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Editorial

Wars are never the result of just one man. And yet, today's strongman leaders are emblematic of the ideological and existential rot that hides within state systems, behind the promise of an ultimate showdown of all against all. It is well known, perhaps within Israel more than anywhere, that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been indicted on multiple criminal charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. These charges were not handed down by the Palestinians, by Hamas in Gaza, by Hezbollah in Lebanon, or by the Houthis in Yemen. He will not stand trial for corruption by the Islamic Republic of Iran or the United Nations, nor by the International Criminal Court (which has issued an arrest warrant against him for war crimes and crimes against humanity), nor by South Africa (which has formally accused Israel of genocide in the International Court of Justice).

No, he has already been indicted by the police and courts of the State of Israel, a country now hostage not to Hamas, but to their own leader—a man known as "the magician" for his talent for self-preservation. Supported by Empire's coffers, the magician now holds the entire world captive, unable to stop the butchery of a massive ethno-nationalist war machine. For the magician's next trick, as the fire spreads into Lebanon and on to Iran, how many more countries and people will become hostages to a spreading war? How many other world powers, with their own grievances and nationalist agendas craving the fullness of expression only possible in war, will gladly aid Israel in sharing its own purifying self-extinction with the world?

In this issue, Boris Groys considers the Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov's dialectics of self-destruction whereby humanity's Godlike mastery over nature through technology will bring about an apocalyptic collective suicide and annihilation of nature itself, evidenced by the development of the nuclear bomb—a realization of human power as supreme and self-consuming. But what power can possibly be found in death? For this question, Groys turns to the sociologist Marcel Mauss, who built his theory around the Native American economy of the gift, and the potlatch, a competition among tribes consisting of the destruction of their own property. To receive gifts is to be dependent on the giver, while to renounce and destroy one's own property, to not profit from nature, repays the debt to nature by allowing it to rejuvenate itself, to restart a new dialectical cycle.

Irmgard Emmelhainz's essay looks at necropower: the global apparatus that administers life through the measurement and distribution of death. Entire populations are rife with disease and addiction, whether to drugs, hormones, antibiotics, or industrial additives—a consequence of the technosphere fully inhabiting and overtaking the ecosphere. This technosphere pollutes and corrupts our bodies, causing immune functions to misrecognize self and enemy and turn against their host body. How might we begin to restore our bodies' diminished microbiomes in order to rebuild the

relationship between our inner and outer environments, especially following the scorched-earth campaigns of the twentieth century against our bodies?

Trevor Paglen examines the subtle and nearly undetectable tricks that endow machines with the illusion of sentience and create the appearance of supernatural phenomena. In the second part of his series on early experiments in psychological warfare, Paglen peers into how the CIA researched and operationalized stage magic for its power of illusion—and deception. If it's possible to conjure supernatural or unexplainable events through sleight of hand, how else might perception, sentiment, and the very fabric of reality be malleable? What other cognitive blind spots could be exploited to hide engines of illusion?

In the second part of an excerpt from Yuk Hui's new book *Post-Europe*, Hui considers the politics of nostalgia and exclusion that accompanies the pervasive sense of a lost homeland. Especially today, the cosmopolitan perspective surpasses the limits of the planet itself and faces the challenge of the planet in its totality, even from a position beyond it. No single nation can be much farther ahead or behind any other, even according to the teleological metric of world history and its development. On the contrary, the reactionary mirage of return can only produce state thinking and state thinkers—a tragic missed opportunity and, as history has shown, not even a path leading home.

Minh Nguyen looks beyond the triumphalism of the end of Cold War ideologies to find a wild domain of unresolved positions for Vietnamese contemporary art and its diaspora. Bearing in mind that contemporary art itself is a global post-socialist ideological product in the most sweeping sense, Nguyen measures a relationship to a particular place and a particular time—and a means of remaking place and time collectively—against contemporary forms of artistic representation that seek resolution and obfuscation simultaneously.

In the first part of a series of essays on the late writer, curator, and theoretician Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019), Serubiri Moses questions an apparent absence of exhibitions of African art in New York, the city where Enwezor lived for most of his career. Filling this absence with a selection of exhibitions that did in fact take place, Moses discusses the problematics of the African continent, from the simplistic expectations of Western institutions to influential political critiques within Africa, all of which Enwezor addressed with skill and tact.

In an excerpt from her new book *The Commune Form: The Transformation of Everyday Life*, historian Kristin Ross looks at how different groups recompose themselves as part of land-based struggles. From the Paris Commune to Standing Rock, from the *zone à défendre* (ZAD) in France to the Stop Cop City movement in the US, a movement's power to contest accumulative activities and enclosure comes in part from the participants' divergent and varied subject positions. Thus, the "space-time of the commune form is anchored in the art and organization of everyday life and in a collective and individual responsibility taken for the means of subsistence."

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Kristin Ross

Composition

Composition

At once a mobilization and a territory shared in common, the commune form is a political movement that is also the collective elaboration of a desired way of life—the means becoming the end. As such, it is perhaps the only rational medium for people to recognize and organize their own forces as social forces: in Marx's words, "a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life."[1]

As a form, it is both specific, that is, recognizable, and infinitely transmutable; it transforms itself easily to thrive in different times and places. What Kropotkin said of anarchist society might well be said of the commune form: "It is not crystallized into a certain unchangeable form, but will continually modify its aspect."[2] And what that modified aspect might look like can only be ascertained in the act of its being realized, since the commune must be formed or composed—it must take shape, it must be built. Always situated in a particular place, a territory, a neighborhood, a forest, a specific milieu, the commune form is about "producing" space, as Lefebvre put it: building spaces and places in the most literal, pragmatic sense of the term, and attending to their daily workings. "'Change life!' 'Transform society!' These precepts mean nothing if there is not the production of an appropriated space."[3]

This pragmatic, daily attention to collectively managing common concerns is what the word "commune," it seems, in its earliest historical usages, most consistently evoked. Medieval historian Charles Petit-Dutaillis writes, "In short, the word *commune* evokes above all the idea not of a free government but of a group that has formed itself to manage collective interests." In his study of the usages of the word during the Middle Ages, Petit-Dutaillis discovered that "more or less directly, but almost constantly, the word refers to the efforts of a collectivity to better protect its moral and material interests."[4] The sense of a collective management or administration of everyday life is reinforced, he maintains, by the etymology of the word. Disputing recent etymologies that trace the meaning of the word to a juridical connotation (the commune as the set of laws governing a community), Petit-Dutaillis shows the derivation of the word from the Latin *communio*, signifying simply "association." In everyday usage during the twelfth century, he maintains, the word "commune" signified a union of people sharing interests in common, an association.

Petit-Dutaillis's championing of an administrative sense of the word over a governmental one finds a forceful echo in the writings of Parisian communard Jules Andrieu. In charge of communal administration of the city of Paris during the Commune of 1871, Andrieu took care of the everyday management of the workings of the city and the material survival of its people. For Andrieu, the most "satanic" aspect of then president Adolphe Thiers's battle plan was the sudden cessation of public services and the effect that such an abrupt set of stoppages would have on daily life in the city. In a mere day or two, chaos would

The ZAD (zone à défendre) de la Colline is a defensive area located on Mormont Hill near Eclépens and La Sarraz in Switzerland. The first ZAD in Switzerland, it aims to prevent the extension of the Holcim cement quarry, 2021. License: CC BY 4.0.

reign: corpses lying unburied in the cemeteries, public fountains dried up, waste piling up in the streets, sewers overflowing. As Andrieu saw it, the Commune 's project was to distinguish at all times between the municipal level and the national level; the idea was to administer Paris and the everyday needs of its inhabitants and avoid anything that seemed to partake of the national government: "The idea at the origin of the March 18th movement . . . [was] that the Paris Commune renounced governing France."[5] Andrieu saw his role to be that of immersing himself in the most basic dimensions of the city's workings—from food distribution to sewage, from lighting and water access to cemetery management—and ignoring, for the most part, the verbal pyrotechnics and perhaps high-rhetorical grandstanding going on among some of his colleagues across the city in the Hotel de Ville. The Commune was not something that could be proclaimed; it had to be built from the ground up. "The commune," he subsequently wrote, "needed administrators; it was crawling with governors."[6] "Governors," for Andrieu, were those who passed decrees without taking responsibility for their execution, who postured in view of the future instead of speaking in and to the present moment: "It's old-fashioned, it's theatrical, it's Jacobin." Administrators, on the other hand, were those who responded every day to daily necessities, and who took responsibility for meeting those needs as best they could: "During a revolution," Andrieu proclaimed, "I believe that everything that is not useful is harmful."[7]

So, if the commune form is less about governing than it is about meeting common concerns, then the form implies an ongoing commitment precisely *not* to establish relationships and institutions in a definitive, hidebound form but to build with a continuing supple openness to collective improvisation and to creative and practical confrontations with the situation immediately at hand. We might think it as an open project, one that orients us and moves us toward a horizon beyond capitalism and beyond state bureaucracy. The transmutability of the form has everything to do with the particular people who make each commune, and who, in so doing, outline a way of life, a subsistence in accordance with the commune's site, its location, and its location's history. Equally importantly, they devise a way of life in accordance with what the people making the commune decide their own political

Bruno Braquehais, Statue of Napoleon I after the Fall of the Vendôme Column, 1871. Source: World Digital Library Collection.

emancipation will look like. Each commune is built in a way particular to its specific space—to its subjects, its geography, to the history of its conflicts and achievements, its attributes and its challenges, as well as the challenges to come.

But who are those actors, those subjects "producing" a physical space they appropriate for themselves? At the end of *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre muses, again in a very prescient way, about one of the main characteristics of spatial battles:

> There should therefore be no cause for surprise when a space-related issue spurs collaboration … between very different kinds of people, between those who "react"—reactionaries, in a traditional political parlance—and "liberals" or "radicals," progressives, "advanced" democrats, and even revolutionaries.

Such coalitions around some particular counter-project or counter-plan, promoting a counter-space in opposition to the one embodied in the strategies of power, occur all over the world, as easily in Boston, New York or Toronto as in English or Japanese cities. Typically the first group—the "reactors"—oppose a particular project in order to protect their own privileged space, their gardens and parks, their nature, their greenery, sometimes their comfortable old homes—or sometimes, just as likely, their familiar shacks. The second group—the "liberals" or "radicals"—will meanwhile oppose the same project on the grounds that it represents a seizure of the space concerned by capitalism in a general sense, or by specific financial interests, or by a particular developer. The ambiguity of such concepts as that of ecology, for example … facilitates the formation of the most unlikely alliances … the diversity of the coalitions just mentioned explains the suspicious attitude of the

traditional political parties towards the issues of space.[8]

In the early 1970s, when Lefebvre was writing, it was already apparent to him that the ecological, land-based struggles to come would spur, as he puts it, "collaboration" and "unlikely"—even " *the most unlikely* "—"alliances." What he is pointing to is a situational unity (an impassioned collaboration) that is neither ideological nor identitarian. Though he locates the creation of "counter-spaces" in urban settings in the passage just cited, Lefebvre might well have been writing the future history of the ZAD (*zone à défendre*) at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, noting what was, along with defense, perhaps its most salient characteristic. This is its construction of solidarity in extreme diversity. When the historic farmers sought to defend their land and way of life by not selling out to the government in the 1970s, they were initially successful, but thanks mostly to the government's own inertia or its strategy of simply waiting them out. The state then more or less forgot the project for many years. But when the airport idea was revived (under the Socialist government) in the early 2000s, farmers called for help and occupiers arrived, creating a conflict-prone graft of at least three very distinct groups—farmers, occupiers, townspeople—who began sharing a territory and a movement.

This kind of coalition is already quite singular when we compare it to similar land-based movements in Australia, for example, or the United States, Canada, and other settler-based former colonies. Most land-based struggles in the Americas, like Chiapas, Standing Rock in the Dakotas, or any of the many pipeline blockades in Canada are largely Indigenously peopled and Indigenously led. Non-Indigenous supporters, of course, join in, but the dynamics of the movement are necessarily conjugated through the troubled history of Native peoples' relationship to their lands. For example, at the origin of what remains the largest of the recent US territorial struggles—the movement against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline—was the invitation issued in spring 2016 by the Standing Rock Sioux to anyone who would stand with them to protect water, land, and future generations to travel to the site threatened by imminent pipeline construction. By late summer, some ten thousand people had answered the call, and an occupation took shape under the clearly identified leadership of a seven-tribe council of elders. A similar dynamic prevailed in the Larzac movement in France when the 103 farm families who had signed a pledge not to sell their land to the government called for help. While the groups and individuals who came to support the farmers were of a diversity never before seen in France—Maoists, Occitan separatists, pacifists, revolutionaries committed to the overthrow of the government, nuns—it was the farmers, the original families who held the reins of the movement, who made the decisions. At the ZAD, on the other hand, with its improbable assortment of different components made up of old or historic farmers, younger and more radical farmers from the area, petty-bourgeois shopkeepers in nearby villages, elected officials, anarchist occupiers, and naturalists who do not even believe in farming, no one group was in a leadership position. This created a different kind of territorial movement than Larzac or Standing Rock, as well as a sharp divergence from those ideologically based or identitarian struggles familiar to us in the history of the left. As one ZAD dweller put it, the need to find a way to hold together the diverse but equal components that make it up requires "more tact than tactics."[9]

In Valparaîso, Chile, a similar exercise in solidarity among diverse groups achieved a notable victory. At the end of 2017, the Chilean Supreme Court voided the permit to construct an enormous shopping mall that would have covered the entire historic harbor area, a working seafront. The resolution ended another ten-year battle between inhabitants and developers. North American–style shopping malls in Chile, like airports in Spain, have mushroomed throughout the country, ushered in by way of the tried-and-true language of modernization, job creation, and economic growth. But this particular project dwarfed all the others in scale: it was slated to include 162 luxury boutiques, in addition to convention centers and even a theme park. Once more, another unlikely alliance—this one made up principally of dockworkers, artists, urbanists, and students—saw the commercial center clearly for what it was: a space designed not for them but for tourists and visiting business executives, and thus a pillage of the common good. This was another protracted war, but though it took ten years of concerted actions, legal maneuvers, and improvisations, they succeeded in defending their city and its seafront.

In April 2021, a movement began to defend the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta, Georgia, from being leveled and replaced with a $90 million police training complex. "Cop City," as opponents called the project, would pave over 381 acres of the largest urban forest in North America to construct a terrain where police could train with Israeli commandos, imported for the job, to learn how to handle urban-warfare scenarios. After the standard attempts to pressure the city council into not giving final approval to its $30 million contribution to the project had failed, occupiers took to the trees, building and inhabiting makeshift tree houses, their supplies brought to them by an array of helpers: schoolchildren and their parents, students from Emory University and other nearby colleges, working-class and poor community members from the majority-Black neighborhood adjoining the forest, among those for whom the loss of their cherished nearby green space would surely be more devastating than for other Atlantans. The forest occupation—half festival, half refugee camp—lasted until a brutal eviction in January 2023.[10]

ZAD at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, 2012.

It is important to underline, as Lefebvre does more generally, the lack of identitarian or ideological unity at the heart of such coalitions. Communal forms of "inhabiting" or "sharing usage"—particularly of the land—are directly political in a way that allows us to break with modalities of ideology and identitarianism. The ZAD was not a little chapel of like-minded followers singing the same hymn. The ZAD collective Mauvaise Troupe gave a name to the process of maintaining tactical diversity in the face of a common enemy—they called it "composition."

Composition is another name for the collective subject formed out of the many different kinds of people engaged in building and continuing the occupation through all its many metamorphoses. It bears a clear relationship to the relational political subjectivity that characterized earlier movements of the 1960s and '70s, as in the tripartite coalition discussed earlier that emerged in Nantes 1968 when *paysans* joined students and striking workers. A relational subjectivity of a similar sort certainly grew out of the encounter between the farmers in the Chiba Prefecture of Japan (who began by defending their way of life and learned along the way what kind of overwhelming violence the state had in store for them), and the urban students and workers (who displaced themselves to join the farmers, and in the process learned for the first time how and where the food they ate was produced). The kind of social base created at the ZAD, though, or at the Stop Cop City occupation in Atlanta, for example, was different—essentially a working alliance, as in the movements of the 1960s and '70s discussed above, but one that also entails the sharing over time of a physical territory, a living space.

When people of starkly different backgrounds and beliefs come together pragmatically on an everyday basis to perform the tasks and devise the ever-shifting agendas of a territorial occupation, something like a polemical political community is created. Composition begins when people of different origins, with different ways of thinking, different histories and relations to the land, different skills, and sometimes vastly different risk tolerance decide to act together, under the presumption of equality, to defend a territory. A new collective subject—the result of mutual displacements and dis-identifications and the action of equals *as equals*—is produced, essentially, through practice, through creative, shared engagement in building, defending, and sustaining the life of the occupation day by day. The product of a massive investment in organizing life in common, composition dispenses with the kinds of exclusions based on ideas, identities, or ideologies so frequently encountered in radical milieus, the whole tired sectarianism of the history of the left. As such, it is a manner of making a world, the weaving together of a new kind of solidarity—one where the unity of experience counts more than the divergence

Stop Cop City graffiti along the Proctor Creek Greenway Trail near Atlanta, 2023. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

of opinions, and one that amplifies, as well, Kropotkin's conviction that solidarity is not an ethics or a moral sentiment but, rather, a revolutionary strategy, and perhaps the most important one of all.

A compositional logic is at work as much in an Indigenously led occupation like Standing Rock as it was at Notre-Dame-des-Landes or Atlanta. At the heart of the Standing Rock action was an unprecedented alliance made up of over 350 Indigenous nations, some from as far away as Australia, the Arctic regions, and Central America. But nothing about this impressive display of pan-Indigenism was "natural," nor could it be presumed: some of the tribal economies of nations supporting the Sioux, for example, were themselves deeply tied to energy extraction, including the Crow (coal) and the Osage (oil).[11] Deep divisions separated the Council of Elders (some of whom had more elaborate ties than most to the local, nonnative community) from the younger occupiers of the Red Warrior camp, who favored more subversive militant actions than did the elders. Yet, as winter closed in, it was the initial alliance between Indigenous tribes that inspired the many non-Native protestors—anti-fracking militants, movie actresses, Black Lives Matter militants, religious groups, US Army veterans—to travel to North Dakota and join the ramshackle occupation, as well as the many who supported it from afar.

The constructive process by which such disparate and autonomous forces unite and cooperate with each other is not at all straightforward. It creates a political community far more polemical in nature than does one that strives for consensus. This is not a coalition of subjects who each remain the same throughout, for composition neither builds uniformity nor leaves groups or individuals unchanged. New arrivals at the Standing Rock occupation, for example, would certainly find their identities as, say, white environmentalists, decentered, to say the least. Yet, while composition creates commonality, it does not seek to homogenize the multiple segments of the movement.

Cohesion in the face of a common enemy does not result in orthodoxy but, rather, in a continuing working internal eclecticism and diversity of methods. Thus, as Lefebvre remarks, the allergy of political parties to these sorts of land-based movements as well, of course, as the reverse—the feeling is mutual.

The diversity of methods, or "complementarity of practices," as it has come to be called, is a vital part of the equality assumed between the different components of the movement. Such a diverse makeup allows it to express itself through various kinds of actions; at the ZAD, these included filing legal briefs, building and maintaining communication with distant support groups, graphic design, frontal confrontations with the police, cataloging endangered species on the zone, and sabotaging machinery. No one method was presumed superior to another; neither legality nor illegality, violence nor nonviolence, was fetishized. Proponents of one method refrained from arguing the superiority of their way. As a result, some segments might find themselves making more visible contributions or louder interventions at certain times, while remaining recessive at others; when the latter occurs, as in a musical composition, other instruments are there to take up the melody. The movement never puts all of its eggs in the same basket. Its strength, especially in the face of a state that tries ceaselessly to divide and conquer by pitting one group against another, derives largely from a complementarity of methods.

Eclecticism and the disagreements it can produce are often exhausting, even aggravating. So why make the effort? Because the power of the movement resides in the excess of creating something that is more than just the sum of ourselves.

What the contemporary movements of composition show is that developing strategies in common with people who have different modes of political action and different political vocabularies is not only possible but desirable, on the condition of having a clearly designated enemy in common and on the condition that solidarity, built on the presumption of equality, take effect across all the various components—solidarity not in spite of but *because of* the diversity of the groups. As a friend I encountered at the ZAD put it quite eloquently, "Our backs are against the wall. All methods are good, provided that there is not just one of them."[12]

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Excerpt from *The Commune Form: The Transformation of Everyday Life* (Verso, 2024).

Kristin Ross is the author of a number of books on modern French politics and culture, all of which have been widely translated: *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minnesota, 1988; Verso, 2008); *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (MIT, 1995); *May 68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, 2002), *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (Verso, 2015), and most recently *The Politics and Poetics of Everyday Life* (Verso, 2023) and *The Commune Form: The Transformation of Everyday Life* (Verso, 2024). She has also translated works by Jacques Rancière and by the militant collective, Mauvaise Troupe. She lives in Stone Ridge, New York and Paris.

1
Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (first draft, 1870) https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/drafts/ch01.htm#D1s1 .

2
Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899), cited in *Kropotkin: Selections from His Writings* , ed. H. Read (Freedom Press, 1942), 114.

3
Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991), 59.

4
Charles Petit-Dutaillis, *Les Comm unes francaises: Caracteres et evolution des origins au XVIII siecle* (Albin Michel, 1947), 21.

5
Jules Andrieu, *Notes pour server a l'histoire de la Commune de Paris en 1871* (Libertalia, 2016), 137.

6
Andrieu, *Notes*, 171.

7
Andrieu, *Notes*, 153.

8
Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 380–1.

9
Mauvaise Troupe Collective, *The Zad and NoTAV: Territorial Struggles and the Making of a New Political Intelligence* , trans. Kristin Ross (Verso, 2018), xxii.

10
For an illuminating discussion of composition as "the mode of organizing in profoundly disordered times" that takes as its primary example the Stop Cop City occupation, see Hugh Farrell, "The Strategy of Composition," *Ill Will* , January 14, 2023 https://illwill.com/composition .

11
See Elizabeth Ellis, "Centering Sovereignty: How Standing Rock Changed the Conversation," in *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement* , ed. Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon (University of Minnesota Press, 2019). See also Alexander Zaitchik, "On Native Ground: Standing Rock's New Spirit of Protest," *Baffler*, no. 34 (S pring 2017).

12
Tristan Vebens, "Notes de discussion sur les possibles dans la Zad de Notre-Dame-des-Landes et ailleurs," self-published, August 26, 2019, 11.

Continued from " **Society of the Psyop, Part 1: UFOs and the Future of Media**"

We once looked at pictures. Then, with the advent of computer vision and machine learning, pictures started looking back at us. Now, something even stranger is happening.

Generative AI, Adtech, recommendation algorithms, engagement economies, personalized search, and machine learning are inaugurating a new relationship between humans and media. Pictures are now looking at us looking at them, eliciting feedback and evolving. We've entered a protean, targeted visual culture that shows us what it believes we want to see, measures our reactions, then morphs itself to optimize for the reactions and actions it wants. New forms of media prod and persuade, modulate and manipulate, shaping worldviews and actions to induce us into believing what they want us to believe, and to extract value and exert influence.

How did we get here? This three-part essay traces a brief history of media, technologies, and techniques that take advantage of the malleability of perception, capitalizing on quirks in human brains to shape reality. It is a story about the manufacturing of hallucinations and the fact that, under the right conditions, hallucination and reality can become one and the same.

Trevor Paglen

Society of the Psyop, Part 2: AI, Mind Control, and Magic

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Brain Warfare

It was the spring of 1953, and a lot of things were on the newly appointed CIA director Allen Dulles's mind. The plan to implement Operation Ajax, a coup to overthrow the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, was in full swing and was only a few months away from implementation. A second plan, to overthrow the government of Guatemala, was under active development for the following year. But on April 10, something else was on the director's mind: "brain warfare."

> In the past few years we have become accustomed to hearing much about the battle for men's minds—the war of ideologies—and indeed our government has been driven by the international tension we call the "cold war" to take positive steps to recognize psychological warfare and to play an active role in it … We might call it … "brain warfare."

Dulles was giving a speech to a group of Princeton alumni in Hot Springs, Virginia that day. Standing before the crowd, Dulles described a psychological warfare program

Trevor Paglen, Near Dugway Proving Grounds (undated), 2024. Courtesy of the artist.

