Henry Dumas* , ed. Eugene B. Redmond (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989), 66–67. Dumas was shot dead in 1968 by a New York City Transit policeman. According to John Szwed, "When Sun Ra heard about it, he became angrier than anyone had ever seen him before, and he raged on and on for days." Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 223.

Lev Ozerov

Andrei Platonovich Platonov

Platonov is reading aloud,[1]

reading “Fro”
in the spacious apartment of Kornely
Lyutsianovich Zelinsky,[2]

just by the Moscow Arts Theatre.
“A grand little hut!”
he said afterwards,
without a trace of envy.

Platonov reads with animation.
I had not heard of Platonov.
I know nothing of his ways,
of his way in life.
“That’s splendid!” I blurt out,
unable to contain myself,
when he reads the last page.
Piercing eyes,
and on his lips—kindness
and irony, irony
and kindness. Wary,
Platonov says nothing.
“Yes, but hardly relevant
to the needs of our time,”
Zelinsky concludes softly,
meditatively. Head ever
so slightly
tilted to one shoulder, he is all
heartfelt tenderness, forever
warm, sweet, and compliant.
We talk a little more, drink tea
with sugar, with small bagels.
And we sit there for a while,
eyes sliding over the bindings
of the books in the rich,
well-cared-for library
that resembles its owner.
Platonov gets to his feet.
I do the same.
We run—fly—hurtle
down the stairs
and wander for a long time
about Moscow.
There are a lot of cars.
Which are Black Marias,
we don’t know. We don’t
discuss this, but we know
we both think about it
and think about
how we both know this.
“And you? Can you
make out
what’s relevant
to the needs of our time
and what isn’t?”
Platonov asks, boldly,

on Bolshaya Ordynka.
I'm twenty years old. Wet
behind the ears. "No,"
I reply. I feel ashamed
of my answer, but it's the truth.
"Precisely!" A pause. A look.
A pause. "Stay like that.
Don't change." Platonov falls
silent, withdraws into himself,
then says, "In fifty years' time,
who knows, it may perhaps
become clear
what era you and I live in
and what name
should be given it. But,
more likely, it will
be given many different names—
some very strange—
chosen by the grandchildren
of those in power at this hour—
the grandchildren, I should say,
of everyone living today."

He was walking fast,
not looking from side
to side, holding his head
up high,
with its high cheekbones
and flinty chin.

X

Translated from the Russian by Robert Chandler.

This poem will appear in the forthcoming collection Lev Ozerov: Portraits without Frames, *translated by Robert Chandler, Boris Dralyuk, Maria Bloshteyn, and Irina Mashinski (NYRB Classics, November 2018).*

Lev Ozerov (1914–96) was born in Kiev. He studied in Moscow, then worked as a front-line journalist after the German invasion. After the liberation of Kiev in 1943, Ilya Ehrenburg commissioned him to write an article for *The Black Book* (a planned documentary account of the Shoah on Soviet soil) about the massacre at Babi Yar, a ravine just outside the city. In the course of six months the Nazis shot a hundred thousand people, nearly all of them Jews. Ozerov also wrote a long poem about Babi Yar, published in early 1946.

From 1943 Ozerov taught in the Translation Faculty at the Gorky Literary Institute, himself translating poetry from Yiddish, Hebrew, and Ukrainian (languages he knew well), Lithuanian (which he could read), and from other languages of the Soviet Union with the help of a crib. He also wrote many books of literary criticism and did much to enable the publication of writers who had suffered or perished under Stalin. He was the first editor to publish Zabolotsky (his translation of *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*) on his return from the Gulag in 1946.

Ozerov's *Portraits without Frames* (published after his death) comprises fifty accounts, told in a variety of tones and with deceptive simplicity, of meetings with important figures, many—though not all—from the literary world. One poem tells how Yevgenia Taratuta, an editor of children's literature, kept her sanity during brutal interrogations by reciting Pushkin and Mayakovsky to herself. A second describes Ozerov's first meeting with Zabolotsky on his return from the Gulag. The poem ends with Zabolotsky's daughter telling Ozerov, decades afterwards, how later that day her father had said to her: "I had thought I was forgotten, but people still seem to remember me." Remarkably, Ozerov is able to write with compassion not only about gifted and heroic poets like Zabolotsky but also about such writers as Fadeyev, a Soviet literary boss who shot himself when Stalin's crimes, and his own complicity, began to be exposed under Khrushchev.

Among the subjects of other Ozerov "portraits" are Babel; Platonov; Shostakovich; Tatlin; the ballet dancer Galina Ulanova; and Kovpak, a Ukrainian partisan leader. One poem tells of Slutsky's generosity in making his room available to couples who had nowhere to sleep together; one evening he returns home to find a note: "Boris, / you are a great humanist, / and the heavenly powers / will reward you. The sins of others, / sins that are not yours, / will bring you blessings."

—Robert Chandler

1
Andrei Platonov (1899–1951) is one of the greatest Russian writers. His longer works were published only long after his death, but the short stories he published during his lifetime are no less remarkable. “Fro“ is one of the most charming and tender of these. Most of Platonov’s best short stories and short novels have been translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, in collaboration with Olga Meerson and other translators, and published by NYRB Classics and Vintage Classics.

2
Kornely Zelinsky (1896–1970) was a Soviet literary critic, of great influence from the early 1930s until his death. In 1940 he wrote a damning internal review of a collection of poems that Tsvetaeva, recently returned to the Soviet Union, was trying to publish. He also played an important part in the public attacks on Pasternak in 1958, after *Doctor Zhivago* had been published abroad.