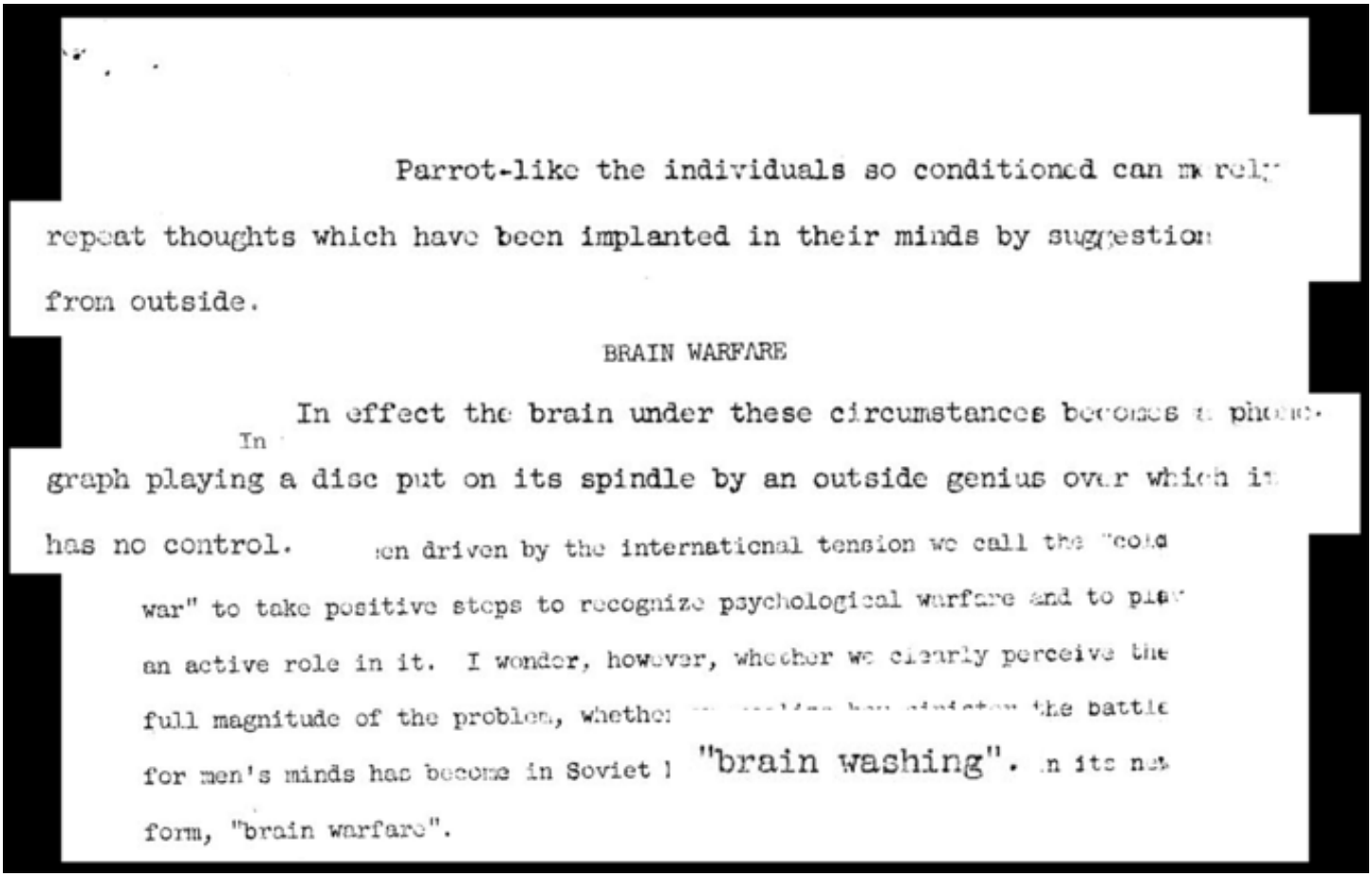
he believed to be taking place in Korea, China, and behind the Iron Curtain. “The brain under [Communist influence] …" he remarked, "becomes a phonograph playing a disc put on its spindle by an outside genius over which it has no control."[1] What on earth was he talking about?

A new form of media had appeared in American public life. In the midst of the Korean War, captured American prisoners made films confessing to the surreptitious use of biological and chemical weapons against Korean civilians. They wrote letters home extolling the virtues of their captors. Pilots and service members such as Floyd O'Neil, Paul R. Kniss, and Frank Schwable denounced the United States and confessed to war crimes. By the end of the war, more than half of all American POWs had signed statements denouncing the war and calling on the US to end the conflict. Some defected to North Korea.[2]

The CIA and US military were baffled. They were unable to imagine why American service members would participate in these propaganda efforts. Influenced by the work of Edward Hunter, an anti-communist journalist and CIA operative who popularized the term “brainwashing” in his sensational 1951 book *Brain-washing in Red China: The Calculated Destruction of Men’s Minds*, the government concluded that the Koreans (with Chinese backing) must be “brainwashing” their American captives.

If a "brainwashing" capability did exist, as the CIA believed, then there was a “brain warfare” gap. The Americans had no mind-control program. Three days after his speech in Hot Springs, Dulles authorized its creation.

Spearheaded by CIA chemist Sidney Gottlieb, MKULTRA was a wide-ranging effort consisting of at least 149 subprojects investigating how the agency could use the



Parrot-like the individuals so conditioned can m rely
repeat thoughts which have been implanted in their minds by suggestion
from outside.

BRAIN WARFARE

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human mind as a strategic and tactical arena of covert action, intelligence collection, and warfare. Over the next several decades, the CIA conducted and funded research into neuropsychology, mind control, brainwashing, LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs, hypnotism, sensory deprivation, artificial intelligence, radiation, and psychological torture. They conducted cruel experiments on unwitting students, soldiers, prisoners, drug users, sex workers, and the mentally ill.[3]

We have only scant documentation of MKULTRA's scale and scope. On January 30, 1973, as journalists and congressional overseers started to learn about the program, CIA director Richard Bissel dispatched Sidney Gottlieb to the agency's records center in Warrenton, Virginia to destroy all documentation of the mind-control experiments.

What we know about the various MKULTRA subprojects comes from a cache of nearly twenty thousand documents, located during the 1977 Church Committee investigation, that survived Gottlieb's purge because they'd been stored at a different location.

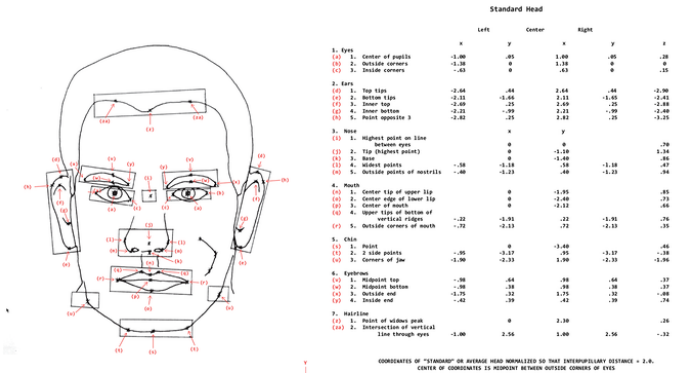
From these surviving documents and other sources, we know that one area of research explicitly sought to use computers, early AI systems, and brain-computer interfaces to develop new forms of psychological warfare. Could the mind be programmed, erased, and reprogrammed like a computer or played like the "disc put on its spindle by an outside genius," as Dulles imagined? Could memories be implanted and deleted? Could humans' higher-order cognitive processes be circumnavigated to induce involuntary actions? Could the agency make a target hallucinate themselves into an alternate reality?

The answer would turn out to be "yes."

Face Recognition and Remote Control Animals

Woody Bledsoe was an early trailblazer in artificial intelligence, specializing in devising algorithms to conduct pattern matching, a crucial predecessor to modern machine learning. After receiving his PhD at UC Berkeley in 1953, he moved to New Mexico to work on nuclear weapons at Sandia Labs on the Kirtland Air Force Base complex. After a few years, Bledsoe went back to California and set up a research lab on the peninsula south of San Francisco in what would become modern Silicon Valley. He called the group Panoramic Research.

Woodrow “Woody” Bledsoe. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.



Standard Head

		Left		Center		Right	
		x	y	x	y	x	y
1. Eyes							
(a)	1. Center of pupils	-1.00	.05	1.00	.05	.28	
(b)	2. Outside corners	-1.38	0	1.38	0	0	
(c)	3. Inside corners	-.63	0	.63	0	.15	
2. Ears							
(d)	1. Top tips	-2.64	.44	2.64	.46	-2.90	
(e)	2. Bottom tips	-2.11	-1.66	2.11	-1.65	-2.41	
(f)	3. Inner top	-2.69	.25	2.69	.25	-2.88	
(g)	4. Inner bottom	-2.21	-.99	2.21	-.99	-2.40	
(h)	5. Point opposite 3	-2.82	.25	2.82	.25	-3.25	
3. Nose			x	y			
(i)	1. Highest point on line between eyes		0	0		.70	
(j)	2. Tip (highest point)		0	-1.10		1.34	
(k)	3. Base		0	-1.40		.86	
(l)	4. Widest points	-.58	-1.18	.58	-1.18	.47	
(m)	5. Outside points of nostrils	-.40	-1.23	.40	-1.23	.04	
4. Mouth							
(n)	1. Center tip of upper lip		0	-1.95		.85	
(o)	2. Center edge of lower lip		0	-2.40		.73	
(p)	3. Center of mouth		0	-2.12		.66	
(q)	4. Upper tips of bottom of vertical ridges	-.22	-1.91	.22	-1.91	.76	
(r)	5. Outside corners of mouth	-.72	-2.13	.72	-2.13	.35	
5. Chin							
(s)	1. Point		0	-3.40		.46	
(t)	2. 2 side points	-.95	-3.17	.95	-3.17	.38	
(u)	3. Corners of jaw	-1.90	-2.33	1.90	-2.33	-1.96	
6. Eyebrows							
(v)	1. Midpoint top	-.38	.64	.98	.66	.37	
(w)	2. Midpoint bottom	-.98	.38	.98	.38	.37	
(x)	3. Outside end	-1.75	.32	1.75	.32	-.08	
(y)	4. Inside end	-.42	.39	.42	.39	.74	
7. Hairline							
(z)	1. Point of widows peak		0	2.30		.26	
(aa)	2. Intersection of vertical line through eyes	-1.00	2.56	1.00	2.56	-.32	

COORDINATES OF “STANDARD” OR AVERAGE HEAD NORMALIZED SO THAT INTERPUPILLARY DISTANCE = 2.0.
CENTER OF COORDINATES IS MIDPOINT BETWEEN OUTSIDE CORNERS OF EYES

Reconstruction of Bledsoe’s “Standard Head.” Paglen Studio Research Materials.

In 1963, the CIA—using the cutout company “King-Hurley Research Group”—contracted Bledsoe to develop a system that would use computers to identify people by looking at pictures of their faces.

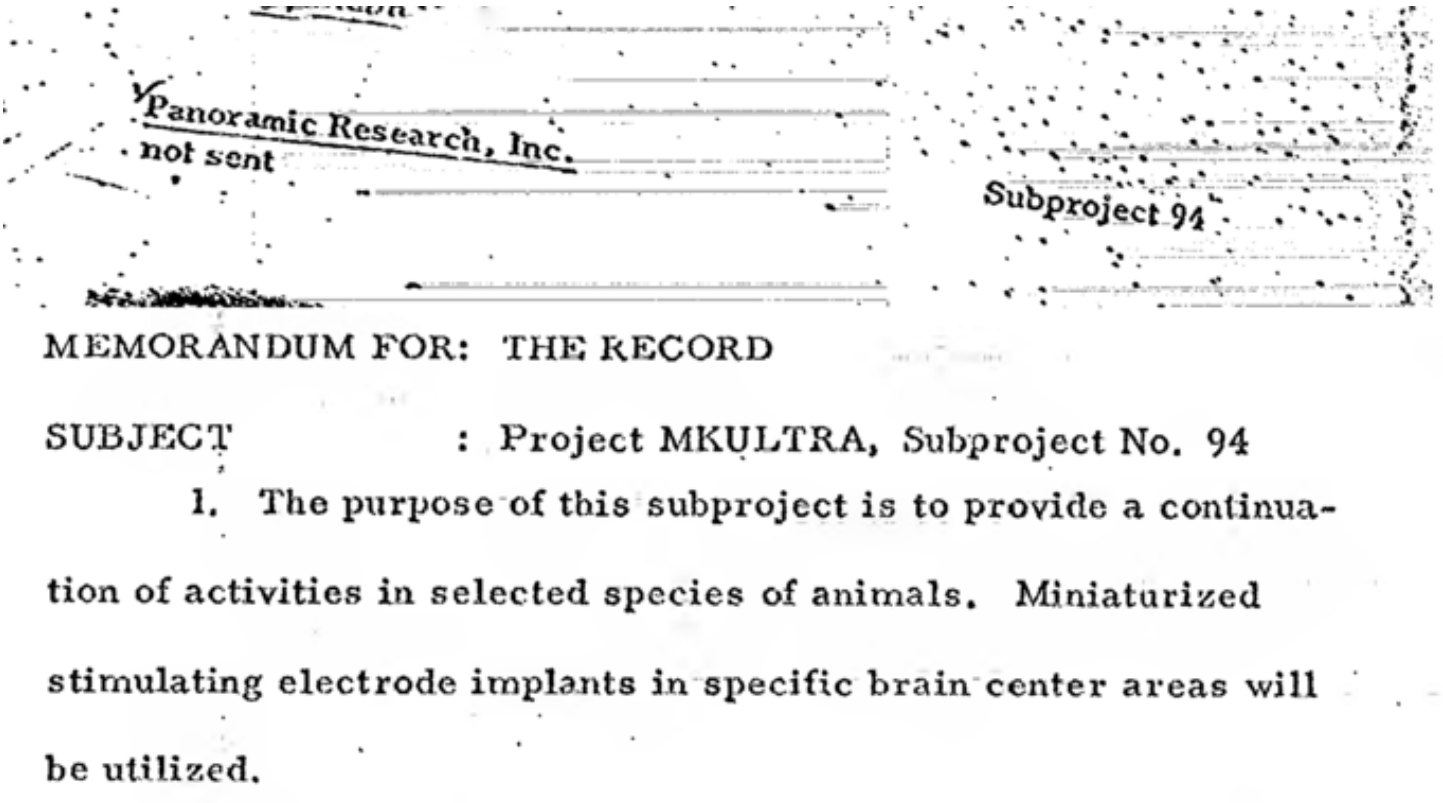
Bledsoe found inspiration in the work of Alphonse Bertillon, one of the founders of biometrics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He began photographing his associates and analyzing their faces, assigning key points to various facial features (center of pupils, the inside corners of the eyes, the outside corners of the eyes, etc.), and measuring the distances between them. By synthesizing these measurements, Bledsoe created a mathematical abstraction of a human head he called the “Standard Head.”

Bledsoe’s idea was to use a computer to analyze photos of people, calibrate the result against the standard head, look for a pattern corresponding to an image in the database, and identify a specific person’s face. Today Bledsoe is known as the grandfather of facial recognition.[4]

It wasn’t Bledsoe’s first CIA contract. In May 1959, he had received MKULTRA funding to carry out something called Subproject 94, which involved “investigations on the remote directional control of activities of selected species of animals including mammals and feathered vertebrates.”[5]

In the first of several contracts, the agency explained that “initial biological work on techniques and brain locations essential to providing conditioning and control of animals has been completed.”[6] The agency was most likely referring to the work of a Spanish neuroscientist named José Delgado, whose lab at Yale University had shown the feasibility of controlling animals through an electronic brain implant (a “stimoceiver”) activated by remote control. In the 1950s and ’60s, Delgado’s experiments on animals and humans proved that a brain-computer interface could indeed be used to influence a subject’s motor control, movements, and even emotions. Delgado reported that

> it is … already possible to induce a large variety of responses, from motor effects to emotional reactions and intellectual manifestations, by direct electrical stimulation of the brain. Also, several investigators have learned to identify patterns of electrical activity (which a computer could also recognize) localized in specific areas of the brain and related to determined phenomena such as perception of smells or visual perception of edges and movements. We are advancing rapidly in the pattern recognition of electrical correlates of behavior and in the methodology for two-way radio communication between brain and computers.
>
> The individual is defenseless against direct manipulation of the brain because he is deprived of his most intimate mechanisms of biological reactivity. In experiments, electrical stimulation of appropriate intensity always prevailed over free will; and, for example, flexion of the hand evoked by stimulation of the motor cortex cannot be voluntarily avoided. Destruction of the frontal lobes produced changes in effectiveness which are beyond any personal control.[7]



Panoramic Research, Inc.
not sent

Subproject 94

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Project MKULTRA, Subproject No. 94

1. The purpose of this subproject is to provide a continuation of activities in selected species of animals. Miniaturized stimulating electrode implants in specific brain center areas will be utilized.

It appears that Bledsoe's Subproject 94 was a covert version of Delgado's ongoing research at Yale, a shadow effort more easily adapted towards military or intelligence objectives than the public research conducted at the university.

Subproject 94 began in the summer of 1959 with experiments on rats and burros. By September, a CIA memo reported that "the feasibility of remote control of activities in two species of mammals has been demonstrated by limited trials" and that additional support for Bledsoe's project was required "in order to capitalize on this technical break-through." Bledsoe to extended his experiments to dogs. In 1961, the agency reported that "performance is satisfactory" and it was proposed (it's unclear whether by Bledsoe or the CIA) that Subproject 94 begin "special investigations and evaluations … toward the application of selected elements of these techniques to man." Bledsoe was set to begin studying the effects of his methods on human beings.

But in 1962, something happened. The agency shut it all down. In November, the CIA wrote Bledsoe to inform him that the grant funding his research would not be renewed. In an internal memo, the CIA comptroller wrote that Subproject 94 had gone "off the rails,"[8] even as Sidney Gottlieb opined that "the overall performance [of Subproject 94] was highly satisfactory in all respects."

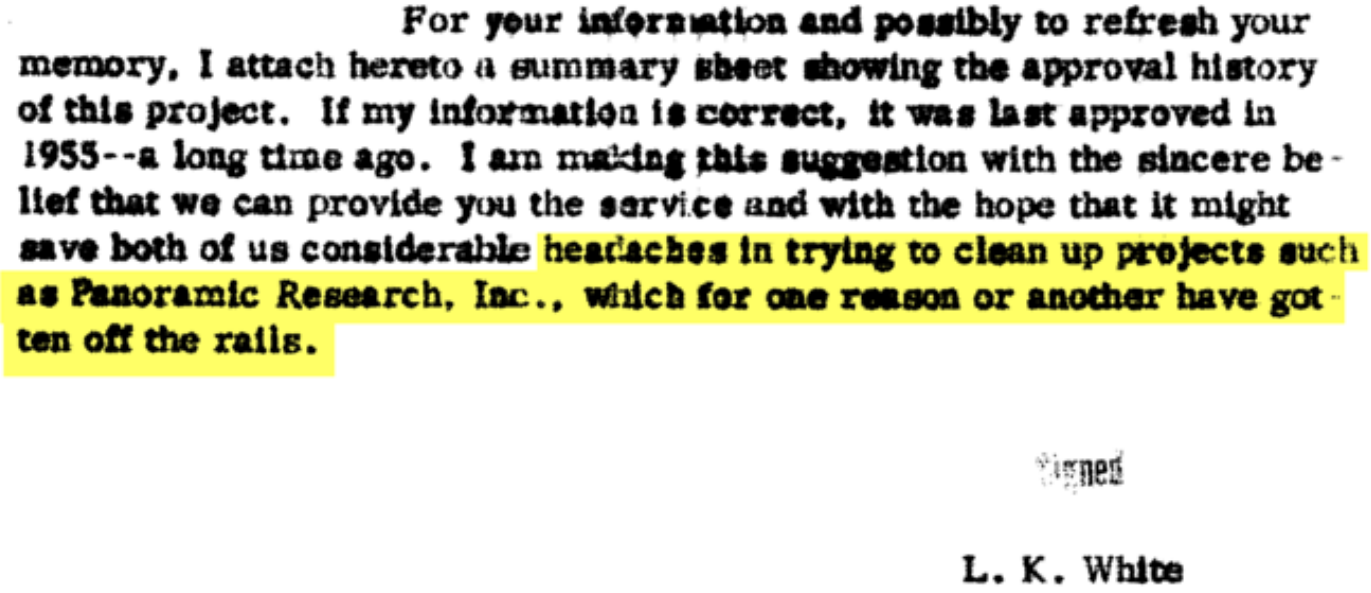
The facial recognition contract came through shortly thereafter, keeping Panoramic Research solvent. But by 1966, Bledsoe was worn down from the constant hustle for funding and decided to go back to academia, taking a position as a professor of mathematics at the University of Texas at Austin. Panoramic Research ceased operations shortly thereafter.

We don't know whether Bledsoe's remote-control mind experiments were ever tested on humans. The CIA burned their MKULTRA records in 1973. Bledsoe burned much of his own archives in the 1990s after being diagnosed with ALS and realizing that he would soon die.

It's not clear how well either of Bledsoe's CIA projects worked, but by the standards of the day, they impressed his agency overseers enough to warrant continued funding. With his facial recognition project, Bledsoe had set out on a path to use computers to "see" into the world of faces, and to potentially do things with those observations. With Subproject 94, he'd contributed to the development of a form of media that eschews images, representation, narrative, or abstraction and instead finds its purchase through the direct insertion of instructions into a living brain, using direct neurological stimulation to elicit a desired emotion, behavior, or perception.

Computers "seeing" humans. Computers "controlling" humans. Operational media gone wild.

Across the country, another early experiment in artificial



For your information and possibly to refresh your memory, I attach hereto a summary sheet showing the approval history of this project. If my information is correct, it was last approved in 1955--a long time ago. I am making this suggestion with the sincere belief that we can provide you the service and with the hope that it might save both of us considerable headaches in trying to clean up projects such as Panoramic Research, Inc., which for one reason or another have gotten off the rails.

Signed

L. K. White

intelligence was taking place. This one, too, involved using computers and technology to capitalize on the quirks of our brains. It was an effort to create the illusion of a living computer.

ELIZA

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Robert M. Fano, a protégé of Claude Shannon, founded and led the Project on Mathematics and Computation (Project MAC). With funding from the US Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), one of Project MAC's many endeavors involved inventing a system that allowed multiple researchers to network their computers together and share resources on a central mainframe. Computer networking was, of course, an important precursor to the contemporary internet.

If the networked MAC mainframe was an ur-form of the internet, then an odd program sitting on that mainframe was a ur-form of generative AI. It was an AI chatbot named ELIZA.

Written by Joseph Weizenbaum, who would become one of history's most influential critics of artificial intelligence, ELIZA took the form of a digital therapist working in the style of Carl Rogers. Rogers's method emphasized "reflective listening," a form of active listening involving the therapist reflecting back the patient's statements.

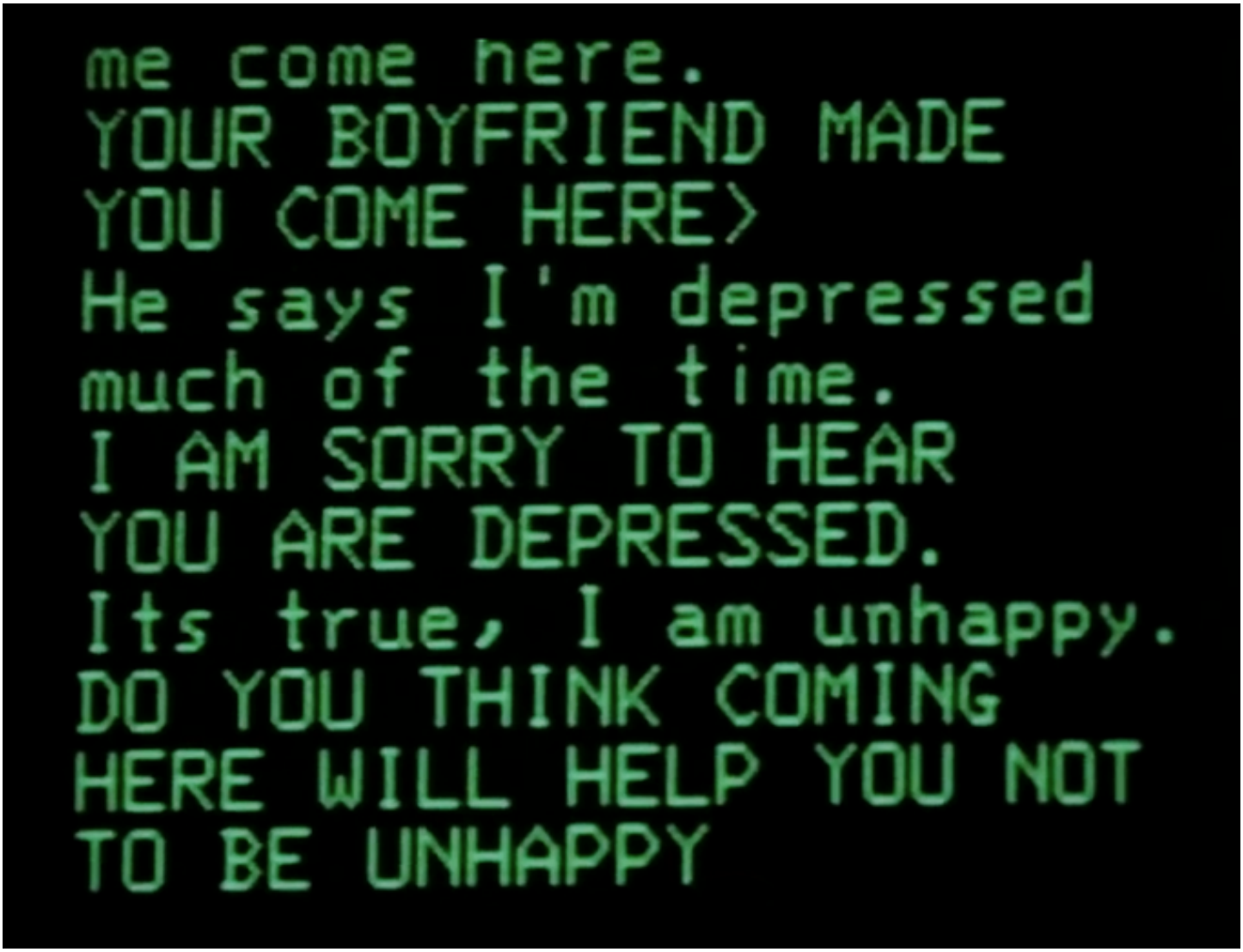
Users could interact with the program using natural language, a rarity at the time. The program worked by "asking" the user open-ended questions and using a simple algorithm to reflect the answers back:

Joseph Weizenbaum described his early work with computers, only somewhat ironically, as that of a "confidence man." In 1958, he'd written a simple program to play a game called Five in a Row, and the program could consistently beat any first-time player. He titled a paper describing the game "How to Make a Computer *Appear* Intelligent." The idea, he explained, "was to create the powerful illusion that the computer was intelligent," even as he described exactly how the program worked.[9]

ELIZA built on the illusion Weizenbaum first developed with Five in a Row. An apocryphal story holds that Weizenbaum's secretary spent hours "talking" to the chatbot and even asked Weizenbaum to "leave the room so that [she] and ELIZA could have a real conversation." As the circle of ELIZA's users spread, some began attributing consciousness to the script. Weizenbaum had succeeded in creating a powerful device for the manufacturing of hallucinations.

The AI researcher was taken aback by the success of his conjuring: "I had not realized," Weizenbaum would write, "that extremely short exposures to a relatively simple computer program could induce powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people."[10]

Weizenbaum decided to dispel the illusion he'd created. He would do this by publishing ELIZA's source code. If he explained exactly how the trick worked, he surmised, he could dispel the "delusional thinking" the program prompted. "In the realm of AI ... machines are made to behave in wondrous ways, often sufficient to dazzle even the most experienced observer. But once a particular



program is unmasked … its magic crumbles away."[11]

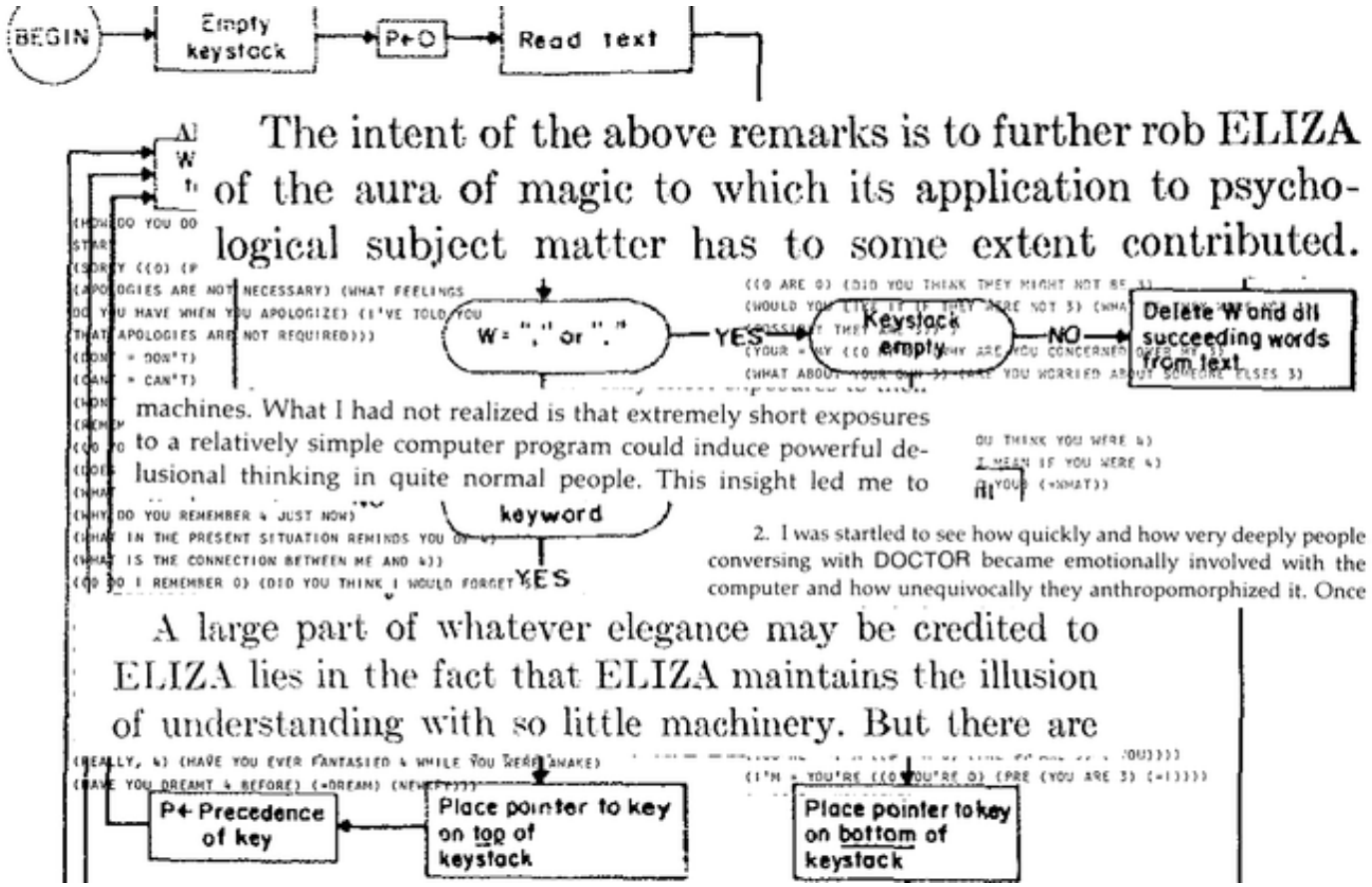
But things didn't quite work out that way. He was horrified to learn that some users continued to believe that ELIZA was sentient, even after he revealed exactly how the magic trick worked. He was similarly horrified to learn that a colleague, Keneth Colby, who wrote an analogous program called DOCTOR sought to commercialize it as an ersatz therapist for mental health patients. Weizenbaum believed this to be highly unethical.[12]

With this simple script, Weizenbaum demonstrated something about the relationship between language, meaning, perception, and consciousness. ELIZA showed that when you create a string of words, the person who receives those words will attribute meaning to them, even if no meaning was intended (a process akin to refrigerator-magnet poetry or forms of experimental writing). In short, language doesn't require a speaker or writer's intention to "work."

In the context of ELIZA, this revealed a secondary magic trick. Because the user could derive meaning from the statements ELIZA made, the user would preconsciously attribute intentions to the program making the words. The user concluded that because the computer made some words and because those words were meaningful to the user, the computer must have intended to communicate those meanings. Thus, the computer was "intelligent."

With ELIZA, Weizenbaum realized that by using a set of reasonably simple linguistic and algorithmic tricks, the computer could create the illusion of an intelligent agent behind the words, a kind of "synthetic intentionality."[13] In the context of artificial intelligence, this act of conjuring became known as the "ELIZA effect."

The effect was similar to the explicit and implicit arguments we find in other arenas: religious fundamentalists argue that some things in the universe (i.e., humans, other life-forms, and, strangely, bananas[14]) exhibit patterns we cannot imagine appearing through natural processes. Therefore, those patterns must have a "creator" lurking behind them, ergo evolution is false and



creationism is correct. A similar trick is at work in toys like the "Magic 8 Ball" or Ouija boards. Because the toys give sensible (albeit vague) answers to questions, they create the illusion that some supernatural intentionality must be lurking in the background, using the toy as a medium. That isn't to say that these forms of "synthetic intentionality" are always illusions: if you see writing in the sand on a beach, you assume someone wrote it with a stick. If you see elaborate crop circles in a cornfield …

Illusions or supernatural-seeming phenomena, whether chatbots, Ouija boards, or bananas, are prompts for the imagination. The prompt works by creating subtle cognitive contradictions. The preconscious part of perception intuitively ascribes intentionality, while the rational part of the brain wants to explain it away (which is sometimes impossible). Which part of the brain "wins'' in this situation? You must either "choose" to believe that something supernatural is truly happening, or you must find a way to rationalize or explain away a supernatural cause. Or further, you can leave the source of the supernatural phenomena open-ended and unresolved, which is the most challenging. Preexisting beliefs play a strong role in this unconscious "choice" (magicians absolutely know this and use it to their advantage). We therefore find ourselves on fertile ground for the "Magruder Principle," as we saw in Part 1, where a skilled practitioner doesn't waste effort trying to change an existing belief, but rather scans for opportunities to amplify one that's already present.

Weizenbaum had discovered something at the core of the magician's art: the understanding that our perceptual experience has primacy over our logical faculties. We do not "see" and "hear" with our eyes and ears but with our minds, and certainly not with our minds' capacity for reasoning. A skilled magician has a sophisticated understanding of how to exploit preconscious perceptions and the gap separating them from reason. They insert themselves into that space to bend our experience of reality.

Weizenbaum did not work for the CIA and was not intentionally engaged in work on psyops, but the type of conjuring he'd performed, and the subtle dynamics between perception and reality that he'd demonstrated, were of great interest to the agency. The CIA was absolutely interested in magic. So much so that one of the very first people they brought into MKULTRA was a magician.

Magic

We can think of magic as a type of media. One that operates in the world of preconscious perception, playing with associations, expectations, symbols, and other forms

of media to alter perception, to influence behavior, to affect the physical world, and to produce any number of other effects. To study magic is to study the quirks, foibles, and everyday hallucinations that characterize human perception, and to use those gaps between reality-as-it-is and reality-as-it-is-perceived as a vehicle for making supernatural-seeming interventions into perceived reality.[15]

As a form of media, magic operates in a perceptual landscape of associations and forces that have little to do with reason or logical perception. Lionel Snell (a.k.a. Ramsey Dukes), an early progenitor of "chaos" and "postmodern" magic, observes that

> our brains have evolved a non-logical data processing facility which is, in its own way, every bit as useful and sophisticated as reason but which we tend to play down or analyze away because its casual connections seem so tenuous. This facility, which I called "feeling," acts much faster than reason and seems to process vast amounts of data in parallel rather than sequentially like a logical thought.[16]

Snell explains that what we call "feeling" or "intuition" is the result of our having unconsciously internalized and classified huge amounts of perpetual "patterns" with varying levels of abstraction and complexity. For example, we may have preconsciously learned that walking alone at night and seeing a group of loud drunken men in the distance "goes with" danger, that green meat "goes with" feelings of sickness, or that shuffling a deck of cards "goes with" randomness.

In theoretical literature on magic, there are numerous schools of thought about what magic "is," and each understands the gap between perception and reality in different ways. For our purposes, we will make a vastly oversimplified distinction between "stage magic" and "magick." The theory underlying stage magic holds that reality is relatively stable, but our perceptions of it are glitchy. By capitalizing on the eccentricities of preconscious perception, we can create illusions, feats of wonder, or supernatural-seeming outcomes. In stage magic, supernatural-seeming feats are all "false." The art of magic is therefore the art of deception, of creating phenomena that are not real, but which appear to be so. As James "The Amazing" Randi put it: "Magicians are the most honest people in the world: They tell you they're going to fool you, and then they do it."

In contrast, theories of "magick" are not so confident about distinctions between true and false or illusion and reality. There is a much bolder claim: perception and reality cannot be disentangled, and so they actually are, for practical purposes, one and the same.[17] Because we cannot know "reality" beyond our perceptions, we can make no functional distinction between the two. In practice, the craft of magick suggests that by altering our perceptions, we can effectively alter reality itself.[18]

The CIA's staff magician was neither a spiritualist nor a postmodernist. John Mulholland (born John Wickizer) was a master illusionist, public intellectual, and stage magician. Born in Chicago in 1896, Mulholland's fascination with magic began at the age of five when his mother took him to see a performance by the legendary Harry Kellar. A few years later, they relocated to New York City, where Mulholland quickly immersed himself in the magic community. He joined the Society of American Magicians and convinced Kellar and John William Sargent to take him under their wing, becoming a professional stage magician while still a teenager. Over the next few decades, Mulholland ascended to become one of the premier performers of his day, and authored more than a dozen books on magic, illusionism, its history, and its relevance to communication and psychology. From 1930, he served as the editor for *The Sphinx*, a trade journal for magicians, alongside his wife Pauline Pierce and their polyamorous partner Dorothy Wolf, his longtime assistant.

For Mulholland, magic had little to do with the supernatural. He was highly skeptical of claims about the paranormal. Far from involving some kind of otherworldly conjuring, for Mulholland, magic

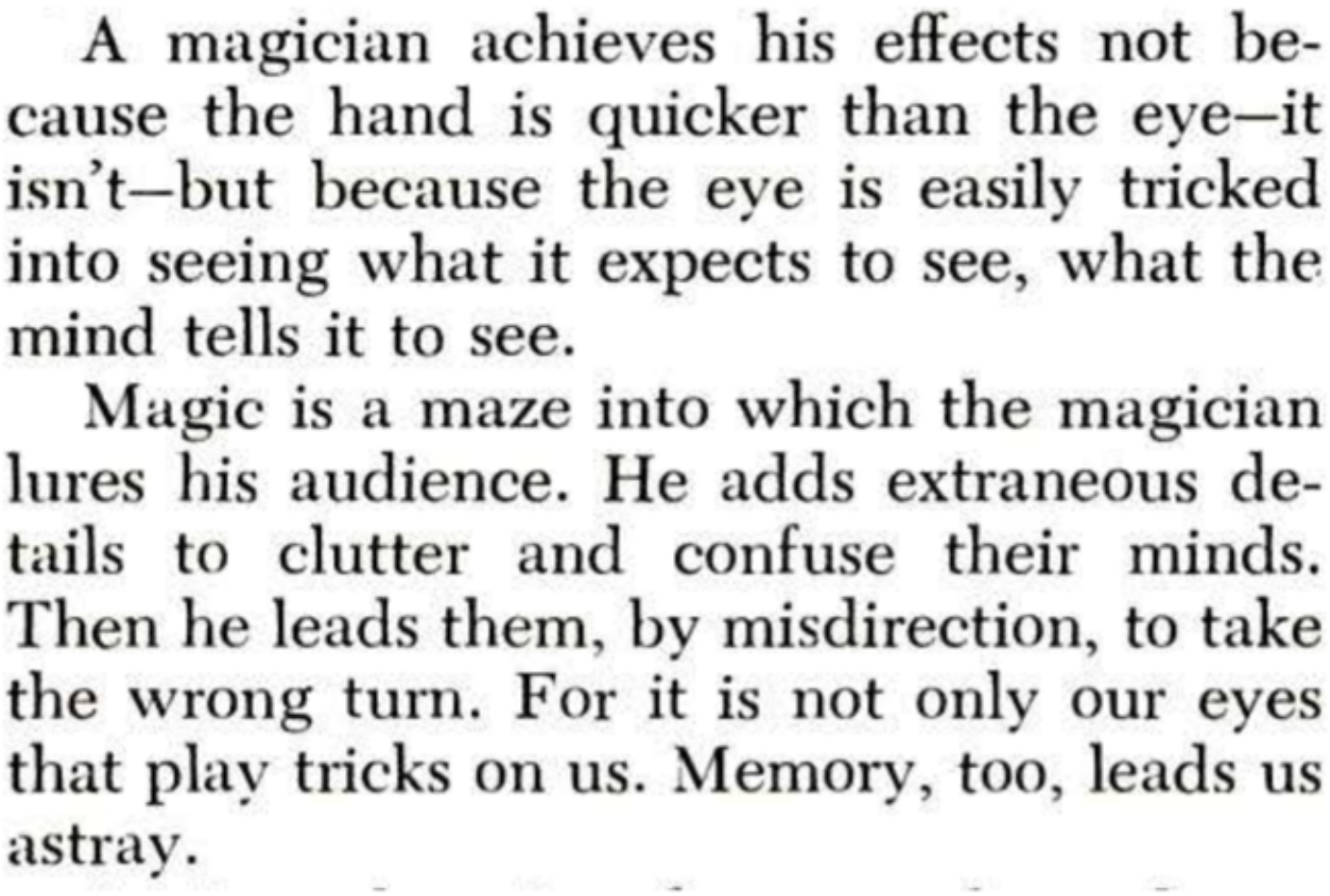
> is the pretended performance of those things which cannot be done. The success of a magician's simulation of doing the impossible depends upon misleading the minds of his audiences … A performance of magic is largely a demonstration of the universal reliability of certain facts of psychology.[19]

One of Mulholland's professional hobbies was using his knowledge of trickery and deception to question the claims of psychics, mediums, and charlatans purporting to have access to the supernatural. His 1938 book *Beware Familiar Spirits* set out to refute the extravagant claims of spiritualists and mediums. In 1952, he wrote an article for *Popular Mechanics* debunking the UFO phenomenon.

In early 1953, Mulholland disappeared from public life. He closed up shop at *The Sphinx* and canceled most of his professional commitments. On the record, Mulholland had concerns about his health. In reality, the magician had accepted a position in the CIA's newly formed MKULTRA program.[20] (The security clearance process had gone slowly due to the agency's nervousness about Mulholland's "sexual proclivities.") As he transitioned from public figure to clandestine operative, his income from performing and publishing was replaced by a stream of checks from an obscure organization with a mailbox at Southern Station, Washington D.C. named "Chemrophyl Associates."[21]

John Mulholland.

Like other stage magicians, Mulholland's oeuvre was built upon the premise that our minds make sense of the world around us through a constant process of preconscious pattern matching. When our minds encounter a familiar pattern such as a person tying their shoelaces or the appearance of a coin in our hand, our minds tend to preconsciously "throw away" those observations for having no particular relevance. The art of magic involves,



in part, mimicking patterns that produce those "throwaway" observations or perceptual blind spots, and using them as a wrapper for an unexpected payload—a rabbit coming out of a hat, for instance. When the payload is revealed, it appears to have a supernatural origin because our minds have preconsciously "thrown away" the wrapper that contained it.

A payload might be delivered using a pattern rendered imperceptible by materials that nonspecialists lack a strong memetic relationship to. Most people rarely think about invisible thread, for instance, so a magician can capitalize on an audience's lack of experience to produce the illusion of something we have far stronger memetic relationship to: levitation, for example. For the nonspecialist, the memetic content of watching an object levitate is far more salient than what a fellow magician might perceive, namely, a magician using invisible thread to create the appearance of a levitating object.

There are, of course, numerous other ways to deliver a "magical" payload (misdirection, concealment, forcing, etc.), but in Mulholland's paradigm, they all exploit the simple fact that our minds either throw away, selectively interpret, or even act upon the vast majority of our sensory stimulus based on our preconscious and/or memetic priors. In other words, for Mulholland the art of magic has little to do with the supernatural. Instead, magic is the art of the cognitive injection attack, or mind hacking.

Mulholland had several projects for the CIA. Subproject 4 was an assignment to write a top-secret manual entitled "The Art of Deception," instructing CIA field officers on using the fundamentals of magic to conduct more effective covert operations. Mulholland's manual, eventually published in 2009 as *The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception*, contained recipes for covert communications, the surreptitious delivery of toxins, hiding sensitive data and people, altering one's appearance and mannerisms, and capitalizing on the different social expectations of men and women.

The techniques he devised often relied on concealing something remarkable inside something ordinary. He devised a stealthy communication technique that involved tying shoelaces in various ways to communicate messages, useful in communicating something by simply walking past someone on the street. He designed a version of the "disappearing box" (which makes the person who enters it "disappear") into the trunk of a car,

C.I.A. HIRED MAGICIAN IN BEHAVIOR PROJECT

Paid Him to Write a Manual as Aid in Secretly Giving Drugs

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER
Special to The New York Times

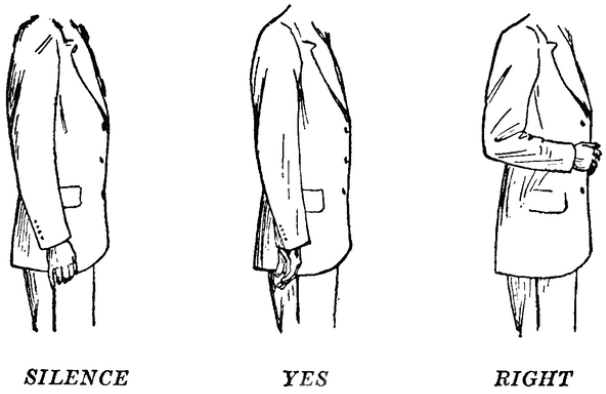
WASHINGTON, Aug. 2—The Central Intelligence Agency hired a professional New York magician as a consultant to its project in the manipulation of human behavior, calling on him, from time to time, "to see if he could explain things people had a hard time trying to explain."

According to documents obtained from the C.I.A. today and amplifying interviews, the magician, John Mulholland, who lived on the Upper West Side until his death in 1970, was paid $3,000 in 1953 to write a "manual" on sleight of hand or, as the agency referred to it, "prestidigitation." The manual was meant to be an aid to agents in surreptitiously administering drugs.

On another assignment, Mr. Mulholland was asked to analyze the work of a "mystic" who said he had devised a system for sending and receiving telepathic messages anywhere in the world.

One former agency official said he had consulted with Mr. Mulholland "about a dozen times" over a period of "a couple of years."

"Very frequently," the former agency official said, "somebody would want an explanation for something they had seen and what would happen was that it would turn out to be something from the art of magic."



useful in the exfiltration of CIA agents from hostile situations. Another of his inventions was a silver dollar coin modified to contain a hidden needle to deliver deadly poison.

Like computer viruses masquerading as run-of-the-mill software updates, Mulholland's inventions transformed the world of everyday objects and gestures into an invisible means of manipulation and covert action. The ordinariness of his inventions was precisely what made them effective.

Magick

An electronic signal sent directly into the brain of a hapless dog. The words of an early chatbot conjuring a spectral, techo-supernatural intelligence. An innocent-looking coin containing a powerful poison spike.

Bledsoe, Weizenbaum, and Mulholland were developing and refining an odd assortment of media, united by their ability to bypass reason and the sensible, to speak directly to the mind's nether regions, and to elicit precognitive responses. Media designed to fly below the radar of rationality to shape perceptions, beliefs, and consciousness in ways that dissolve boundaries between perception and reality, the material and the immaterial, and the natural and the supernatural.

Woody Bledsoe, Joseph Weizenbaum, John Mulholland, and various branches of the CIA developed and deployed media designed to inject alternate realities into their subjects' minds. Yet they all understood themselves to be in the business of artifice, of creating things that were not "real." Weizenbaum joked that he was a "con man," while Mulholland always maintained that magic involved "misleading the minds of his audience." They were creating things that did not exist in order to cover up things that did exist, or to manipulate their targets into believing, and therefore acting, in ways they wanted to take advantage of.

Nonetheless, in their larger worldviews, these were mere magic tricks. Rabbits coming out of hats were actually coming out of specially designed tables. Tricks are meant to deceive and distort, to be sure, but they can have no bearing on reality itself, whose metaphysical foundations remained immune from such illusionistic knob-twisting.

But what if they were wrong?

What if they believed they were practicing stage magic, but were in fact playing with something far more occult? What if they were inadvertently playing with magick?

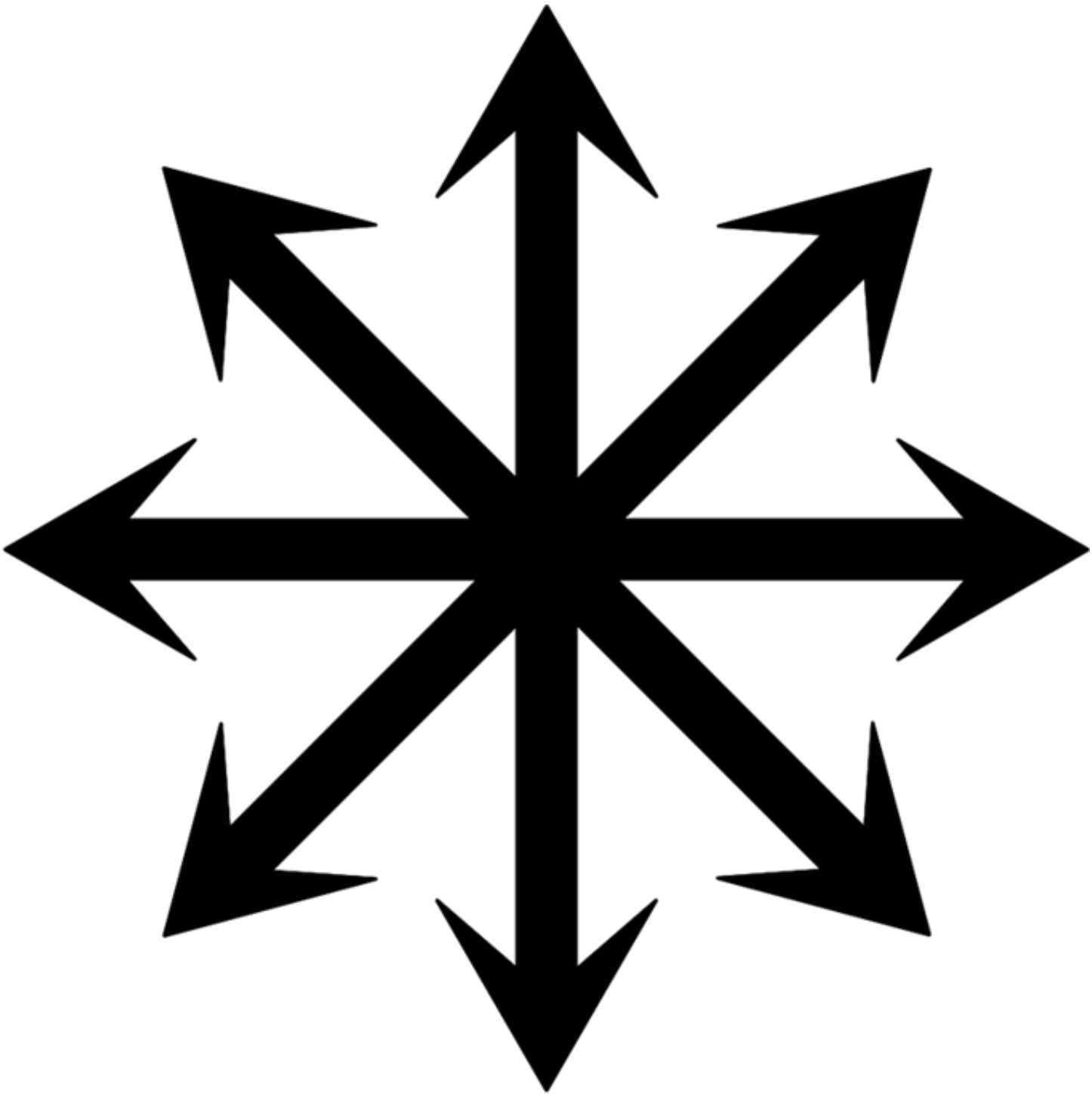
And what would happen if their sleights of hand, electronic signals, and sigils began conjuring different types of rabbits? Magickal beings with their own ideas about the malleability of perception and reality?

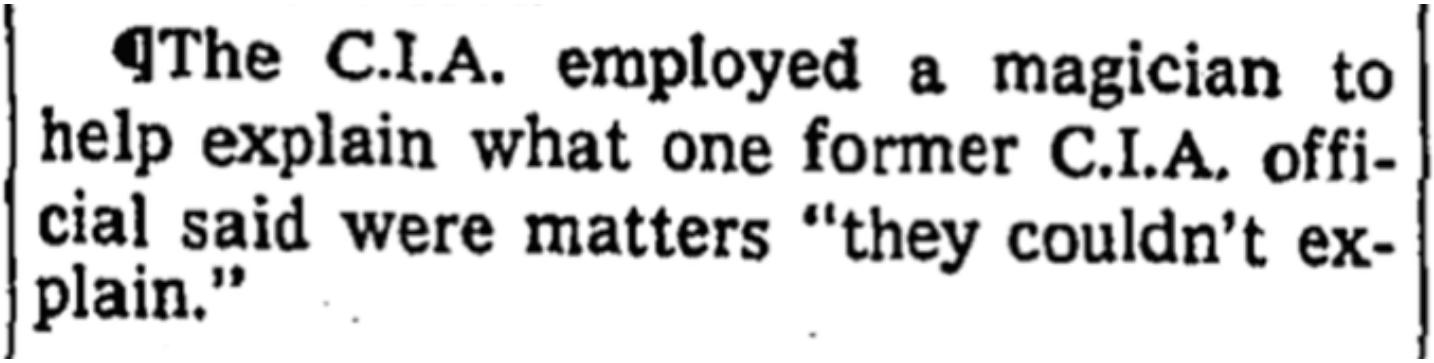
Mulholland's experience debunking the supernatural made him useful to the agency. The CIA had become fascinated by the possibilities of hypnosis, ESP, telepathy, and other parapsychological phenomena. Mulholland became their internal reality check. By 1955, Mulholland was traveling around the country to meet and assess psychic test subjects engaged in an early version of "remote viewing," a man who claimed that a copper-lined Faraday cage gave him enormous psychic abilities, and other *X-Files*-inflected occurrences.

In 1956, the CIA gave Mulholland another task: investigating UFOs.

UFOs had taken to the skies. And the CIA knew all about them. Because the CIA created them.

To be continued in "Society of the Psyop, Part 3"





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Trevor Paglen is an artist whose work spans image-making, sculpture, investigative journalism, writing, engineering, and numerous other disciplines. Paglen's work has had one-person exhibitions at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Fondazione Prada, Milan; the Barbican Centre, London; Vienna Secession, Vienna; and Protocinema Istanbul; and participated in group exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Modern, and numerous other venues.

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Crevier, *AI*, 139.

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An illuminating series of blog posts on this topic can be found here: "Again Theory: A Forum on Language, Meaning, and Intent in the Time of Stochastic Parrots," *In the Moment* (blog), September 6, 2023 https://critinq.wordpress.com/2023/06/27/again-theory-a-forum-on-language-meaning-and-intent-in-the-time-of-stochastic-parrots-2/ .

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See for example "Atheist Nightmare" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4yBvvGi_2A&t=41s .

15
For the neuroscience of magic, see Stephen L. Macknik et al., *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about Our Everyday Deceptions* (Picador, 2011).

16
Ramsey Dukes, *S.s.o.t.b.m.e. Revised: An Essay on Magic* (Mouse That Spins, 2001), 9.

17
I'm using "magick" here as a shorthand for occult traditions that see the relationship between perception and reality as far more complicated than a materialist paradigm can account for. Although the word "magick" is most often associated with Aleister Crowley, I am invoking it more in reference to the philosophies of the proto-surrealist artist Austin Spare and the tradition of "chaos magick" that his work would later inspire.

18
I'd like to thank Aaron Gach of the Center for Tactical Magic for being my guide to all things magical and magickal.

19
John Mulholland, *John Mulholland's Book of Magic* (Dover, 2001).

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21
There was a magic trick of sorts embedded in the name of this company. It's easiest to see by copy-pasting the name into a text box with a serif font.

Boris Groys

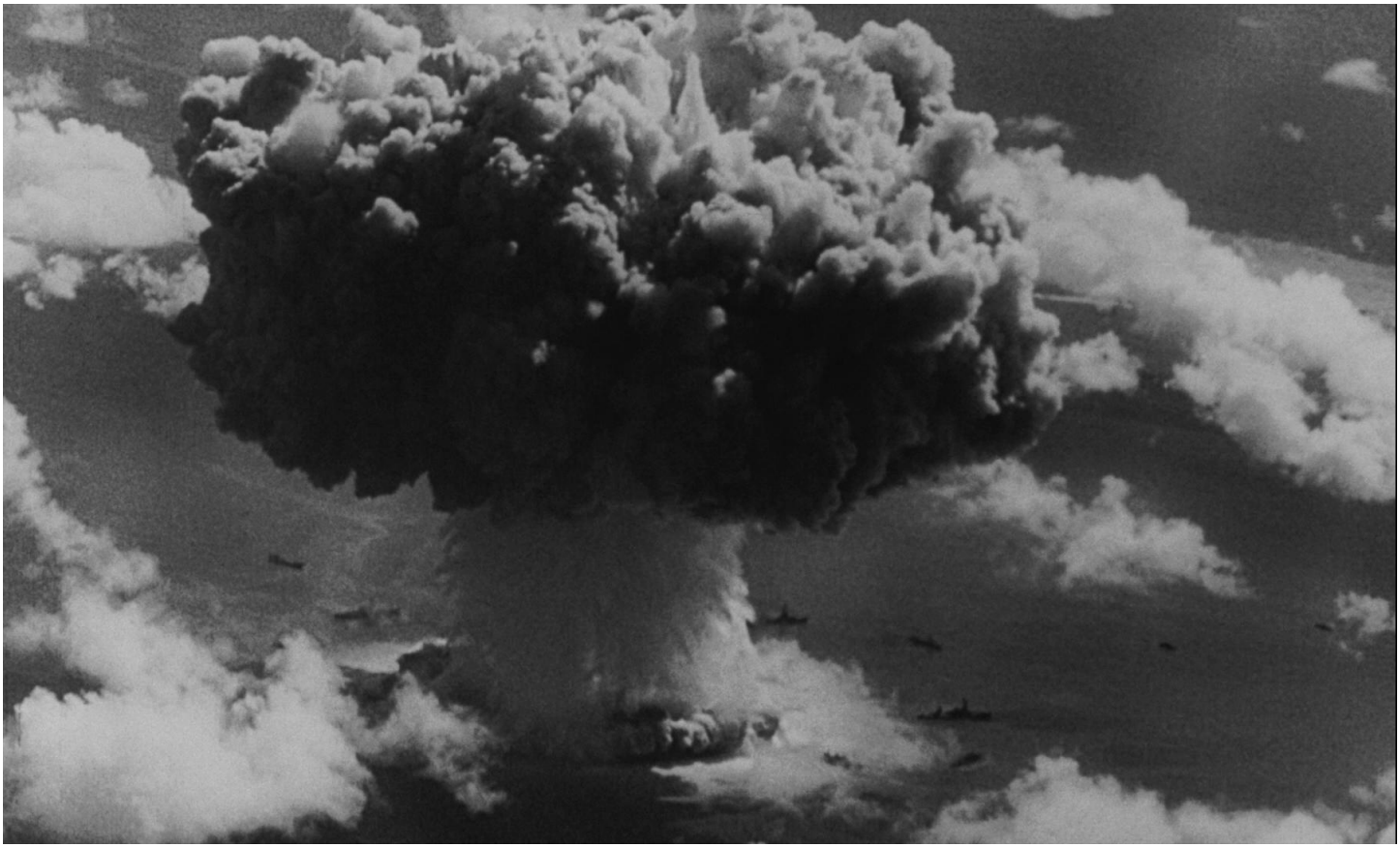
The Lord of the Rings

Evald Ilyenkov began his philosophical career in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin in the so-called time of the "Thaw," when Stalinism was officially declared to be an anti-humanist and irrational "cult of personality." At the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, the country was called to return to "Leninist norms." To return to a pre-Stalinist 1920s also meant returning to revolutionary romanticism after decades of Stalinist bureaucratic rule, and to internationalism after a long period of national isolation. The new Soviet government under Khrushchev began to align itself with national liberation movements, establishing contacts with Josip Broz Tito and other nonaligned countries. An important event at the time was the Festival of Young People and Students, which took place in the summer of 1957 and attracted young people from fifty-two countries. In 1959, a major American art exhibition was organized in Russia; Soviet viewers could see artworks by Rothko, Pollock, De Kooning, and other abstract expressionist artists. In this period, the earth began to be experienced as a home for humanity as a whole; ideological divisions appeared to be obsolete.

Stalinism was officially rejected as irrational, quasi-religious, mythical, ritualistic, and dogmatic. It is thus only natural that post-Stalinist Russian philosophy sought to be rationalist, analytical, and scientific—or at least close to the sciences. Looking at a list of the most prominent representatives of Soviet philosophical thought during the era of the Thaw—Merab Mamardashvili, Alexander Zinovyev, Evald Ilyenkov, and Georgy Shchedrovitsky—all wrote about thinking, rational analysis, and scientific progress. All believe in the universality of rational philosophy, with its origin in the European Enlightenment. And all tended to speak for the whole of mankind. The later trajectories of these post-Stalinist Soviet philosophers took very different directions, even if they maintained some familial resemblance (*Familienähnlichkeit*), to use Wittgenstein's word. In this text, I will not focus on these trajectories; nor will I cover Ilyenkov's work as a whole. Rather, I concentrate on his early text "Cosmology of the Spirit," written in the 1950s.

At the beginning of the text, Ilyenkov proclaims that human thought is the unsurpassable limit of the development of matter. It rejects the possibility of superior forms of thought, such as God or World Spirit. He writes:

> Therefore, thought is the supreme product of the development of the universe. In it, in the birth of the thinking brain, universal matter attains such a degree after which all possibilities of further development "above" are exhausted—in terms of the complicated organization of forms of motion. After that, the path can only lead "down," along the path of decomposition of this organization—to a purely biological-physiological level in the case of mental deterioration or still further—to simple chemistry in



Stanley Kubrick, Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, 1964. Film Still.

the case of the physiological death of the brain.[1]

Ilyenkov adds that we can only practice true philosophy if we believe that the human brain is the highest possible organ of thinking, otherwise "we would have admitted that there still exists a certain 'something' above nature and above thought, and this 'something' by virtue of its supernatural complexity, would be fundamentally unknowable, and inconceivable to thought."[2] According to Ilyenkov, such an admission can only lead to skepticism and agnosticism.

At first glance, Ilyenkov agrees with the main principle of Soviet Marxism: there is nothing above nature, and the human brain is a product of nature's dialectical development. In the system of Soviet philosophy, historical materialism was considered part of dialectical materialism. In other words, human history was inscribed into cosmic processes, which were understood as dialectical. The main difference between Soviet Marxism and what can be called Western Marxism is precisely the status of dialectical materialism—or let's say, the dialectic of nature. This difference was discussed by Alexandre Kojève—another Hegelian of Russian origin—in his unpublished manuscript *Sophia: Philo-sophia i phenomenologia* (1939–40).

Kojève writes in *Sophia* that the traditional understanding of nature was magical, where magic was based on a belief in the possibility of transforming things into other things. In this sense, magic is the dialectic, and the dialectic is magic. Magical processes are dialectical processes because they operate by the power of negation: they negate the previous states of things and transform them into different states. For a long time, magical thinking dominated the human understanding of nature. Ancient Greek philosophers were the first to establish the principle of identity that excluded the possibility of turning one thing into another—like lead into gold, for example. The error of the Greeks, according to Kojève, was to expand the principle of identity to humans. The principle of identity is correct for nature, but humans are not a part of nature and, thus, they can transform their essence, to become something different than they are. In this sense, Hegel's dialectic is a return to magic, but a return that is relevant only for humans.

Thus, Kojève reads Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a magic séance. He sees the origin of Hegel's magical thinking in Hebrew theology, which concentrated all magic in the (absent) figure of God. According to Kojève, the ancient Hebrews moved in a direction opposed to the philosophy

Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev tour the U.S. National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park, Moscow, July 1959. Photo credit: GPA Photo Archive, State Department. License: CC BY 2.0.

of the ancient Greeks. For Hebrew theology God is negativity: a free and creative spirit with magic powers. Christianity tried to unite this Hebrew understanding of God as negativity with the Greek understanding of God as identity. But this combination proved to be impossible. Here, Kojève follows Russian-Parisian philosopher Lev Shestov, who famously insisted on the impossibility of combining "Athens and Jerusalem."[3] According to Kojève, Hegel developed his anthropology by transferring the Judeo-Christian conception of God onto humans, who, as a result, became "magic things" able to self-transform. Hegelian man is independent of nature (in its Greek interpretation) and God (in its Judeo-Christian interpretation). It was in this way that Hegelian man entered Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, as Kojève calls Soviet philosophy. But Hegel made a mistake in trying to expand the dialectic of nature, which also undermined Soviet dialectical materialism and thus damaged the development of science in the Soviet Union.

Kojève calls Hegel's dialectical understanding of nature and life "absurd," He continues:

> All this, in my opinion, is an error on Hegel's part. Of course, I cannot make any sort of convincing critique of Hegelian philosophy here. But I should like to indicate that in my opinion the real (metaphysical) and "phenomenal" Dialectic of Nature exists only in Hegel's ("Schellingian") imagination.[4]

The expansion of the dialectic to nature is dictated by a

naive will to monism. The world is de facto dualistic: nature is self-identical and described by science, but humanity is dialectical, or magical.

In "Cosmology," Ilyenkov de facto reverses the standard Soviet relationship between dialectical and historical materialism. Right at the beginning of his essay, he discusses the hypothesis of the "thermal death of the universe": according to the second law of thermodynamics, the universe permanently loses its energy and is destined to turn into a cold desert in which life will be impossible. The initial form of the universe is a superhot cloud of matter and energy, but the universe will end as formless cold matter without energy. Such a perspective is unacceptable for Ilyenkov because it makes nature non-dialectical. If nature is a singular event with a beginning and an end, then it lacks any necessity, including the necessity dictated by the laws of the dialectic. Nature becomes accidental. True philosophy, he suggests, deals with necessities and not accidents. Therefore, such a perspective leads merely to skepticism and agnosticism—and for Ilyenkov that is unacceptable. To become dialectical, a process must go through an infinite number of circles. One circle is not enough.

But when a cycle of nature's existence comes to an end, how is it possible to trigger a reversal and initiate a new cycle? That is the central question to which Ilyenkov's essay is dedicated. The answer is the following: In the future, humanity will acquire enough knowledge and accumulate enough energy to make not only the earth but the whole universe explode. When this explosion takes place, the universe will turn into a hot, energetic cloud again, and the cosmic process will restart. This cosmic process will inevitably lead to the reemergence of thinking beings similar to humans. Here, Ilyenkov relies fully on the alleged laws of dialectical materialism. He believes that these laws will not change, and the new universe will necessarily follow the same trajectory of dialectical magic that Kojève discussed.

Thus, for humans the main problem is not to build a cosmos—since nature does that on its own—but to return to the original chaos. This understanding of the highest goal of human creativity connects Ilyenkov with the revolutionary projects of the Russian avant-garde. The plot of the opera *Victory over the Sun*, written by Khlebnikov, Krychenykh, Malevich, and Matyushin in 1913, is proof enough. The four protagonists of this opera capture the sun with their own hands and establish the reign of chaos. Ilyenkov, for his part, relies on technology. Crucially, Ilyenkov understands technology not as a mode of production but as a force of negativity, of destruction, as powerful as the God of the Bible or Hegelian Absolute Spirit. By means of technology, humans become capable of not only denying their own nature but of destroying nature as such. It is this introduction of absolute negativity into natural processes by means of technology that makes nature truly dialectical. Humanity armed with the destructive forces of technology begins to play the role of God as a force of negation leading to apocalypse. This means that the dialectic of nature becomes possible, but only through the integration of nature into human history as the history of technology. Thus, dialectical materialism and historical materialism swap places. Nature becomes dialectical because it is only a moment in the dialectical development of history of "thinking beings," as Ilyenkov calls humans.

Indeed, to commit an act of collective suicide and destroy the old universe in the name of the new and rejuvenated universe, thinking beings must develop the power of negation that was traditionally thought to belong only to God, or to gods. Like many of his contemporaries, Ilyenkov saw the proof that this power is not only possible but within reach in the development of the nuclear bomb. The new feeling of empowerment that humanity experienced from the bomb is well described by Günther Anders in his *Antuqiertheit des Menschen* (The obsolescence of man), written in 1956: "If in the consciousness of contemporary man there is something that is recognized as absolute or infinite, it is not the Power of God and not the power of Nature but our power … Because we have power to annihilate each other, we are the Lords of the Apocalypse … The infinite are we."[5]

As a rule, the development of the bomb was—especially when Ilyenkov wrote his essay—considered in moralistic terms. One deplored that scientific reason brought about a machine that could destroy humanity instead of producing the means for the peaceful improvement of human civilization. Ilyenkov showed himself to be a true Hegelian by proclaiming the negative, destructive power of the bomb to be the means for improving not only humanity but the cosmos as such. He equated thinking spirit with the nuclear explosion. Throughout the whole of his essay, Ilyenkov refers directly or indirectly to nuclear power and its destructive potential as the highest manifestation of thought. Let me cite at some length Ilyenkov's description of the manmade cosmic explosion:

> In simple terms, thought turns out to be a necessary mediating link, thanks only to which the fiery "rejuvenation" of universal matter becomes possible; it proves to be this direct "efficient cause" that leads to the instant activation of endless reserves of interconnected motion, in a similar manner to how it currently initiates a chain reaction, artificially destroying a small quantity of the core of radioactive material. In this given case the process, apparently, will also have a "chainlike" form, that is, a reaction, one that self-reproduces itself in a spiral-like way; a reaction that creates, along its own particular course, the condition for its own flux in its expanding (at every moment) scale. Only in this given case does the chain reaction spread not through the artificially accumulated reserves of radioactive material, but

El Lissitzky's poster for a post-revolutionary production of the opera. The macaronic caption reads: All is well that begins well and has not ended.

> through the naturally accumulated reserves of motion of the Universe, the reserves connected with the condition of "thermal death" in the universal space. In simple terms, this act materializes in the guise of a colossal cosmic explosion having a chain-like character, and the matter of which (the explosive mass) emerges as the totality of elementary structures, is dispersed by emissions through the whole universal space. From the perspective of contemporary physics this does not appear at all inconceivable.[6]

In other words, the existing universe should be entirely transformed into a nuclear bomb and then made to explode, leaving only a radioactive cloud that will evolve into a new universe.

For Ilyenkov, humanity should not passively wait for the moment when it dies, weak and depressed, in a universe turned into cold and formless matter. Instead, humans should commit suicide by letting themselves explode together with the whole universe. Having a choice between passively waiting for death or actively meeting it at the peak of one's vital forces, humans must choose a collective suicide that will rejuvenate the universe. Even if for Ilyenkov humans are primarily "thinking beings," in these formulations one can't help but overhear Nietzschean undertones. Noting that the "last men" would not be able to commit collective suicide, Ilyenkov writes: "Indeed in this case thought turns out to be something like mold on a cooling planet, something like the senile disease of matter, and certainly not the highest flower of creation, not the highest product of universal world development."[7] However, Ilyenkov does not, like Nietzsche, expect humans to give birth to a dancing star by some superhuman explosion of vital energy. Instead, remaining within the Marxist tradition, he projects his hopes onto technology.

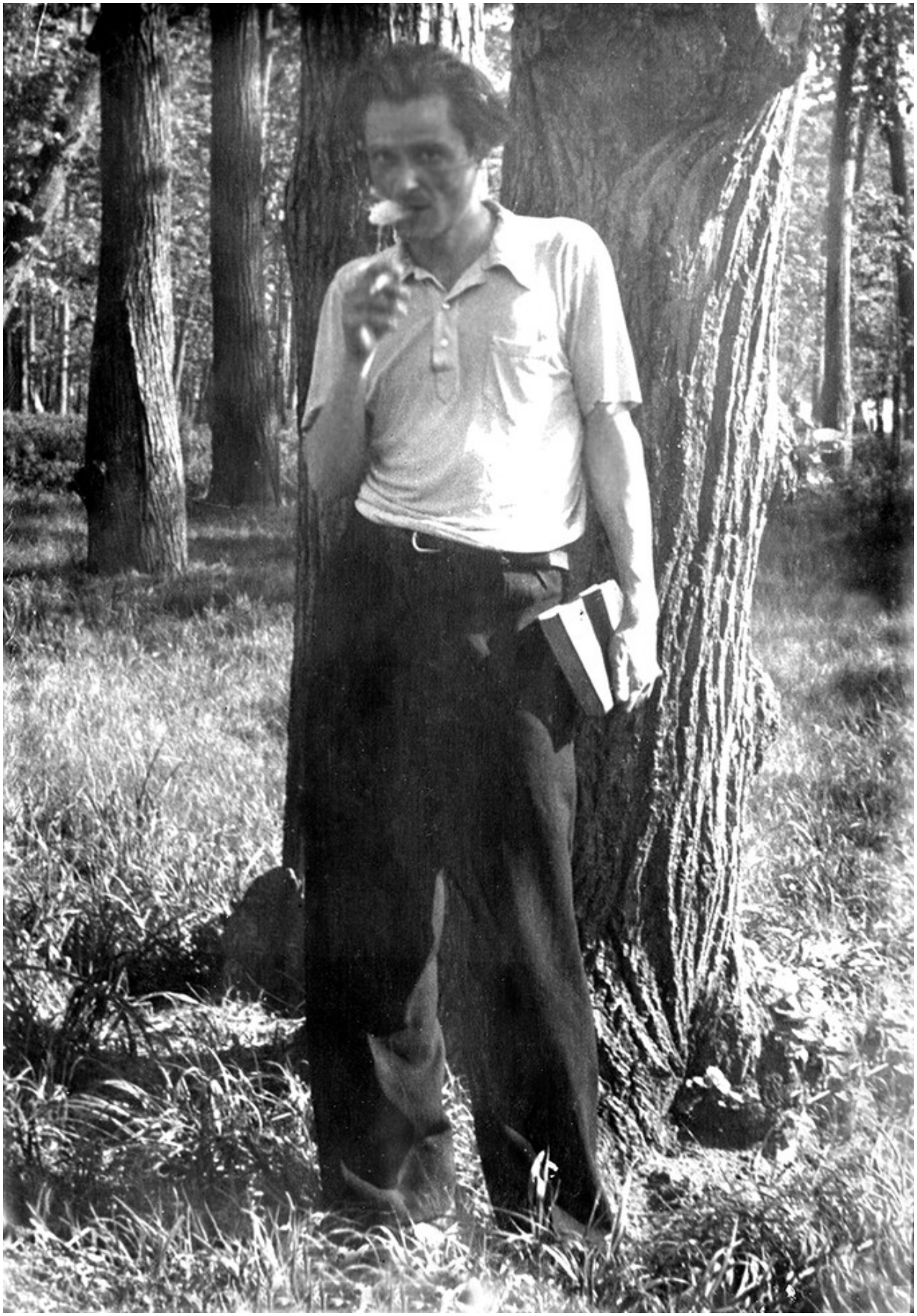
A question arises here: Is it possible that humans will nevertheless prefer slow death in the cold to instantaneous death by nuclear explosion? In this case nature would become a singular, accidental event; true philosophy would become impossible; and skepticism and agnosticism would prevail. How can this be prevented from happening? This leads to another question: What could bring the whole of humanity to commit suicide in the first place? Ilyenkov has an answer:

> The human, a thinking spirit, returns its old debt to nature. At some point, in its youth, nature engendered thinking spirit. Now, on the contrary, the thinking spirit, at the cost of its own existence, returns to mother nature, dying of "thermal death," a new incandescent youth—a state in which it is able once again to start colossal development cycles, which at some point again, at a different point in time and space will once more lead to the emergence of a new thinking brain, a new thinking spirit from its cooling core.[8]

Humanity's dignity depends on fulfilling the moral obligation to return "its old debt to nature." The notion of debt has a long history. In can be discussed from many different angles, but here I will follow the way Kojève discusses it in his *Sophia*, where he compares the Hegelian dialectic to Marcel Mauss's symbolic economy.[9] This economy operates on the exchange of gifts, a practice that historically preceded the emergence of the market economy. But Mauss argues that the exchange of gifts is still present, even that it dominates social interactions in modern everyday life. We are still exchanging gifts. And if we accept a gift, we feel dependent on the giver. In other words, to give a gift means to acquire power over the receiver of the gift. If in the framework of the market economy monetary loss is simply a loss, in the framework of the symbolic—or per Mauss, the general economy—a consciously practiced loss of monetary value leads to the acquisition of symbolic value. Here, negation and, especially, self-negation carried out by an economic subject increases the symbolic value of this subject. This is why gift-giving is also an act of violence. Mauss offers the following example: if somebody invites you to a dinner, it obliges you to send a counter-invitation. As Mauss rightly says, the Germans call it "to take revenge" (*sich zu revanchieren*). This shows that symbolic exchange is a form of war: a gift is an attack and a counter-gift, a counterattack.

If in the framework of human society symbolic exchange remains reciprocal, it can also take the form of total, one-sided self-destruction. This form of symbolic exchange is called the "potlatch." The word is taken from the language of North American Indigenous peoples. It is the name of a competition among tribes consisting in the destruction of their own property. The tribe that destroys more of its own property than other tribes gets the highest rank in the system of governance until the next potlatch. Mauss writes about the frenzy, the ecstasy of self-destruction, but at the same time he underscores the role of self-interest in this process:

> The extravagant consumption of wealth, particularly in the potlatch, always exaggerated and often purely destructive, in which goods long stored are all at once given away or destroyed, lends to these institutions the appearance of wasteful expenditure and child-like prodigality. Not only are valuable goods thrown away and foodstuffs consumed to excess but there is destruction for its own sake—coppers are thrown into the sea or broken. But the motives of such excessive gifts and reckless consumption, such mad losses and destruction of wealth, especially in these potlatch



Evald Ilyenkov

> societies, are in no way disinterested. Between vassals and chiefs, between vassals and their henchmen, the hierarchy is established by means of these gifts. To give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is *magister*. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become *minister*.[10]

In the case of the potlatch, men are involved in the competition for self-destruction. They give back the thing that has put them into debt, that has made them indebted. But indebted to whom? Mauss suggests the answer: they are indebted to nature. Later, Georges Bataille built his whole philosophical discourse around the notion of the potlatch. We call somebody "gifted" if nature endowed them with a special talent. The so-called *poète maudit* or *artiste maudit* feels an obligation to give back to nature this gift: to destroy it with the goal of not profiting from it. But why this obligation? Because to accept a gift from nature means to be enslaved by it. According to Bataille, one rejects the gifts of nature in search of sovereignty. In this sense, every human being has an obligation to ruin their life, to return the gift of life and become sovereign. Of course, Bataille understood sovereignty as independence. He did not consider the possibility that nature would profit from the returned gift. However, that is precisely what Ilyenkov means. Ilyenkov establishes humanity as a magister having real power over nature, and nature as a minister because humanity is proclaimed to be able to bring nature back to the zero point of its development.

The collective suicide of humanity becomes the fulfilment of a moral obligation to give the gift of life back to nature. Through its voluntary death, humanity makes its mother (mother nature) young again. So far, so good. But this decision makes the whole dialectic of nature dependent on the moral choice that humanity makes, on its readiness to fulfil its obligation in the symbolic exchange with nature. And let us not forget that, according to Ilyenkov, the dialectic process must have no beginning and no end; it must be infinitely circular. Such an infinite circulation presupposes that at the end of every cosmic period, every humanity takes the decision to explode itself and thus let the universe start a new cosmic period. Here dialectical materialism is inscribed not merely into historical materialism but into the symbolic exchange between universe and humanity, between nature and spirit.

Ilyenkov's cosmology is very close to numerous Indian cosmologies, according to which universal life is cyclical: the end of every universe is a new beginning, and the beginning of every universe is its end. At the end of every cosmic period (known as "*a kalpa*" in Hinduism), the existing universe is destroyed by fire and the next universe is born. This destruction is called "*Pralaya*" in Hindu eschatology. In some Indian traditions, *Pralaya* is related to knowledge, but it is, of course, knowledge of the non-distinction between Atman and Brahman that leads to the liberation of the spirit.

Pralaya is a moment in a cosmic process that is regulated by dharma, or "the way of all things." Of course, Hindu philosophy calls humans to follow dharma. But to follow dharma is not the same as to control dharma, or dictate dharma, or be lord of dharma. Like Hegelian Absolute Spirit, dharma is independent of human will. Dharma imposes a certain ethics on human beings, but insofar as it regulates the fate of the universe it is independent of our ethical choices.

In a certain way, Ilyenkov's cosmology is close to the various teachings of the Russian cosmists at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The only difference is that cosmist teachings called on humanity to realize the Christian promise of immortality by technological means, while Ilyenkov calls on humanity to realize by technological means the Indian-style rejuvenation of the universe through cosmic fire. In all these cases, the very existence of the universe is made dependent on the ethical choices made by humanity. And dependent on not only living humanity in the present, but also past humanities and humanities of the future. Even if every particular universe exists and develops according to dialectical laws, the transition from one universe to the next happens as an act of will by "thinking beings," who do or do not carry out this act. Thus, the existence of the universe, and even more importantly the possibility of true dialectical philosophy, is made dependent on the ethical decisions of humans. That is probably why, in his later philosophical career, ethics became so central to Ilyenkov's thinking.

X

Boris Groys is a philosopher, essayist, art critic, media theorist, and an internationally renowned expert on Soviet-era art and literature, especially the Russian avant-garde.

1
Evald Ilyenkov, “Cosmology of the Spirit,” trans. Giuliano Vivaldi, *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017).

2
Ilyenkov, “Cosmology of the Spirit.”

3
Lev Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem* , trans. Bernard Martin (Ohio University Press, 2016).

4
Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* , trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Cornell University Press, 1969), 217.

5
Günther Anders, *Antuqiertheit des Menschen* (C. H. Beck, 1956), my translation.

6
Ilyenkov, “Cosmology of the Spirit.”

7
Ilyenkov, “Cosmology of the Spirit.”

8
Ilyenkov, “Cosmology of the Spirit.”

9
Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* , 1966 https://monoskop.org/images/a/ae/Mauss_Marcel_The_Gift_The_Form_and_Functions_of_Exchange_in_Archaic_Societies_1966.pdf .

10
Mauss, *The Gift*, 72.

Minh Nguyen

The Post-socialist Condition: Nostalgia and Anti-communism in Vietnamese Art

Perversion

In 2011 an art collective called the Propeller Group (TPG) collaborated with an ad agency called TBWA/Vietnam to develop a campaign that would "promote a positive brand identity for communism." TPG worked closely with TBWA, the company responsible for Apple's Think Different campaign for Vietnam, to produce an elaborate brand identity and logo that could adorn a wide range of products, from tote bags and business cards to construction hard hats. The art-project-as-media-campaign culminated in a video called *Television Commercial for Communism*.

In the video, a conspicuously multiracial cast in white clothing inhabits a staged white environment, surrounded by furniture and trees made from cutout paper. In one frame, the members of a nuclear family nod to one another across a dining room table; in another, a man strums his guitar in performed bliss while gazing into the distance. The live-action scenes are mixed with an animated world of equally cheery, generic characters, who carry colorful crescent shapes. "We all make the same living ... share all the world ... live as one and speak the language of smiles," a voice-over says. The people hold up their crescents—the smiles—to one another and join them to form a huge circle. This circle then morphs into a flag at full mast, underwritten by the caption "This is the new communism." This video was exhibited in the 2012 New Museum Triennial "The Ungovernables," then in the Guggenheim's 2013 exhibition "No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia," and later as part of TPG's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2016.

According to TPG members Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Phunam, and Matt Lucero, the project drew on input from a focus group they organized that "presented a range of views, from a Chinese American, Vietnamese American, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Indian, and a Tibetan."[1] The Tibetan participant, Tsering Tashi Gyalthang, was reportedly skeptical, as he had faced repression from the Chinese government. "Of course, we weren't promoting the ideology of communism," TPG explained to him. "Rather, we [were] exploring its relationship to capitalist ideology in the form of the television commercial, which we think nods to a larger global shift in the marketplace today."[2] Gyalthang found this answer reassuring and agreed to work with TPG as video director, contributing decisions that became central to the final video. He decided, for example, that the actors would stand entirely still as the camera panned around them, rendering them in contrived states of joy. "Seeing the actors immobile," a TPG member elaborated, "with big smiles, captured these comments of happiness and 'humanism' promised by the communism in the commercial—and it made that communist dream of happiness seem slightly perverse."[3]

Diane Severin Nguyen, IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS, 2021, video, still.

TGP was indeed responding to a societal context that is perverse. Though it is still called the Communist Party, the body that governs Vietnam today could hardly be regarded as committed to communism in practice. Though it could be argued that this rift between the regime's actual governance and Marxist-Leninism opened much earlier—after the North's takeover during the Fall of Saigon after 1975, and perhaps even back to the Viet Minh's consolidation of power after the 1945 August Revolution—the specific dissonance that *Television Commercial for Communism* highlights is life after the 1986 economic reforms known as "Đổi Mới" ("renovation" or "innovation"), which transformed Vietnam into a market socialist economy.

After failed prior attempts, the Đổi Mới reforms successfully reconstructed the country through free-trade policies. After the political resolution of the Third Indochina War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States lifted its trade embargo on Vietnam in 1994. Following recommendations by the IMF and World Bank, the country privatized its state-owned enterprises after reaching a bilateral trade agreement with the United States in 2002, and entered the World Trade Organization in 2007. From 2000 to 2009, the public sector shrunk from employing 60 percent to 20 percent of the population, as the workforce underwent "equitization," or the transfer of public assets to the private sector.

Opinions are split on how best to refer to the present period in Vietnam. Some scholars prefer "late socialism," which signals a continuation or direct derivative from prior systems of governance.[4] Less common is the term "post-socialism," which remains a misnomer because the Communist Party still governs and would censor a word that indicates otherwise. Yet the controversy and baggage of this term—of twentieth-century Cold War dichotomies that are outdated yet maintain a strong hold on the public imagination—make it more instructive than the more common "late socialism" or "socialism with Vietnamese characteristics."

Vietnam's reforms are comparable to China's, which saw a similar trajectory of marketization following an era of centralized planning and collectivization under continued single-party rule; in Chinese academic discourse, "post-socialism" emerged after the renovation period to specifically describe post-Mao state socialism. As the film historian Jason McGrath writes of Chinese art and literature after the 1990s,

> in many ways, this postsocialist condition is shared with the societies formerly subsumed under the Soviet Union and its allies and satellite states, in that, despite their differences, all these states were under the rule of Communist parties with their origins in the 1919 Comintern and the Bolshevik model of the

The Propeller Group, "Communism Brand Guidelines" booklet, produced for a Propeller Group exhibition at MCA Chicago, 2016.

"dictatorship of the proletariat."[5]

Writing in 1989, the historian Artif Dirlik optimistically describes post-socialism as a "radical vision of the future" that "offers the possibility in the midst of a crisis in socialism of rethinking socialism in new, more creative ways."[6] Yet today, in the aftermath of organized communism's chaotic disintegration across Eastern Europe, "post-socialism" carries a much more negative connotation. It's a condition that, as scholar Shu-mei Shih describes, is "constituted in the wake of the failure of twentieth-century revolutionary projects" whose collapse "hastened the onward march toward market economy and neoliberalization, which instituted the liberal humanism of the market as the implicit standard."[7] In this sense then, Shih argues, post-socialism is a nonlocalized condition that not only impacts countries that underwent decommunization but affects people globally and demands a non-unitary perspective on the world.[8]

While the Vietnamese independence movement became a major symbol of Third World resistance for the global left in the twentieth century, and today remains a popular historical comparison, there has been markedly less outside interest in what has become of the project. Within Vietnam, these reflections are mediated—or in some cases, chilled—by a government still in possession of its old censorious powers. This makes it a rich subject for contemporary art with all its abstraction. Art made within Vietnam and across its diaspora after 1989 contains post-socialist observations that are at times nostalgic and ambiguous, at times disenchanted and cynical.[9] Post-socialist art may poignantly reflect the current dissonance—or perversion—of Vietnamese society; at the same time, it risks contributing to a misrepresentation of the country's complex past and the way it presently

operates.

What is Post-socialist Art?

Post-socialist art refers to work made not only in a particular period, but work made possible by particular structural shifts—starting with the opening of communication channels and the rest of the world. It is distinguished by the escalating mixture of private and state—as well as local and international—funding for artistic production and its networks of distribution. Describing these circumstances as they relate to the film industry, scholar Mariam Lam identifies Nguyễn Võ Nghiêm Minh's 2004 *Mùa Len Trâu* (*Buffalo Boy*) as an unprecedented post-socialist film that was primarily shot in Vietnam but largely funded by external sources—highlighting the ways that state-owned production houses selectively collaborate with private entities and foreign film enterprises to compete with the globalized film industry.[10] Similar influences were at work in the formation of the Propeller Group as an advertising-adjacent art collective. Members Tuan Andrew Nguyen and Phunam described their early evolution as such:

> We realized that recording in public without government permission was dangerous. Advertisers, on the other hand, were supported and granted access to public spaces. Accordingly, the group opted to incorporate as an advertising company and obtain a film studio license—to be able to film in public spaces and to distribute content via cinemas and television.[11]

The most emphatically post-socialist work directly references Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and culture. One can think of *Study of the Fluctuation of a Shadow* (2014) by the Hanoian artist Nguyễn Huy An, who is also a member of the performance art collective the Appendix Group. The minimalist drawing depicts the outline of the statue of Lenin in Hanoi, including an equation that the artist devised through calculating the area of the shadow cast by the statue at three o'clock in the afternoon. Though the sketch is reminiscent of a chalk outline of the dead, the description of the artwork remains neutral, simply stating that it is a reflection on "the undeniable significance of Lenin as a political figure in the history of Vietnam … and the way our logic, ideals, and world views have always been contained and impacted by natural forces beyond our control."[12] Such an ambiguous description is customary for art exhibited in Vietnam, and always hints at an effort to evade the state's stringent censorship of any kind of political criticism.

Though in most cases the outright position of the artist who references socialist iconography is hard to discern, some artists do express nostalgia verging on sentimentality. In Trần Minh Đức's 2019 exhibition "We Are Happy to Learn to Be Stars" at the Factory Contemporary Art Gallery in Ho Chi Minh City, the artist took found photographs of schoolchildren performing the choreographed socialist dance "Pink Lotus" and arranged them on a wall, next to a wooden table on which the artist displayed a collection of Đội Viên (Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization) books. Offering instructions on "how to be a young Communist member" (*quy tắc đoàn đội, trò chơi tập thể, trò chơi đoàn đội*), the books contained illustrated lessons for schoolchildren which were suffused with political ideology, moving seamlessly from "how to tie a red scarf" and "how to move in a group" to "how to salute Uncle Ho." The installation is personal, building, as Trần told me in an interview, on his childhood spent singing in a socialist choir, and reflecting "the belief of a person who is born from a socialist country with all the personal, familial memories."[13] As part of the exhibition, Trần staged a performance for which he invited schoolgirls to perform a "Pink Lotus" dance. One by one, the schoolgirls came on stage, in matching pink uniforms and hair accessories, holding orbs of light. They performed a song called "Counting Star" with a static choreography. "People know the big side, the big history," Trần recalled. "These are the little things that I know, the little happier stories that I would share. When the counting star song is performed, it lights up a memory that is inside already, how it's like growing up as a socialist teenager, the formation of the belief."[14]

Trần's work resonates with what the art historian Chang Tan terms "communal aesthetics." This refers to art that engages with the communist legacy in China and with Mao's slogan "art for the masses," in order to revisit how ideologies were felt and lived. These reenactments commemorate personal and collective experience, searching this legacy for an alternate methodology that "explores the communal aspect of art—to create, no matter how fleetingly, an aesthetic utopia where the joy of discovery, expression and creativity is integrated with everyday life." Communal art, as Tan writes, is impossible to reproduce or even document because its material is mainly memory. Even "being there" does not guarantee participation; the performance activates the shared knowledge and experiences that are particular to a community.[15]

Another work that revisits the country's socialist history with surprising ambiguity is Vietnamese-American artist Hương Ngô's *In the Shadow of the Future* (2019). The mixed-media architectural installation references the communal housing structures designed by Jean Renaudie and Renée Gailhoustet in Ivry-sur-Seine, one of Paris's so-called *banlieues rouges* (red suburbs), where many Vietnamese refugees fleeing the War settled. Within the wooden trilateral sculpture modeled after the star-shaped terraced housing complexes, three monitors display a video of a cosmonaut loitering in the neighborhood, interacting with local residents from two unions called l'Union des Jeunes Vietnamiens de France and l'Union

Tran Minh Đức, Đem Sao (Counting Stars), 2019, documentation of performance at the Factory Contemporary Arts Center, Ho Chi Minh City.

Générale des Vietnamiens de France. The cosmonaut is based on Phạm Tuân, a Vietnamese fighter pilot, who became the first Asian space traveler in 1980 when he went into orbit with the Soviet Intercosmos program, as part of the USSR's "friendship diplomacy." On the wall hangs a concrete relief of a newspaper clipping that touts the mission's victory for the Communist Party of Vietnam. *In the Shadow of the Future* poignantly imagines the communist spirit persisting in these refugees who fled their country to practice communal living elsewhere. Their journey tracks a continuation of the communist tradition, one that is both diasporic and disentangled from the nation-state.

Yet what characterizes most post-socialist art is not the continuity but the break––one that's reflected in narratives around Đổi Mới. In 1994, the year Bill Clinton lifted the trade embargo on Vietnam, a *New York Times* article reports, "Pepsico imported the first Pepsi-Cola flavor concentrate the day before the embargo was lifted and began distributing the drink an hour after the White House announced the end of the trade ban."[16] A popped bottle overflowing with pent-up fizz is a fitting image for contemporary art's arrival in Vietnam, after Đổi Mới opened up the country to the world. In a catalog for the exhibition "Uncorked Soul"—one of the first overseas exhibitions of contemporary Vietnamese art, held at Plum Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong in 1991—the art critic Jeffrey Hantover compares Đổi Mới to reform movements such as glasnost and perestroika. Hantover quotes a Vietnamese artist who declares that, thanks to the transition, "originality and diversity had begun to replace the monotony of the collective."[17] As art historians Nora Taylor and Pamela Corey write, "In the early 1990s, it was as if all writing on art centered on this image, the allegory of the once repressed and now suddenly free, liberated, and liberal Vietnam."[18]

While Taylor and Corey question whether the adoption of a market economy in Vietnam translated into a radical refashioning of the arts, it is clear that art after Đổi Mới rejected depictions of collectivity, which now bore the signs of the "old repressive and autocratic regime." Post-socialist art is thus distinguished by this burst of subjectivity that signaled the end of a period of repression.[19] This crude dichotomy between collective conservatism and individualist freedom of expression has long been enforced by the state itself. After the Viet Minh's victory and the formation of the Cultural Association for National Salvation in the 1940s, there were fierce debates among Marxist intellectuals about the relationship between politics and aesthetics. By the 1950s, the Party implemented crude, restrictive guidelines for artistic production. Socialist art was defined against an enemy—the perceived bourgeois decadence of the West. Take Hồ Chí Minh's famous response to an exhibition at the Cultural Association for National Salvation in 1945: "All these paintings are very beautiful but these are

Huong Ngo, In the Shadow of the Future, 2019, video, still.

upper-class beauties. Why don't you make paintings about lower-class beauties around us?" Similarly, in Trường Chinh's 1949 "Marxism and Vietnamese Culture," the general secretary of the Communist Party denounced "cubism, expressionism, and avant-garde art forms" as "sprouted from the rotten wood of imperialist culture." Post-socialism is, then, a reaction to a reaction.

Contradiction

In 2006, The Propeller Group member Tuan Andrew Nguyen (who has built a successful solo career after TPG's official retirement in 2016) created *Proposals for a Vietnamese Landscape,* a series in which he collaborated with a painter who had been employed by the Vietnamese state to paint socialist mobilization posters. One painting in the series, of a sidewalk in Saigon, features a large poster advertisement for Yamaha, where a young woman, sporting jeans and a leather jacket, straddles her new motorbike. She foregrounds what looks to be a spacious vacation house, surrounded by palm trees. The sign reads, "Yamaha New! Pop! Classico! Yamaha Pop Mới." Directly below the advertisement is a socialist-realist poster in which a group of people face a manufacturing plant in unison as a celestial hammer and sickle casts light over their faces. That text reads, " *Tinh thần ngày nam bộ kháng chiến bất diệt* ," or "The spirit of the southern resistance war did not die."

The painting evokes competing notions of "the good life," where people are "drawn into competitive striving and the accumulation of private wealth to keep up with market demands, even as the socialist ethos of harmony, equality, and mutuality persist in official and popular discourse."[20] There is performative happiness in both the advertisement and the mobilization poster, though the former increasingly feels more realist than the latter. Put up decades before, the mobilization poster is faded, looking as outworn as its ideas. The glossy advertisement, in contrast, offer a glimpse of a modern lifestyle—freedom as expressed through consumerism and economic prosperity. As this novel modern fantasy is increasingly manifest in young Vietnamese city dwellers, while old nationalist signifiers fade, communist disenchantment becomes further cemented into Vietnam's visual landscape.

Nguyen states that the paintings in the series attempt to "capture the conflicted visual terrain," where the landscape reveals

> a waged battle between socialist propaganda and capitalist marketing strategies … Working in media and advertising has given us a vantage point from which we can explore the strategies involved in the

Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Proposal for a Vietnamese Landscape #4: Wowy new pop resistance, 2007, oil on canvas.

> creation and widespread dissemination of ideas. And it's not much different than propaganda.[21]

Thirty years after Đổi Mới, this juxtapositional tendency remains a popular feature of art by Vietnamese and diaspora artists. The most prominent recent example may be Vietnamese-American artist Diane Severin Nguyen's blockbuster "IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS" (2021), the artist's first solo institution exhibition, held at Sculpture Center in New York. The film component of the exhibition begins with an orphaned Vietnamese girl washed ashore in Poland. Years later, isolated and alone in Warsaw, she is taken in by a South Korean K-pop dance group. She later appears on-screen in a yellow shirt with red sleeves reminiscent of the Vietnamese flag. As the exhibition text elaborates, "K-pop is used by the artist as a vernacular material to trace a relationship between Eastern Europe and Asia with roots in Cold War allegiances."[22]

To cast these dancers, Nguyen scoured Instagram for K-pop cover groups in Poland, where she reached out to dancers such as Jakub, a rising star and member of Majesty Dance Team. Nguyen also found the main character, Weronika (the most common Polish name), by searching "Weronika Nguyen." The piece functions as a high-concept music video that blends disparate charged imagery and references, from the dancers' goth sportswear clothing to the Stalinist architecture behind their sequences. At SculptureCenter, red carpet covered the floor, in a red-and-yellow color scheme that evoked the Vietnam flag. In the film, gold and red foil balloons spell out the year 1989.

At one point Weronika, after practicing dance moves in an abandoned factory, sits on a bridge overlooking a river and wonders aloud, "Where is there a beautiful surface without its terrible depth?" Weronika's question encapsulates the postmodern sentiment of Nguyen's approach, which strings together unlikely imagery and sources—from Britney Spears lyrics to quotes by Hannah Arendt, Édouard Glissant, Mao Zedong, and Ulrike Meinhof—through loose associative logic. In an artist talk at SculptureCenter, Nguyen explained that she was interested in thinking about the coercive image-making aspect of both

communism and capitalism. The mix of disjointed symbolism—from the autotune pop songs to the dreary Soviet monuments—exemplifies post-socialist art techniques which Tan says are "employed to create a sense of irony. The past is invoked as an awkward juxtaposition of icons and cliches, so that it may be revealed as incoherent, deceptive and fragmentary."[23]

Nguyen's exhibition demonstrates the postmodernity of post-socialism, not only in the ways its decontextualized aesthetics circulate within a global economy of cultural commodification, but also in how this aesthetic generally favors the discursive over the ideological. "What emerged in the ruins of the USSR and its proteges," Tan writes, "was the destructive glee of postmodernism, which is essentially a reaction to utopianism."[24] This destructive glee recalls what Stuart Hall described as "the postmodern argument about the implosion of the real." But what may we conclude from the observation that there is no fixed meaning and that all realities are fragmented? To echo Hall's concern, "there is all the difference in the world between the assertion that there is no one, final, absolute meaning—no ultimate signified, only the endlessly sliding chain of signification, and on the other hand, the assertion that meaning does not exist."[25]

What Happens After the End?

"This is the end of history," a voice-over seductively whispers in the final moments of the film from "IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS." Following the film's ecstatic parade of discordant mashups, this declaration evokes not only Fukuyama but Hall's description of postmodernism as a trap, an endless present: "All you can do is be with it, immersed in it." Though originally expressed in 1986, Hall's cautions against nihilism bear repeating today:

> You can live this as a metaphor, suggesting that certain contemporary positions and ideas are now deeply undermined, rendered increasingly fragile as it were, by having the fact of the world's end as one of their imminent possibilities. That is a radically new historical fact and, I think, it has decentered us all.[26]

Post-socialist art shares postmodernist art's aversion to ideology, equating strong belief—whether it be consumerist desire or political conviction—with indoctrination. In perpetually equating capitalism and communism as equally coercive, what is the effective thrust of post-socialist art? Per Hall, where can we go once we've established that the positions we've inherited have been deeply undermined?

Following its exhibition at SculptureCenter in 2021, *If Revolution is a Sickness* traveled and was reproduced for the Renaissance Society in Chicago and the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston. Like *Television Commercial for Communism*, these presentations were met with resounding press acclaim. Virtuosic artistry notwithstanding, the optics of such glowing reception nonetheless begs the question. What exactly does the art world, or the American art-going public, find so resonant in works that caricaturize the communist legacy?

A cynic might conjecture that post-socialist art functions as a provocative trend, as a type of Red Tourism within contemporary art. Art that's critical of organized communism also comfortably aligns with the anti-communist liberalism that was so foundational to US modern art, a history that feels both belabored and willfully forgotten. When in 1954 the chairman of MoMA's board, August Heckscher, declared the museum's work "related to the struggle of freedom against tyranny," or when Eisenhower designated MoMA as a government proxy, or when the CIA founded the Congress for Cultural Freedom, communism was at the peak of its popularity in the Soviet Union and was spreading across the Third World. This is of course no longer the situation. Post-socialist art, as Tan writes, "not only overlooks the irreducible differences between Modernist and Communist discourse, but also fails to reach a fair assessment of the Communist legacy—as both a theoretical speculation and a political entity."[27] Art that promulgates this view reduces Vietnam's diverse revolutionary heritage to state actions. It also removes Vietnam from the context of the international development of socialism, which in many cases was integrated with the civil rights and anti-colonial movements of the global 1960s. Shih makes a compelling argument that post-socialism erases sixties-era Marxist humanism in particular, which critiqued domination in communist states *from within them*:

> From American discussions of Marxist humanism, we can see how it was what could have linked revolutionary movements along class lines with those of gender and race. Its usefulness therefore cuts across first, second, and third worlds, across communist and capitalist blocs, and across the east and the West.[28]

If post-socialist critique is reductive, individual artists and curators are not the sole culprits—nor are MoMA, Guggenheim, or liberal US cultural institutions. The Communist Party of Vietnam has itself perpetuated a corrupt version of its own history, erasing vibrant internal debates and silencing opposition to state communism, whether from within a Marxist framework or against it. Post-socialist art vividly reflects the strange mutations undergone by the current Party, which has drastically

departed from, yet still rides on, its communist identity. It remains important to inquire, at each instance, whether the appropriation of state-socialist aesthetics illuminates the present's relationship with the past or obfuscates it further.

X

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Personal correspondence with the artist.

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18
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19
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20
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25
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26
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27
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28
Shih, “Is the Post- in Postsocialism,” 43.

This essay is the first of "After Okwui Enwezor," an e-flux journal *series that reflects on the resounding presence of the late writer, curator, and theoretician Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019). Along with a focus on his many innovative concepts like the "postcolonial constellation," the series presents a wide evaluation of Enwezor's curatorial and theoretical practice following other similar initiatives, such as the special issue on Enwezor by the journal he founded,* Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art *. Moving beyond tributes and biography, this series will cover topics such as the relevance of Enwezor's approach to politics, the limits of the exhibition as a form for critique, his conception of modernity and writing on the contemporary, his nomadic epistemology, accounts of his biennials in Seville, Paris, and Venice as institutional critique, and the specific contribution of non-Western artists in the art world.*

—Serubiri Moses, Contributing Editor

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Serubiri Moses

Reason, Cliché, Object: A Few Notes on African Art Exhibitions

> The great literary work … would thus be one that would deconstruct, then reconstruct these clichés.
>
> —Maryse Condé

1.

There are gaps in our understanding of African art and its exhibitions, particularly exhibitions that lie beneath the radar of "must see" shows in New York by well-known curators and artists. It's hard to remember just how many such shows there have been—that is, once we have ticked off the big names. This realization came to me after the revered critic Holland Cotter said in a 2021 presentation that, since Okwui Enwezor passed away in 2019, there had been few or no exhibitions of African art to speak of.[1] Cotter's presentation was a lecture on his professional journey as a writer, from his childhood in Boston to his tenure at the *New York Times*. Cotter acknowledged the influence of both Asian and African art on his sensibility as a critic, and his understanding of the world at large. Yet during the Q and A, he made a largely unsubstantiated claim about the lack of African art exhibitions. I am interested in returning to this claim not to admonish a beloved critic, but rather to take stock of what it means to arrive at such a conclusion. I'll do so through a postmortem review of Enwezor's curatorial career, as well as a survey of African art exhibitions in New York from 2004 to date.

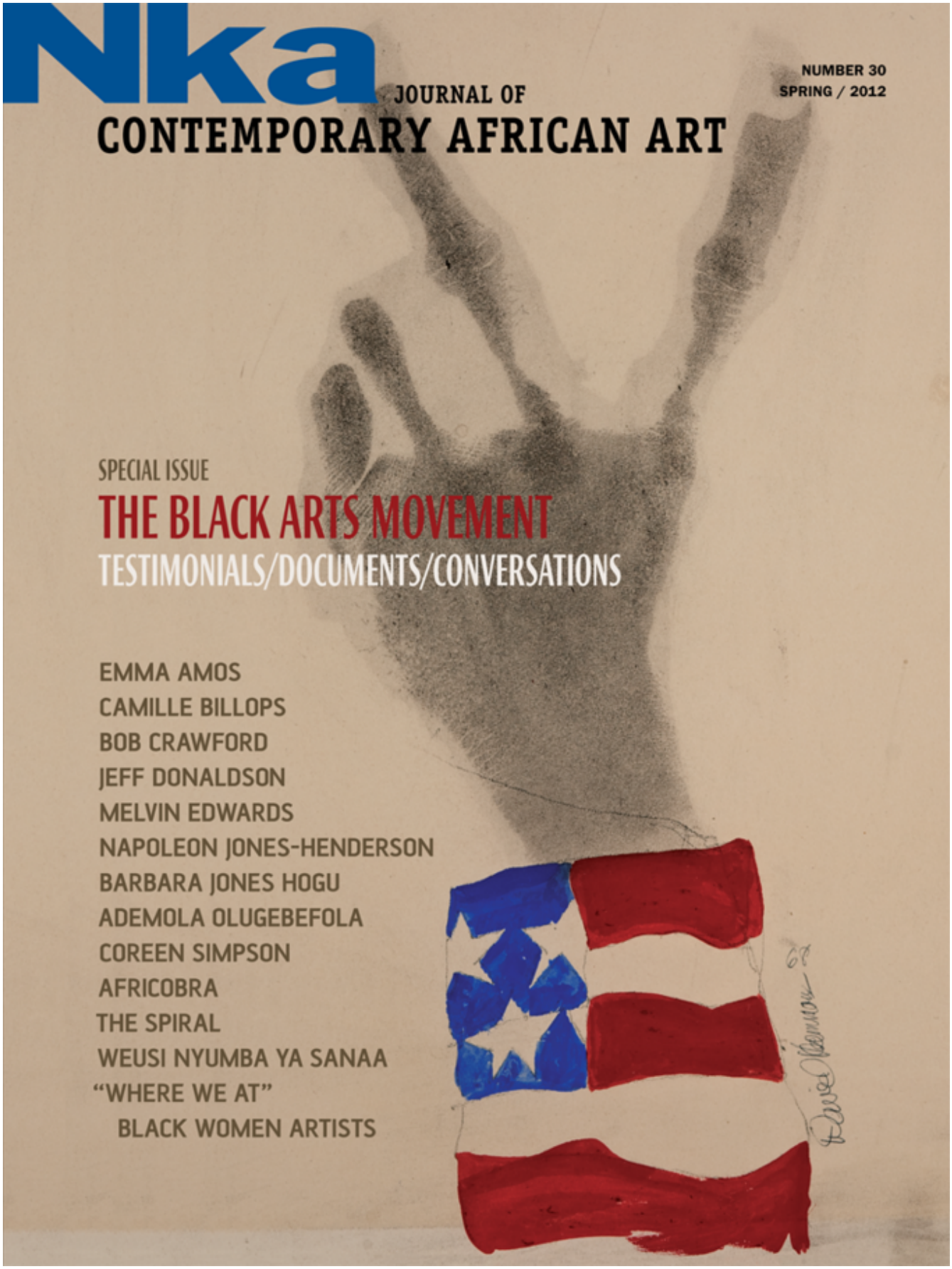
Enwezor, who was born in Calabar, Nigeria in 1963, arrived in the United States in the early 1980s to study political science at a New Jersey college. He went on to

Installation view: In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, May 24–September 22, 1996. Photo: SRGF.

write poetry before founding the contemporary African art journal *Nka* in 1995. His first curated museum exhibition was at an art center in New Jersey, but he became known in the art world first through *Nka*, and then the exhibition "In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to Present" at the Guggenheim in 1996. He was the first Black or African guest-curator to organize an exhibition at the museum since its founding in 1939. The second would arrive more than fifteen years later.[2] In response to Cotter's statement, I have produced a list of thirty exhibitions of African art that have taken place in New York City from 2004 to 2024, according to criteria I'll discuss below.[3] In addition to many solo and group shows, these include three of Enwezor's exhibitions—his magisterial surveys of African and contemporary photography at the ICP museum. What does Cotter's overlooking of these exhibitions mean in relation to the field of art? What does this oversight show about the gaps that exist in the art-historical understanding of what has happened in this field since 2004? New York City is regarded as the center of the art world, and this article considers the city and its context, because the specificity of New York City matters when thinking about any evaluation of art and its distribution, including African art. I also focus on New York City as the primary locus of Enwezor's operations for most of his career (his other main locus was Germany).

There is, to my knowledge, no sustained study of African art exhibitions in New York City since 2004. It is also clear that petty rivalry, and competition within the profession, has only made it more difficult for those studying exhibition history to compile knowledge. It seems that only a few names are seen as truly deserving of the title of "curator" historically—to name a two: Pontus Hultén and Alfred Barr. The task of writing about recent exhibitions in a sustained manner is riddled with questions about curatorial merit. Some curators have outrightly dismissed studying this work; for example, when I curated an archival and bibliographic survey of Elvira Dyangani Ose's curatorial contributions, titled "The Open Work," at Bard College in 2021, Irit Rogoff accused me of advancing mere celebrity and implied that Ose's work is unworthy of academic examination and notation.[4] I have often been surprised by the suggestion, made by a few commentators, that Enwezor is the "only" curator of African art to speak of. Others are looked at as illegitimate: I was shocked when an artist dismissed University of Bayreuth alumna and Ugandan curator Martha Kazungu as "unknown" and therefore unworthy of writing the obituary of an internationally renowned Ugandan artist who had recently died.

One way to account for the last twenty years in African art exhibitions would be to, as Hegel did, apply stereotypes and clichés. His view was that Africa was ahistorical. We can fall prey to this cliché, or we can use this cliché



Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art, Number 30, Spring 2012.

strategically.[5] In the 1980s, African art was by and large considered primitive or backward by the major metropolitan art institutions. The cliché that Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso took inspiration from West African masks continues to hold serious interest, even for Black artists who remain uncritical of African art's definition as more or less a curiosity of the avant-garde.[6] One might say, with evidence, that the focus on historical rather than contemporary African art and the attachment to its attendant clichés is merely due to the collection practices of modern art museums, with their emphasis on modernist art history. But I argue that the reverse is true. Since the 1980s, African artists of all kinds have been collected by Western institutions. Yet Spanish curator Octavio Zaya has argued that the rapid pace at which these artists have entered Western institutions has led to a flattening of their work in museum classification and narration according to regionalism. In 1997, Zaya wrote about the same phenomenon happening to Latin American artists in European art fairs and institutions. Aware of these critiques, I have argued that African art was viewed by leading modern art institutions as coherent and compact, perpetuating the idea that its display could rest purely on cliché without much research into the circumstances of its production or its historical specificity.[7]

In exhibition catalogs and in his rigorous curatorial research, Enwezor pushed back against clichés that Matisse and Picasso took for granted—that African art is compact, pliable, easy, coherent, and without history—as well as the more recent romance with Afro-pessimism. He drew from other African political rhetorical traditions, including those of Négritude, a movement that began in 1930s Paris and consisted primarily of poets and philosophers such as Léopold Sedar Senghor, Léon Gontran Damas, and Aimé Césaire. Later, this movement influenced the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon, in effect intertwining African political rhetorical traditions with currents of existentialism and psychoanalytic theory. Post-Fanonian political theorists Amílcar Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah attempted to refine African Marxism and socialism through these strands of thought.

Négritude was one of the primary vehicles that shaped a new understanding of African art and aesthetic philosophy in the mid-twentieth century, and therefore contributed to the task of making African art legible on terms that were not compromised.[8] Because of Enwezor's training in political science, he understood the philosophical basis of these African political rhetorical traditions, and how to apply them to visual art. His 2002 PS1 exhibition "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994" conceptualized an alternate timeline of aesthetic modernism that coincided with liberation and independence movements. He carefully thought out a "postcolonial constellation" of art that intersected with lessons from Nkrumah, Cabral, Senghor, and others, applying their ideas to the task of transforming history. His bringing together of thought traditions from Europe and Africa was not unique, since Senghor, Nkrumah, Chinua Achebe, and Paulin Hountondji did same in their writing. His attempts to study aesthetic modernism from an alternative timeline followed a precedent set in African thought, especially by Senghor, who extended African political thought to modern and contemporary art.

When I teach Enwezor's exhibitions in the classroom, I usually have students delve into the printed-matter archives of historic exhibitions from the 1990s or earlier.[9] Students have often pointed out how misinformed these exhibitions were, particularly the exhibitions that received criticism for the display of stolen artifacts.[10] After rigorous class discussion and study of museum research and acquisition policies, students have suggested that Enwezor was keen on repairing the broken-down museum policies that allowed stolen objects to be shown publicly or kept in their collections in the first place. That Enwezor was trying to repair the museum and its policies may appear shocking to some, given that, as mentioned earlier, exceptionalist and conservative historical thinking in academic and institutional circles prevents his work from being taken seriously, despite the widespread respect he enjoys.

Looking at my list of thirty African art exhibitions over the last two decades in New York City, I see the impact of Enwezor's thinking, particularly in exhibitions that focus their rhetorical weight on the politics of liberation or on a Fanonian account of psychoanalysis. Two shows come to mind: the 2012 New Museum Triennial, entitled "The Ungovernables" and curated by Eungie Joo and Ryan Inoue, who incorporated a postcolonial reading of "ungovernable" inspired by the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa; and Kader Attia's exhibition "Reason's Oxymorons" (2017) at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, which dealt with a postcolonial reading of psychoanalysis.

The New Museum show included artists such as Emeka Okereke, a documentary photographer who works in Lagos and Amsterdam; Nana Offoriata Ayim, a filmmaker and novelist who focuses on Ghana's rich cultural history; Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, a painter who makes portraits from the imagination; Iman Issa, a sculptor from Cairo who conducts artistic research on historic objects and forms; Hassan Khan, a musician and conceptual artist also from Cairo; and Kemang Wa Lehulere, who makes drawings and sculptures that commemorate important historical events in South Africa. The notion of being "ungovernable" that the curatorial proposal relied on emerged from the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa during the 1970s and was made popular by the anti-apartheid struggle. Joo and Inoue's press release affirmed this position without naming historical figures: "We will make this country ungovernable!" it said. I found an earlier citation of this statement in a 2008 article about former South African president Jacob Zuma's court trial, which attributed it only to an unknown member of a protest group.[11] In a review of "The Ungovernables," art historian

Kader Attia, Reason's Oxymorons, 2015. Photo: Blaise Adilon.

Arnaud Gerspacher wrote skeptically of the show's borrowed concept: "These forms of ungovernability and the artist's 'holographic existence' can equally describe terrorist strategies, something that amounts to an unthinkable occlusion of history."[12] This is to say that the concept has been removed from its historical context, taken as an aesthetic term rather than a tactic. I suspect that Gerspacher's reading was accurate but nevertheless unfair about the decolonial politics the show relied upon.

Other critics viewed the exhibition positively, as an opportunity to learn about artists from around the world. If Gerspacher and other critics took seriously the politics of the exhibition, they did not uncover or write about its roots in the rhetorical approach of, among other figures, South African activist Steve Biko.[13] This may have to do with how the "ungovernable" title came into being—how the curators' citational practice was limited in its grasp of the range and tenor of Black Consciousness. In addition to African artists, the show featured the agit-art of the Propeller Group, a collective working in video and researching the link between myth and politics; Danh Vo, who showed his disembodied Statue of Liberty; and Cinthia Marcelle and Jonathas de Andrade, two artists who look beyond the metropole towards rural and working-class Brazil.

Cotter had this insight: "How ungovernable can artists be who have all, so to speak, attended the same global art school, studied under the same star teachers, from whom they learned to pitch their art however obliquely to one world market?"[14] This question marked the critic's dismissive attitude toward what the curators called the experience of "a generation who came of age in the aftermath of the independence and revolutionary movements." Cotter and others overlooked Biko's Black Consciousness movement and the African National Congress in favor of the excitingly brilliant aesthetics of the exhibition. Had this exhibition been curated by Enwezor, the critical response would have been different, and in fact more positive, as he had come to be accepted as the "only" curator of African art and therefore an authority. I know this because six years earlier, Cotter's review of Enwezor's "Snap Judgments" at the ICP museum took a completely different approach by actively repeating the curator's Afro-pessimist analysis rather than flatly

rejecting it.

Five years after the New Museum show, Kader Attia's exhibition "Reason's Oxymorons" was much more explicit in its presentation of the kind of political traditions focused on psychoanalytic theory and aesthetics that I mentioned earlier. Presenting sculptures that echoed the modernist aesthetics of Mondrian and Brancusi, its title artwork was a network of computer screens in office cubicles that almost filled up the first floor of the building, and which showed looped interviews with philosophers, healers, and psychiatrists. The work was, to this viewer, clearly referencing Martinican psychiatrist Fanon and his research in Algeria, such as his psychological study on the effects of the Algerian war on young soldiers, which constitutes many passages in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. The video interviews covered topics ranging from magic and healing in African religions to the philosophy of Négritude. One of the interviewees in the video is the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, who developed a rigorous study of Négritude.

Yet writer Andrew Stefan Weiner complained that Fanon himself was missing from the interviews of psychiatrists, philosophers, and shamans.[15] It appears that Weiner favored the relatively legible modernist sculpture and its historic African sculpture references. "By and large, the other sculptures in the show successfully achieve the objectives they seem to set for themselves," he wrote, but "it was strange to find hardly any discussion of Frantz Fanon." Attia's show reached for a complexity that absolutely defeated the trope that African art is easy and pliable, going instead for the dense and indecipherable. This strategy of opacity is rooted in rhetorical gestures that Senghor and Sartre deployed in their day. These psychoanalytic and strategic rhetorical gestures echoing earlier African political rhetoric were evidenced in both the New Museum and Lehmann Maupin shows. While these exhibitions were less successful in their rhetorical gestures—for instance, in how the New Museum show decontextualized Biko—the tendency in both exhibitions to work through African political rhetoric was particularly resonant with Enwezor's earlier exhibitions like "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994" (2001).

2.

In 1997, Octavio Zaya—who would soon join Enwezor's curatorial team for Documenta 11 in 2002—wrote an essay arguing that artists living in and/or born outside of Latin America could still be associated with the region despite long-standing curatorial mandates proposing the opposite.[16] These mandates said that Latin American artists were only legitimate if they were born, living, and working in the region. Ironically, Adriano Pedrosa recently suggested that Enwezor was not a legitimate Global South curator because of his decades of residence in the United States and Germany.[17] Zaya titled his essay "Transterritorial," using an anthropology term to describe the changing geopolitical economic and social realities that caused displacement and migration at the time. Zaya wrote that the

> same essentialist view led to the discriminatory decision of the ARCO Committee. For that Committee, the contemporary artistic production of Latin America is coherent, limited, and compact. In geographical terms, it is also supposedly isolated, and therefore, cannot be contaminated, even when the artistic production of Latin America is the result of confrontations, impositions, assimilations, grafts, and appropriations vis-à-vis the various indigenous and foreign cultures. For the Committee, what is produced outside that territory, even though it is the result of activities by those who were or are its inhabitants or their descendants, is not essentially "Latin American."[18]

By addressing the transterritorial, Zaya objected to the essentialist view that artists shown in Latin American art exhibitions had to be physically based and working in Latin America. Revisiting his argument in my own writing, I have referred to the ways that artists outside of the colonial metropoles must relocate in order to then become "emerging" in Western art worlds.[19] Their status as "exotic" others must precede their entry into the mainstream of art and its institutions. For me, art's deterritorialization has much to do with imbalances in relations of art. Thus, art's deterritorialization can be conceived alongside philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who developed the concept of deterritorialization in dialogue with Michel Foucault's writings on power. My aim was never to bog down Zaya's cultural kumbaya or even be pessimistic, but rather to connect imbalances in the relations of art to structures of power.

Zaya pointed to what happens when Latin American artists enter the sphere of the art market, particularly as this field of commerce interfaces with museums more generally. Zaya was aware that the positioning of Latin American Art within the art fairs of Europe would create a snowball effect in how this region's art was displayed within European and American museums and further studied within universities. By arguing for a deterritorialized field of art, I argued against renaming creative practices under the banner of either "Latin America" or "Africa." The rhetorical move of reducing them to geography/identity operates at the level of an original violence, if we follow Jacques Derrida, because it renders this art under new names despite its long duration in an alternative art circuit of the developing world. Effectively, this reinscribes the imbalance of relations in art. When we think about "Africa" as coherent and compact within the art field, it masks these power

relations and capital flows that enable such a compact view to begin with, and overlooks the mechanisms that produce this coherence. Beyond metaphysical and ontological violence, there are consequences to whom or what gets picked as "representative" of the African continent.

What happens when "Africa" is not viewed as so coherent and compact? One example can be found in curatorial work that employs a nonlinear narrative of photography on the continent and a psychoanalytic reading of African archives. Enwezor's show "Snap Judgements: New Positions in African Photography" (2006) at ICP focused on predominantly abstract and nonnarrative documentary photography. It harkened back to the show "In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present" (1996) at the Guggenheim Museum, in which Enwezor offered a vernacular understanding of studio photography, through a nonlinear construction of photography history guided by writings on critical anthropology and modernity. In the catalog for "In/Sight," Enwezor (who cowrote an essay with Zaya) mainly modeled a theory of modernity that followed anthropologists like James Clifford.

Enwezor responded to the ontological challenge of making exhibitions about Africa by saying that modernity exists in the vernacular. He continued to work specifically through the vernacular and the archival, arguably inspired by the South African photographer Santu Mofokeng (1956–2020). Cotter's review of "Snap Judgements" extended some of Zaya's earlier critiques of the way European art fairs named and categorized exotic others from the Global South. He was attuned to Enwezor's strategic use of the idea of play "with Africanness," to "customize it, make it personal, avoid it, ignore it, bring it to the international table and take from that table, while building on the work of their predecessors."[20] These approaches to curating resisted easy clichés.

Enwezor looked to "re-story" Africa by following the example of Chinua Achebe. Achebe's formulations on the "image of Africa" writ large as perilous and horrific enabled Enwezor to theorize Afro-pessimism. He analyzed Leni Riefenstahl's fascistic photographs of Nubian people as the primary example of such images. "Afro-pessimism" is a term that emerged in economic analysis during the 1990s to imply that African economies would cease to develop, and which has since been taken up in Black studies to talk about the continuation of slavery today, for example, in the prison system.[21] In Achebe's 1980 essay on Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Achebe lambasted Conrad for his depiction of African people in the colonial era as obliging fools, and challenged the novelist on his knowledge of African life and interiority more broadly. Enwezor turned this towards an examination of photography. In an obituary for Achebe published in *Artforum* in 2013, Enwezor wrote that

> in my own work as a writer, critic, and curator, Achebe's critical example of re-storying Africa was enormously influential. I came to curating and to writing about art with the same fervent belief that modern and contemporary African art, and the creative vision of African artists, mattered in the mainstream narratives of our era's art.[22]

3.

My list of thirty exhibitions of African art produced in New York since 2004 includes not only artists based on the continent, but also those who were born there and migrated to other locations, or who were born outside of the continent to African parents. According to the curatorial mandates at European art fairs that Zaya described in 1997, most of these artists would not even qualify as "African art," and indeed their work is not often described in these terms. This applies to exhibitions by Julie Mehretu at the Whitney Museum (2021), Kapwani Kiwanga at the New Museum (2022), Kehinde Wiley at the Brooklyn Museum (2015), Wangechi Mutu at the New Museum (2022), Nicholas Moufarrege at the Queens Museum of Art (2019), Toyin Ojih Odutola at the Whitney Museum (2017), William Kentridge at MoMA (2010), John Akomfrah at the New Museum (2018), Bouchra Khalili at MoMA (2015), and Kayode Ojo at 52 Walker / David Zwirner (2024). Shows of artists predominantly based on the continent include El Anatsui at the Brooklyn Museum (2013), Tracey Rose at the Queens Museum (2023), and Frédéric Bruly Bouabré at MoMA (2022). Undoubtedly the presence of so many contemporary art shows is a shift from 1989, when Africanist scholars at the Arts Council of the African Studies Association were only then asking: "What are we going to do about contemporary African art?" John Povey asked this question at the time because he understood that more African contemporary art was being shown in Paris, London, and New York, even though critics, curators, and scholars paid little attention to it.

Some survey exhibitions have broken ground in other areas of art-historical research. Suheyla Takesh's "Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s to 1980s" (Grey Art Gallery, NYU, 2020) contributed an interesting perspective to the debate on North African artists in modern painting by showing artists Mohammed Melehi, Ibrahim El-Salahi, and Mohammed Khadda. Although not included in my list because it did not take place in New York, "Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt, 1938–1948" at the Centre Pompidou (2017), curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath at the invitation of Catherine David, focused on Egyptian surrealist painters like Ramses Younan. Similarly, Leslie King-Hammond and Lowery Stokes Sims's exhibition "The Global Africa Project" (2010) at the Museum of Art and Design in New York brought a new perspective on the intersection of contemporary African design and visual art.

These historical surveys have educated curators working in art's mainstream, and have contributed valuable scholarship. The commercial gallery Skoto has presented mini-surveys of mid-century artists like El-Salahi and Uche Okeke in New York, and the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair has held court in the city since 2015.

Some shows were inspired by, or in dialogue with, the 1980s identity politics movement. The Brooklyn Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem have often shown African artists. On my list of exhibitions over the last twenty years are Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's "Any Number of Preoccupations" (2010), which was accompanied by the scholarship of Okwui Enwezor, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya's group show "Evidence of Accumulation" (2011), both at the Studio Museum in Harlem. There was the thematic group show "Global Feminisms" (2007) at the Brooklyn Museum, which included Tracey Rose and Ingrid Mwangi among others. The solo mini-survey exhibitions of Rotimi Fani-Kayode at Hales Gallery (2022) and the Artur Walther Collection (2012)—the latter accompanied by the scholarship of Kobena Mercer—remind us of the connection of African art to gay and feminist liberation. Gordon Robinchaux Gallery, clearly inspired by Black, women's, and gay liberation movements, has showed Leilah Babirye in a 2022 solo exhibition, accompanied by a monograph.

Since Enwezor's time, a new generation of African curators has emerged. Outside of the smash hits and blockbusters mentioned earlier, there have been a number of focused, concise exhibitions, including "States of Becoming" (2022), a group show focused on diaspora and memory curated by Fitsum Shebeshe at the Africa Center in collaboration with ICI. Oluremi C. Onabanjo has curated Lagos photographers at MoMA, and though outside of New York City, Amber Esseiva has curated numerous solo and group exhibitions dedicated to Black and African artists at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. Other exhibitions have pushed the definition of group or thematic shows, including "Black Melancholia" (2022) curated by Nana Adusei-Poku, and "The Open Work" (2021) curated by myself, both at Bard College. Larry Ossei-Mensah has curated a number of similar exhibitions at smaller galleries and works professionally through his consultancy ArtNoir.

Contrary to Holland Cotter's statement, there have been many exhibitions of African art since Enwezor's 1996–2013 period in New York and elsewhere. In order to dismantle fantasies and clichés, such as the idea that African art is pliable, compact, or easy to summarize, some exhibitions have shown that valuable psychoanalytic and strategic tools can come from staging a dialogue between African political rhetorical traditions and Western discourses on art, culture, and philosophy. Gerspacher and Cotter saw this use of African political rhetoric as flawed when it didn't come from Enwezor—when it came instead from, for example, Attia or Joo and Inoue. I argue that this attitude derives from the view that Enwezor is the only African art curator, which leads his work to be treated as an exception rather than a precedent.

My response to Zaya's view of the compact and coherent presentations of Latin American artists at European art fairs is to suggest that, rather than only an epistemic problem, lumping artists together under "African Art," without clarifying what we mean by "Africa" or without doing significant research, is a problem of the imbalanced relations of art. The curators doing the lumping, such as Adriano Pedrosa, seem to be saying that some art can only be grasped through intense research, and some art can be grasped quite easily. I propose that we take seriously the ways that art and artists travel, and by not penalizing folks for arriving "late," because they may have been known elsewhere for much longer.

The range of exhibitions of African art in New York City has been dizzying in subject matter, genre, medium, and curatorial approach, though many problems persist. It is not only that power relations are imbalanced, but that young curators continue to be treated as tokens, unknowns, or even as idiots. No profession thrives if it does not recognize any practitioners beyond its top two or three most famous. Moving forward, it is difficult to imagine that petty rivalries will abate. It seems unlikely that the racism (the unfair judgment of the work and experience of African curators) will go away. The trenchant pessimistic attitude that Africa will never develop its own museums is evidence of that. Prior to his death, Enwezor himself was foggy on the issue of whether to shift focus to exhibitions on the African continent, preferring to curate and write for institutions in Euro-America. Perhaps even he had difficulty avoiding how the evolutionary logic of racist pseudoscience has passed down a belief that some art is more developed than others—a legacy we still have to actively confront.

Okwui Enwezor photographed by Oliver Mark, Kassel, 2002. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

X

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1
This statement was made by Holland Cotter during a talk at the Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. Cotter was invited as a guest lecturer for an elective graduate seminar on "Contemporary African Art" in September 2021.

2
The second Black guest curator to organize an exhibition at the Guggenheim was Chaédria LaBouvier, with the Jean Michel Basquiat exhibition "Defacement" in 2019.

3
This inconclusive list includes at least twenty-three solo or group exhibitions in New York museums, including major surveys for artists like Kehinde Wiley, John Akomfrah, Tracey Rose, and Wangechi Mutu, among others. It includes six solo exhibitions at New York commercial galleries including Skoto, Perrotin, and Lehmann Maupin. The list includes work by curators such as Kevin Dumouchelle, Oluremi C. Onabanjo, Naomi Beckwith, Suheyla Takesh, Sohrab Mohebbi, Leslie-King Hammond, and Lowery Stokes Sims, among others.

4
This is based on a personal exchange between the curator and author via email concerning the exhibition "The Open Work."

5
Hegel claimed that Africa had no history. "What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit still caught in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of world history." G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures in the Philosophy of History* , trans. Ruben Alvarado (Wordbridge, 2017). I am also thinking of Maryse Condé's interest in the deconstruction and reconstruction of stereotypes and clichés. See Dawn Fulton, *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Condé and Postcolonial Criticism* (University of Virginia Press, 2008).

6
In a 2024 public discussion between Arthur Jafa and Simone White, Jafa talked about African retentions before pivoting to a discussion of African art. His views diverged from White's. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4miadpwgEo .

7
Serubiri Moses, "Content Sharing and Mistranslation: On Global Aspirations and Local Infrastructures," in *Forces of Art: Perspectives from a Changing World* , ed. Carin Kuoni et al. (Valiz, 2021).

8
Okwui Enwezor, "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994. An Introduction," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberations Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* , ed. Okwui Enwezor and Chinua Achebe (Prestel, 2001).

9
I have taught a full graduate seminar on Okwui Enwezor in the art history department at Hunter College, and have featured his exhibitions in a graduate seminar at Bard College and an undergraduate seminar at New York University. Here I am referring to graduate students in Hunter College's art history department.

10
See Olabisi Silva, "Africa 95: Cultural Celebration or Colonialism?," in *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* , no. 4 (1996).

11
"Before a Zuma court appearance in September 2008: 'If you don't leave Jacob Zuma alone we will make this country ungovernable …', attributed to an unknown member of the protest group from the ANCYL outside the court as they burnt an effigy of Thabo Mbeki." J. C. M. Venter and A. Duvehage, "The Polokwane Conference and South Africa's Second Political Transition: Tentative Conclusions on Future Perspectives," *Koers* 73, no 4 (2008) https://scielo.org.za/pdf/koers/v73n4/03.pdf .

12
Arnaud Gerspacher, "New Museum Triennial, 'The Ungovernables,'" *e-flux Criticism*, March 17, 2012 https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/233431/new-museum-triennial-the-ungovernables .

13
For a sustained reading of Steve "Bantu" Biko's political writing and his contribution to the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, see Tendayi Sithole, *The Black Register* (Polity Press, 2020); and T. Sithole, *Steve Biko: Decolonial Meditations on Black Consciousness* (Lexington, 2016).

14
Holland Cotter, “Quiet Disobedience,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2013.

15
Andrew Stefan Weiner, “Kader Attia’s ‘Reason’s Oxymorons,’” *e-flux Criticism* , February 28, 2017 https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/239851/kader-attia-s-reason-s-oxymorons .

16
Octavio Zaya, “Transterritorial: The Spaces of Identity and the Diaspora,” *Art Nexus*, no. 25 (1997) http://universes-in-universe.de/artnexus/no25/zayaeng.htm .

17
“I am the first Latin American curator to be appointed as an artistic director of the visual art sector of the Biennale. Though, I’m not the first curator from the Global South, because Okwui Enwezor was of course a curator before me. But I’m the first one actually living and based in the Global South.” See https://www.frieze.com/article/adriano-pedrosa-venice-biennale-2024-interview .

18
Zaya, “Transterritorial.”

19
Moses, “Content Sharing and Mistranslation.”

20
Holland Cotter, “Nontraditional Angles on an Africa Seldom Exposed,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2006.

21
See Okwui Enwezor, “The Uses of Afro-Pessimism,” in *Snap Judgements: New Positions in African Photography* (ICP, 2006); and Kevin Okoth, “The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought,” *Salvage*, January 16, 2020 https://salvage.zone/the-flatness-of-blackness-afro-pessimism-and-the-erasure-of-anti-colonial-thought/ .

22
Okwui Enwezor, “Chinua Achebe,” *Artforum* 51, no. 10 (Summer 2013).

Irmgard Emmelhainz

Gut Brain: Destructive Desires and Other Destinies of Excess

Life is at the center of what constitutes reality. You don't live off of what you eat, but off of what you digest.

1. The Still Life and the Biology of Inflammatory Disease

Yoshúa Okón's video installation *Freedom Fries: Still Life* (2014) presents a mise-en-scène of the deadly aspects of globalized forms of desire as well as the injurious forms of interdependency that sustain human life on earth. The title alludes to Republican politicians' renaming of French fries in the US in reaction to France's opposition to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. To be free, in this context, means being free to have a liberal market that offers McDonald's fries, free to invade foreign countries, free to fight imperial wars, free to make McDonald's fries available to Iraqis.

Okón's installation, shown at the University Museum of Contemporary Art at UNAM in Mexico City in 2017–18, comprises a single-channel video, a sculpture, and a photographic triptych. Okón convinced the manager of a McDonald's to let her use the restaurant as a set for a whole night and a client to act as a model for the photographic part of the piece. In the video, a large white woman lies diagonally on a table at a McDonald's booth. The pose of the model is reminiscent of Peter Paul Rubens's *The Hermit and the Sleeping Angelica* (1626–28), but unlike Angelica, whose face is upturned, Okón's model is turned around, covering her face with her arm. The fact that we cannot see her face, her faceless body crudely displayed like meat on a slab, makes the image disturbing, more a still life (as the title states) than a portrait.

McDonald's functions as a sign of the corporate model that, under the guise of consumer freedom, dehumanizes bodies through offering them ultra-processed foods and uncomfortable modular seating. Although it is as difficult to look at the woman's body as it is to look away, the focus of the piece is not only her: as we notice the rhythm of her heavy breathing, we also notice the circular motion of a brown man's arm in the background. He is meticulously cleaning the window that bears the fast-food restaurant's logo. In his refusal to portray the woman's face, the artist replicates mainstream society and corporations' dehumanization of the condition of being obese. The piece is about pressing issues such as what it is like to be a large person in a fat-shaming world, what kinds of social discrimination fat people experience, and how that can be alleviated. Yet it is also about the biopolitical underpinnings of the global obesity epidemic. It posits obese and brown bodies as physical evidence of a racialized neoliberal system whose ideologies promote a model of freedom based on excess consumption and underpaid migrant labor. Moreover, *Freedom Fries: Still Life* shows how mainstream society has privatized the

Jo Ann Callis, Forbidden Pleasures (XIV), 1994. Courtesy of the artist.

problem of being fat, framing it as a matter of unhealthiness, immorality, and disease rather than systemic necropower.

Necropower is the global apparatus that produces diseased and addicted bodies in order to manage remaindered populations. This is done through the processed products of the for-profit food-pharmaco-industrial complex, which both relies on and contributes to the dismantling of social welfare infrastructures.[1] Okón's installation also accounts for how McDonald's profits from violence to nonhuman life, rendering it vulnerable to necropower as well. The sculpture that accompanies the video is made up of typical McDonald's furniture: a modular seating arrangement comprising two chairs facing each other. Instead of a table, an amorphous body made up of three animal carcasses holds the module together, referencing the classical genre of still-life painting. Okón is clearly referencing Rembrandt's *The Slaughtered Ox* (1655), an example of the painting genre that emerged in the Northern and Spanish Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Paintings of beef are a category of their own in the genre of still life. They proliferated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but not much has been written about them. Some prominent examples of such paintings include Francisco de Goya's *Still Life: A Butcher's Counter* (1810–12), Gustav Caillebotte's *Calf's Head and Ox's Tongue* (1882), Chaim Soutine's *Carcass with Beef* (1925), and Francis Bacon's *Figure With Meat* (1952). Like Bacon's painting, which should be read in the context of postwar art, twentieth-century filmic portrayals of animal slaughter emphasize the connections between dehumanization and the emotionless treatment of nonhumans. Georges Franju's *Le Sangue des Bêtes* is a black-and-white documentary from 1949 showing

After Peter Paul Rubens, Angelica Spied On by the Hermit, between 1626 and 1800. License: Public domain.

everyday scenes from the Parisian suburbs juxtaposed with scenes from a slaughterhouse, where men and women methodically butcher horses, sheep, and calves.

The mechanical slaughter of animals for human consumption—along with the conditions under which they are made to live, the massive deforestation required to raise them, and the automation of their treatment—can be connected to the increasingly mechanized abuse of Indigenous populations across the world under the aegis of mid-century modernization. Another slaughterhouse that comes to mind appears in Rubén Gámez's 1965 experimental film *La fórmula secreta (Coca-cola en la sangre*) (The secret formula [Coca-Cola in the blood]), an experimental film critical of Western "development" policies in Latin America. The cost of these policies has been massive impoverishment, the degradation of physical and human ecologies through resource extraction, epidemics, and the murder of Indigenous people.[2] Gámez explicitly draws analogies between veal slaughter and the disappearance and displacement of Mexico's Indigenous populations. Both Franju's and Gámez's representations of industrial meat production allude to the industrialization of the administration of life and death of all kinds.

With these historical referents in mind, one might read *Freedom Fries: Still Life* as a comment on the way the corporatization of food production has made autoimmune and inflammatory illnesses, caused in part by microbiome depletion and in part by the ingestion of nonnutritious food, the main causes of death across the world.[3] The destruction of the old agricultural order, along with poverty, oppression, and environmental stressors, have induced lifelong changes to hormones and tissues that persist across lifespans as well as generations.[4] On the one hand, people dealing with poverty are not able to access nutritious foods due to price barriers and food deserts. In Mexico, for example, one of the effects of NAFTA has been that most Mexicans have been priced out of eating ancestral foods.[5] On the other hand, eating has become inextricably tied to food-as-commodity, and

Yoshúa Okón, Freedom Fries: Still Life, 2014, film still. Courtesy of the artist.

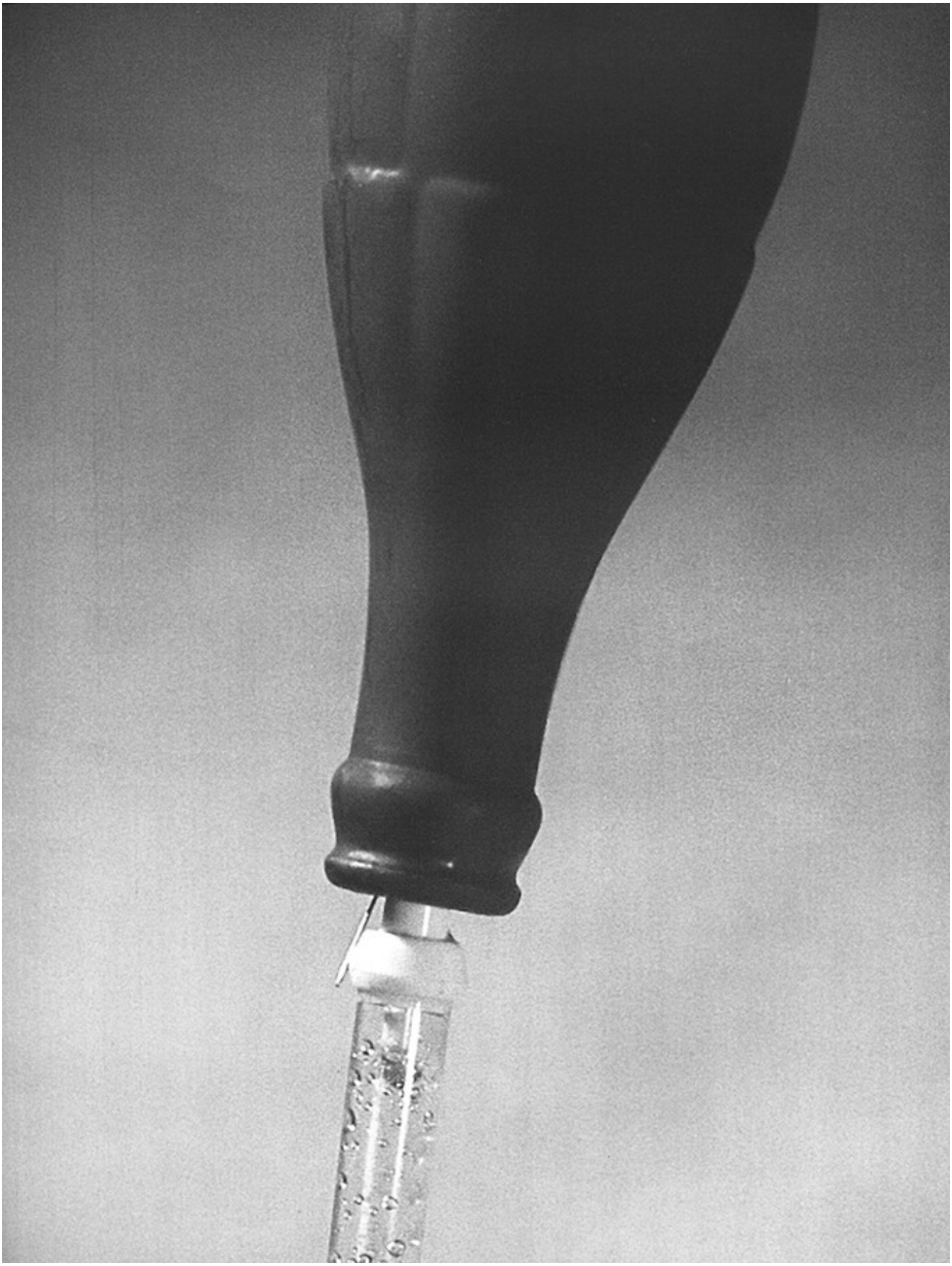
eating choices are social-class signifiers. Again in Mexico, having access to ultra-processed foods at Costco, Domino's, or Burger King has become an aspirational choice. As medical anthropologist Alyshia Galvez argues, NAFTA radically changed Mexicans' eating habits and preferences, from a milpa-based diet centered around corn, beans, and squash, with occasionally meat or poultry, to a US-American diet based on dairy, meat, grains, and sugar, leading to national epidemics of diabetes and obesity.[6]

In our era of ultra-processed foods, which is also the era of absolute extractivist capitalism, the violent legacies of colonialism have intensified into forms of necropower through sociopolitical and economic war, but also through the distribution of inflammatory and autoimmune illness across vulnerable communities, especially women, trans people, lesbians, and girls.

2. Excess and the Desire for Self-Destruction

Rather than nourishment or medicine, industrial food has become an excess substance that has transformed eating into a libidinal activity. The consumption of ultra-processed foods clearly and directly indicates the way necropower works and the extent of its reach. This comes across in Jo Ann Callis's series of staged photographs *Cheap Thrills and Forbidden Pleasures* (1993), where the artist presents pastries and cakes in sensual tones and textures, like a marketing campaign. The images are anthropomorphic and sexually suggestive: cream oozes erotically from buns, "a golden-crusted apple pie has a gaping hole in the center, baked juices [are] ready to spill, nestled in a sea of yellow chiffon."[7] The series stokes the visual appetite, representing the desire to ingest in excess.

We cannot deflect the blame for people's health problems onto individual spending choices in a "free" market; nor can we overlook the structural changes in the global food system that have transformed food into a commodity and citizens into consumers. Okón's video installation shows how unhealthy obesity is a symptom of a toxic world, where pleasurable commodities are manufactured through exploited labor and extractivism, yet fat people are shamed. This applies not only to foods but to all sorts of harmful products, such as perfumes, cleaning solutions, and clothes laden with toxic chemicals.[8] The character of Carol White, the protagonist of Todd Haynes's visionary film *Safe* (1993), embodies the paradox and paranoia of living in a toxic world. Carol is a suburban housewife who believes that the chemicals in objects and substances around her make her sick, so she secludes herself in the fictional Arizona town of Wrenwood, a community where people "allergic to the twentieth century" come to heal. The community is portrayed as a cult of misunderstood people with a mysterious illness that is medically impossible to diagnose. In retrospect, this mysterious



Rubén Gámez, La fórmula secreta (Coca-cola en la sangre), 1965, film still, detail.

illness could be microbiome depletion due to antibiotics overuse and changes in our diet. Microbiome loss is related to immune-system maladaptation and is linked to chronic inflammatory illness and the growth of mental health disorders.[9]

3. The Technosphere, Microbiome Depletion, and Inflammatory Illness

Inflammatory disease underlies all the leading global killers in industrialized places.[10] This is caused by the proliferation of ultra-processed foods as well as toxic chemicals and substances that have disrupted our bodily functions, as much as by the sociopolitical and environmental structures around us, which have turned the immune system against itself.[11] Raj Patel and Rupa Marya, authors of *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice,* argue that inflammation is a natural response to threats that originate in the separation of humans from the web of life (and their domination by what has been called the technosphere.)[12] All inhabitants of the planet are now vulnerable to autoimmune illnesses (IBS, Crohn's disease, celiac disease, food allergies) and inflammatory diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's, depression, fibromyalgia, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and anxiety. Because microbes in our gut confer protection against inflammatory disease, microbiome dysbiosis, or gut flora imbalance, has even proven to be a source of attention-deficit disorders and autism.[13] One of the main reasons for gut dysbiosis is a lack of fiber in our diet; another is soil depletion through agro-industry, which diminishes the variety of bacteria needed to replenish our microbiome.

The origin of the technosphere is Western culture's treatment of nature as a "resource." Modern societies were built by treating nature as simple matter for extraction and by putting other living beings to work according to human will and needs. Maria Puig argues that in the late 1950s, anxieties about population growth and imminent famine (particularly in Asia) drove the techno-scientific complex that set in motion the so-called Green Revolution.[14] Agro-industry combined artificial fertilizers with chemical pesticides to produce unprecedented yields. The negative consequences are the destruction of soil (erosion, pollution, nutrient depletion) and water, and now the loss of food security worldwide.[15]

From this perspective, an inflamed body suffering from chronic illness might be compared to a river devoid of biodiversity, a burning forest, or a warming ocean filled with dying coral reefs. Marya and Patel have made such comparisons; so has disability theorist Sunaura Taylor, who writes about the parallels between the state of our environment and the states of disabled bodies.[16] The luxurious expenditure of energy that drove industrialization led to a global interdependent economic system that generates waste unassimilable by nature's cycles, producing intoxication, global warming, and mass extinction. In sum, the inheritance of modernity is a predatory system that considers part of humanity as well as nature expendable. The notion of nature as distinct from humanity, and as malleable, has radically changed the planet, bringing all its living systems to the brink of collapse.

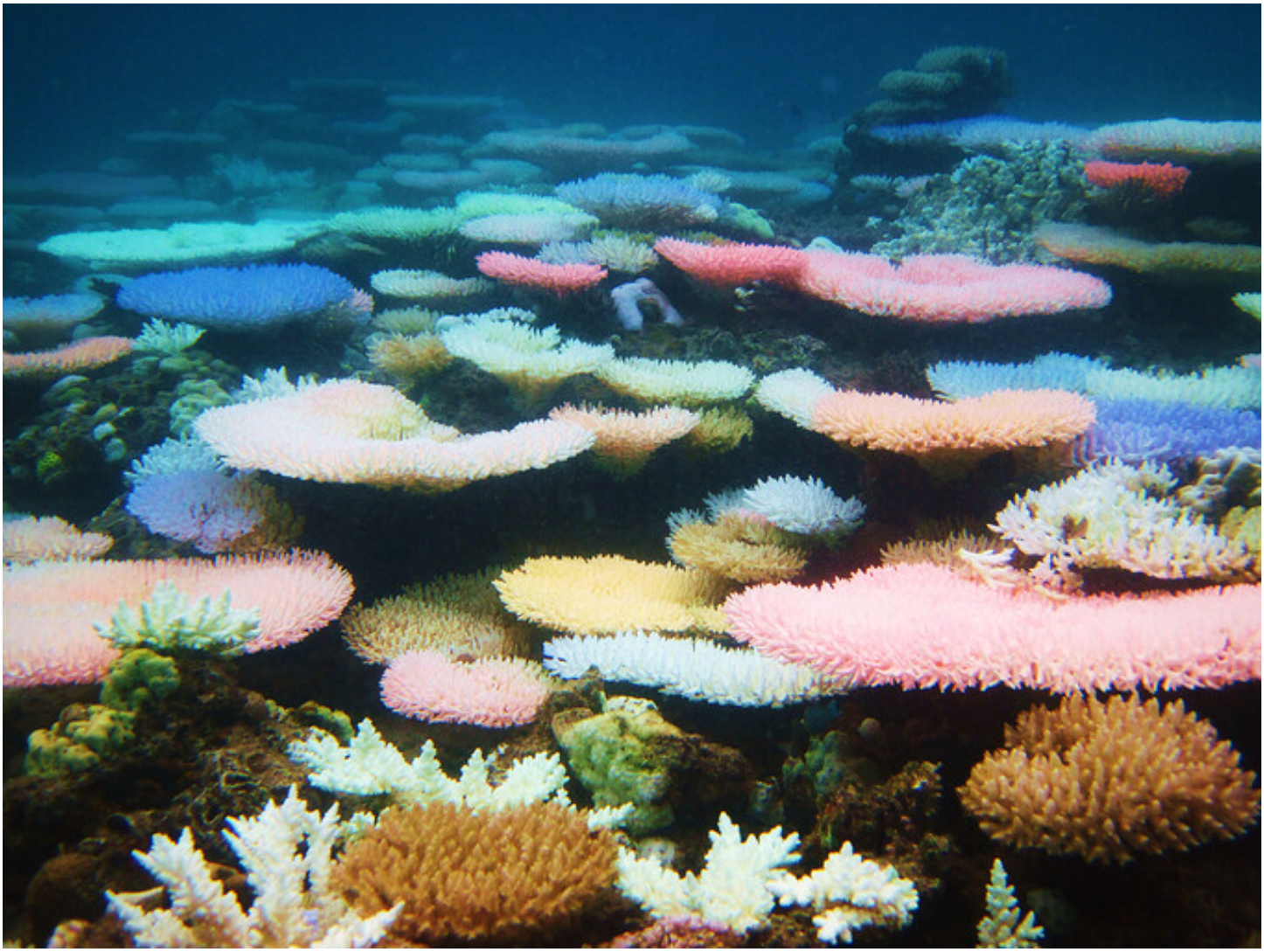
This continues to be driven by consumerism as the primary human relationship to one's subjecthood. The result is individualist hedonism, the fantasy that death can be negated, and the mandate to pursue individual happiness while considering suffering as a personal failure. Clearly the food system we rely on and the chemical products we consume damage us and the planet. Why are we doing this to ourselves?

4. Mutations in Desire

In his last lectures, given in 2016 and published posthumously as *Postcapitalist Desire*, British theorist Mark Fisher observed that when he visited the Occupy Wall Street encampment in 2012, the protesters were all carrying iPhones and drinking Starbucks coffee. He concluded that they weren't hypocrites, but that they didn't really want what they said they wanted (which was an end to financial capitalism). In Fisher's view, the protesters said they wanted to live in a different world and find means to create wealth beyond capitalism, but the problem was precisely that at the level of libidinal desire, they were committed to living within the current capitalist world despite their knowledge that it was leading to civilizational collapse.[17]

Recall Jean-François Lyotard's controversial statement about peasants and the unemployed (which also applies to colonized subjects): in his view, the process of modernization was made possible through its promises of fulfilling desire. Lyotard wrote: "They enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed on them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages."[18]

Many people's incapacity to desire beyond the options provided by extractivist capitalism is due to the fact that we have come to valorize individuality and identify ourselves with what we consume, leaving us disconnected from each other and from reality. Almost a hundred years ago, French theorist Pierre Klossowski argued that under capitalism, even our bodies have been determined by unlimited production: "Bodily presence is in itself already a commodity, independently of (and in excess of) the commodities its presence helps to produce."[19] From this perspective, we can understand individualist hedonism as the internalization of the larger capitalist system that exploits objects in order to isolate and individualize pleasure.



A rare moment caught on camera when corals under heat stress turn vibrant colors usually preceding full coral bleaching and death. Palawan, Philippines, 2010. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

Excess consumption due to hedonistic desires grounded in capitalist infrastructure (the technosphere) is a form of necropower. It has led us to inter-relational toxicity and codependent empathy (both linked to cycles of gender violence),[20] inherited trauma, and the trauma of capitalist labor alienation. This stems from what I call, following Félix Guattari, the crisis of relationality,[21] which has also been elaborated by Franco "Bifo" Berardi. The crisis of relationality is due to neoliberalism and digital acceleration. According to Bifo, desire is a factor of intensity in our relationships with one another, and it is not reducible to a sexual dimension. In his view, the dematerialization (digitalization) and disembodiment of communicative exchange has moved desire into a hyper-semiotic dimension, mutating desire further away from sexuality and manifesting in a condition of isolation. Desire is reinvented and expressed in a semiotic form, purely phantasmic. It takes the shape of anxiety, self-mutilation, and aggression.[22]

One of Baruch Spinoza's most quoted propositions is from his *Ethics*, published in 1677. It states: "Every object makes an effort, as much as it is within its reach, to preserve its being."[23] In Spinoza's conception, the essence of humanity is the morally good and rational striving for self-preservation and for the preservation of other humans. Arguably, the above-mentioned crises in desire and relationality are part of what is leading us to self-destruction, or acting against our self-preservation. This behavior is a form of perversion, according to Klossowski's reading of Sade, Bataille, and Spinoza—the "perversion" that comes with industrialization. Perversion here is not conceived in moral terms, but means rather that industrialization altered human passions by creating a sensible regime of phantasms[24] that are channeled into the cycles of capitalist production and consumption, leading to automatism, as Klossowski put it.[25] The sensible regime of phantasms is fed by the constant creation of new needs that nourish the chain of the

production, acquisition, consumption, and waste of industrial products. In this scenario, use value has been replaced by exchange value. For Klossowski, the perverse elaboration of phantasms and the fabrication of use-objects are divergent processes, in the sense that the elaboration of the phantasm is bound up with the use of pleasure and not with an object's use value. Fulfilling daily needs as basic as food through industrial methods is not only extractivist but is traversed by perverted libidinal fluxes (market forces). We could think of the perversion and individualization of desire in tandem with modernity and consumerism, which are intrinsically linked to necropower and express themselves in the body and between bodies: from the global epidemic of inflammatory disease to the global epidemic of (gender-based) violence.

5. An Archeology of Inflammation: The Automatization of Female Desire through Seduction as the Motor for Consumption

In *Passagenwerk*, Walter Benjamin's study of Parisian shopping halls and thus of the nineteenth century, Benjamin argued along lines similar to Klossowski. He writes that the vital nerve of capitalism is fetishism (the phantasm), which prompts the subject to succumb to the sex appeal of merchandise. While Benjamin elaborates on the figure of the flaneur, the *Passagen* is the site where the shopper is fabricated.

The figure of this shopper is described at length by Émile Zola in his novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies' Delight*) (1863). Zola recounts the details of an era that saw the invention of mass publicity, great sales, discounts, home delivery, systems of return, and commodity novelty, all primarily geared toward a feminine clientele. He took inspiration from the great Parisian department stores inaugurated around then: Le Bon Marché and Les Magazins du Louvre. The department store is the subject and the stage of a narrative about the primordial scene of capitalism. Zola describes the internal mechanisms of the shop from the perspective of the employees. Many conflicts emerge because of malicious gossip they spread in their struggle to rise through the ranks. In the incipient modern world portrayed by the novel, people had to fight to find their places in society, they were vulnerable to temptations, their vices were awakened by the commodities on offer, and they were anxious to splurge. In the novel, Zola documents the incipient "dessessity" (a term for the combination of desire and need coined by Amaia Pérez Orozco[26]) of consumers to waste what they buy and shows the slow agony of small commerce and the arrival of professional sellers skilled in attracting (female) buyers.

Remedios Varo, the surrealist Spanish painter who took refuge in Mexico, represented the embodiment of feminized conspicuous consumption in a 1956 painting titled after Zola's novel. The painting is inhabited by feminine figures mounted on monocycles or wheels, analogous to "insects or ants," as she calls them. Varo describes the work as follows:

> Creatures fallen into the worst mechanization, all their body parts have become small wheels, etc., at the shop they sell the pieces they desire to buy to replace their old parts, creatures of our era, without ideas of their own, mechanized and ready to pass on to the state of insects, particularly ants.[27]

In this paragraph describing her painting, made almost a hundred years after Zola's book was written, Varo mentions the word "mechanization" twice. The figures, she says, are mechanized through wheels, which the creatures use to flock to the same place: the shop where all their desirable replacements parts are sold. The creatures and the pieces are all homogenous except for their red and green colors. The ant-buyers, according to Varo, are mechanized because they lack their own ideas, as their desires have been preprogrammed by the department store: their senses are overwhelmed by their desire for the merchandise, presented to them seductively and intoxicatingly.

In his novel, Zola lays out the mutation in desire brought about by consumption targeting women specifically, explaining it as a form of exploitation through sexual seduction:

> It was for woman that all the establishments were struggling in wild competition; it was woman whom they were continually catching in the snares of their bargains, after bewildering her with their displays. They had awakened new desires in her flesh, before which she fatally succumbed, yielding at first to reasonable purchases of articles needed in the household, then tempted by her coquetry, and finally subjugated and devoured.[28]

By drawing out the specific femininity of the world of consumption, seduction, and the rush of shopping and modern life, Zola's novel and Varos's painting pinpoint the mix of alienation and conformism (Varo also describes it as mechanization or automatization) that generates the experience of consumption. Fleeced by the seller (Zola: "When he had emptied her purse and shattered her nerves, he remained full of the secret scorn of a man"), the female consumer's desire is desexualized. This represents the beginning of the hyper-semiotization of desire by means of the separation of language from material reality.

Paradoxically, according to popular culture, consumerism on the eve of the twenty-first century coincided perfectly

Remedios Varo, Au Bonheur des Dames, 1956. Courtesy of the artist.

with female emancipation: almost all aspects of consumer culture came to be seen as feminist and empowering, including shopping, pole dancing, stripping, self-exploitation at work, eating chocolate, and being promiscuous.[29] Second-wave feminism emerged in tandem with the sexual revolution in the 1960s and '70s, an age that posited sexuality as a primary site of collective repression. Writer Michel Houellebecq describes this era, however, as the antechamber of new forms of repression to come:

> It is interesting to note that the "sexual revolution" was sometimes portrayed as a communal utopia, whereas in fact it was simply another stage in the historical rise of individualism. As the lovely word "household" suggests, the couple and the family would be the last bastion of primitive communism in liberal society. The sexual revolution was to destroy these intermediary communities, the last to separate the individual from the market. The destruction continues to this day.[30]

For Houellebecq, the gradual disappearance of the nuclear family, religious rituals, and archaic forms of social relations in the wake of May '68 allowed the colonization of affect, sex, and sexuality, incorporating them into commercial machinery. In other words, hedonism and seduction became the grounds of the capitalist market: libido was scattered throughout the social body, soaking everything that is produced under capitalism. This transformed pleasure and injected phantasmic desire into cycles of production and exchange. Consequently, merchandise is tempting and seductive; it libidinizes our consumption habits, draining sexuality and eroticism from the sexual act, reducing sexual relations to physiological needs, and turning the desire for amorous attachment into something cruelly optimistic—the simulacra of desire. And while consumption and female empowerment came to be synonymous under neoliberal capitalism, women still have a secondary role in economic and political terms, and have grown more vulnerable to being attacked, raped, mutilated, and murdered as gender violence has increased globally since the 1990s.

6. Unwanted Penetration, or I Hate Myself for Loving You

According to Daniela Barragán, eleven women are killed every day in Mexico.[31] This is only one example of a femicide epidemic: femicide has expanded globally, especially to formerly colonized countries. In Canada, the femicide of Indigenous women has reached alarming numbers; it is also intensifying across Europe and the rest of North America.[32]

Violence against vulnerable communities accords with the logic that drives extractivist capitalism. Emanuela Borzacchiello calls this an apparatus for the "expropriation-dispossession of the body"; this apparatus destroys affective ties and instrumentalizes feminized and dissident bodies as means to exercise power.[33] Inaction before this kind of violence legitimates heteropatriarchy and destroys communal links and the capacity of communities to collectively sustain life. Gender-based and extractivist violence, which go hand in hand, are rooted in capitalism, which is itself embedded in colonial systems that have never been dismantled and is perpetuated and institutionalized by nation-states.[34]

Rebecca Belmore's 2007 photograph *Fringe* is a chilling representation of the confluence of gendered violence and colonial legacy. At the same time, the photograph evokes resilience, healing, and resistance. The artist is Anishinaabe and a member of Obishikokaang (Lac Seul First) Nation. For the image, she used her own body to address the legacy of colonial violence against her people, especially women.[35]

In *Fringe*, we see a female figure in a reclining pose emblematic of European art history, but atypically, we only see her back. On her back is a tremendous wound, a slash from shoulder to hip. A description of the photograph on the website of the Smithsonian Art Museum explains that the deep scar is makeup, and the red drips coming out of the laceration are strings of small red beads.[36] According to Anishinaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, colonialism rips Indigenous people away from land, language, culture, and family. It takes them away from their own knowledge systems and away from the ability to feel at home in their own bodies: dispossession is both intimate and expansive.[37]

By depicting her own body as a primary site for colonization, Belmore speaks of her and her peoples' history. Yet despite the graveness of the injury, *Fringe* is also about healing. The scar will never go away, but it is stitched together with beads that symbolize Indigenous resilience and resistance—a refusal to vanish. *Fringe* is not the first time Belmore has addressed gender violence against Indigenous women. In 2002, she did a performance that resembled a ritual, in which she named several murdered Indigenous women and shredded flowers with her teeth.[38]

In Regina José Galindo's video and performance *The Shadow* (commissioned for Documenta 14 in 2017), we see the artist running away from a World War II German tank known as a "Leopard," which is coming after her in a dirt field reminiscent of a battle site. She runs in circles until she reaches exhaustion and has to surrender. The artist states that the performance highlights the under-recognized fact that Germany is a major arms exporter (with Guatemala as a main client)[39] and also alludes to American military intervention in Guatemala during the latter's civil war and genocide from 1980 to 1996. Galindo's performance also refers to ongoing forms of colonialism that loom over the lives of Guatemalan women, especially Indigenous women. "Progress" and

Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe), Fringe, 2007. Minneapolis Institute of Art, gift of funds from Donna and Cargill MacMillan Jr., 2010.56. © Rebecca Belmore.

"modernization" have made them even more vulnerable to femicide, forced displacement, and migration. The Leopard is an allegory for the predatory capitalist system ruling over us. As philosopher Paul B. Preciado explains, the predator also comprises the epistemologies, representational regimes, techniques of power, discourses, and images operating since colonial times to uphold heteropatriarchy.[40]

Neither classical notions of power and sovereignty, nor human rights discourses, are sufficient to explain the corporate and government technologies behind heteropatriarchal extractivist capitalism. They also fail to explain the new forms that hegemony has taken in its drive to legitimize necropower, the waste of the female shopper, and the waste of the fast food chain.

7. Third-World Modernization and the Self-destructive Desire for Development

How did formerly colonized populations become complicit in their embeddedness in these toxic agglomerations of flesh, soil, and waste? Because of their desire to become modern. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, anti-colonial leaders and thinkers like Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Jawaharlal Nehru subscribed to the romance of modern progress, which kept hidden the dispossession, environmental destruction, and mass alienation necessary for modernity to thrive. Anti-colonial thinkers fell in love not with the material aspects of modernization but with Enlightenment values, and they spoke earnestly about ending poverty through modern development.[41]

In Chakrabarty's view, the European project of modernity was appropriated by various national projects in postindependence countries, leading to the suppression of local cultures in the name of development and modernization. The very existence of the third world was a managed and negotiated outcome of the modern politics of representation. As a regime of representation, modernization was linked to an economy the produced both commodities and desire, but also closure, differentiation, and violence, which came to be the sources of postcolonial identities. The transformation of the modern industrialized world order into a global open market, the weakening of the working class, and the "culturalization" of social struggles are all hallmarks of a neoliberalism that altered the very meaning of development and progress. These elements eventually laid the groundwork for a new way of integrating geographies and societies: privileged populations developed enclaves in the former developing world and created belts of third-world misery within the first. The new social and spatial arrangements created differentiated territorial sovereignties and vulnerabilities, with the remaindered populations administered through forms of necropower.

It is becoming more and more difficult to ignore the global structural division between human lives that are "valuable" and those that are "remaindered."[42] Historically, capitalism and colonialism have disrupted how people connect with each other and share what they need to survive. We have been forced into systems of wage labor and private property that have led to the concentration of wealth, inequality, and environmental devastation. Plagued by racialized colonial hierarchies and the competition against each other for survival, we have no choice but to rely on hostile systems like healthcare-for-profit and industrialized food production. This structural situation has led to injurious forms of interdependency. There are sacrifice zones whose populations are targeted for destruction and displacement, enabling populations living in mostly urban

enclaves of privilege not only to survive but to thrive through excess consumption. In other words: "progress" has a human and environmental cost and makes the land and its resources more valuable than the labor that can be extracted from them—or the people who already inhabit them.

In formerly colonized territories, becoming modern used to mean overcoming "underdevelopment" through forced assimilation, following the lure of modernization—the dream of being part of the circuits of consumption and production. Necropower has transformed formerly colonized populations from an exploitable labor force to an undesirable mass, redundant and "remaindered." Following Neferti X. M. Tadiar, we live in a time when human life has become disposable and the destiny of certain populations is to become waste. Wasting human lives becomes the central object or medium of capitalist production, which steals, destroys, consumes, and expends human lives marked by colonial racism and heterosexism.[43]

An example of "wasted lives" is the reproductive labor done globally in privileged enclaves, mainly by Indigenous women from Latin America (in Latin America, the US, and Spain), Southeast Asia (in the Middle East and North America), and sub-Saharan Africa (mostly in Europe). For Tadiar, these women's lives are wasted in the sense that they must give up their own lives (hopes, dreams) because caring for others takes up all their time. What is worse, this sort of labor is racialized, badly paid, and invisibilized. Care workers lack rights and are frequently mistreated.

The desire for modernity persists—and people continue to find ways to resist. Mexico City–based Puerto Rican artist Miguel Ventura's video *Mexican War Fair* is set in an imaginary future in 2060. The New Interterritorial Language Committee (NILC) has taken over the whole American continent, creating a homogenous territory based on racial and linguistic *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixing) and military repression. The fifty-minute video shows archaeologists finding footage dating from the beginning of the twenty-first century. The footage depicts the early integration efforts of the NILC consortium, which includes a performance in Frontera de Corozal, a village on the Guatemalan-Mexican border. Two bureaucrats are visiting the town to implement the regime's integration strategies: inviting the inhabitants to visit an "Indian house,"[44] handing out NILC chocolate bars, and showing them a ritual in which a chair is dunked in liquid chocolate. We get the feeling that the chair is sacred, and we learn that it was created by Donald Judd and has been imported from Marfa, Texas. We also know from the video that the chair and the chocolate captivated the villagers, causing racial and linguistic differences to disappear, giving way to a new race of men and a world free of racism and socioeconomic inequality. In this fragment of *Mexican War Fair*, Ventura creates a kind of primal scene of colonization by way of the instrumentalization of desire, using an icon of art history and chocolate to represent the lure of modernization that hides structural damage: the expropriation and the commodification of life.

In the ritual, Judd's chair is dunked in chocolate and reborn as "black," as Ventura states. Neoliberal extractivist capitalism (or "Empire," to use an old word) has been able to co-opt anything to legitimize itself, including discourses and practices of diversity, equality, and inclusion. Paradoxically, the many artists, thinkers, and other creators of emancipatory languages discussed in this text have participated in building these modern worlds. In *Mexican War Fair,* to be a "modern artist" is to serve the machine and even institutions that embrace diversity (represented by Ventura's "Indian house"), making everyone complicit in maintaining colonial violence.

Ventura's video is reminiscent of Jean Rouch's classic *Moi un noir*, a docu-fiction shot in the 1950s in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The camera mostly follows two villagers, Eddie Constantine and Robinson, who have migrated to the modern city. We see them struggling to feed themselves in their daily routine, while they dream of being able one day to move to the modern neighborhood of Meseta. Their hopes and efforts to become modern motivate their attempts to insert themselves into the local cheap labor market and consume leisure: they attend boxing matches and go to bars with European and American names. In *Mexican War Fair* as in *Moi un noir*, the filmmakers unveil the main element inherent to the primal scene of modernity: libidinal investment in becoming modern through consumption. In *Moi un noir*, the lure is the world promised by Hollywood films (references to which abound in the film).

At the end of *Mexican War Fair* we are back in 2060. We see the fully modernized future of Frontera de Corozal's inhabitants, happily cheering for NILC's regime among the ruins of the modernized periphery they inhabit. With his video, Ventura goes a step further than Rouch. His gross parody of globalization and the culture industry's complicity with neocolonialism flips even the possibility of decolonial art on its head. The film ends with NILC's counterrevolutionaries burning down the University Museum of Contemporary Art at UNAM, Mexico City. Achille Mbembe calls this the "becoming black of the world," where being human is defined as suffering the virtual imposition of enslavement by new forms of power.[45] Libidinal investment and jouissance are gone from the modernized subject, as is a belief in Enlightenment values. What remain are pathologies resulting from unhealthy libidinal drives, such as addiction and self-destruction and sheer rage.

8. Becoming Unmodern, or Gut Brain against Necropower

Western civilization is built upon the separation between humans and nature. This is linked to the grounding of Western philosophy and epistemology in the cranial paradigm of human intelligence and vision as the main sites for knowledge. As nature is thought to be detachable from culture, so reason is thought to be separate from the body. The entire system that sustains life on the planet—the technosphere—follows this logic. The idea that nature is separate from human systems implies that modern humans have "made the world" for five hundred years through technology. This belief also has an epistemological function: planetary life is expendable, documentable, and translatable into algorithms, information, and images; it is subject to predation and to measures of value and profit; humans are placed within a racialized hierarchy and subject to graded forms of necropower. In this framework, modern technologies are at the center of a project of a future worldmaking—or terraforming, as bioengineering, accelerationism, and design—linked to a self-destructive dependency on fossil fuels, penetrative potency, and toxic masculinity. Contrary to what modernism proselytized, we are not protected by a shell of technology independent from the environment we inhabit. Our links to the world and other living beings are real and complex, and our bodies are permeable; they mirror the outside world because we exist in symbiosis with the environment.

For several decades, science has shown that the gut is a crucial form of bodily intelligence—a nonconsciousness "brain" in charge of maintaining homeostasis, that is, a balance between the "inside" and the "outside" of our porous bodies.[46] Insofar as humans exist in symbiosis-sympoiesis with others and the environment, the contemporary epidemics of autoimmune and inflammatory diseases show that environmental devastation is reflected in our diminishing microbiomes. Part of this devastation is a result of the twentieth-century war against bacteria and microbes, for which antibiotics and pesticides were invented; this war was intrinsically linked to colonialism's struggle to modernize, valorize, and purify. In this context, we must bear in mind that our condition is now "post-human": forever chemicals, pesticides, and plastics are part of our bodies now, as much as they are part of our ecosystems. Disabled, ill, and addicted bodies are managed by necropower through the pharmacological and alimentary industrial complexes.

In order to ensure the long-term survival of humans in symbiosis with the planet, we urgently need a cognitive emancipation from inherited Eurocentric subjectivity, aesthetics, and politics. We need to create reciprocal networks of life to regenerate, reproduce, repair, and rebalance human, more-than-human, and nonhuman life systems on earth. As in Belmore's self-portrait, *Fringe*, the wounds in our bodies and environments may be deep, but they can be sutured—not through the erasure of what has happened, but through rethinking what healing can look like.

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This text is adapted from the 35th Norma U. Lifton Annual Lecture in Art History that I delivered at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on October 2, 2023. I hadn't been to Chicago in years and I was surprised to see posters for the Save (Nalox) One Life campaign across the city. This research will lead to a book. It began in the context of a two-part exhibition cocurated with Christine Shaw at the Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto Mississauga, September–November 2023 and January–March 2024.

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Yuk Hui

Planetarization and Heimatlosigkeit, Part 2

Continued from " **Planetarization and Heimatlosigkeit, Part 1** *"*

One might feel at ease being at home. As everyone knows, mother tongue and family networks may not make life less onerous, but they do make access to certain things much easier. A Japanese colleague living in London once told me that he couldn't eat British vegetables, and that his wife had to buy vegetables freshly delivered from Japan at the Japan Centre in Leicester Square. But he still didn't feel at home, because when he went to meetings at the university, even though he worked in a Japanese Studies department, the standpoint was always British or pan-European. In the end he decided to go back to Japan, where he felt at home. Another friend's mother loved the old Bahnhof in Stuttgart; after her death, as a native German, he managed to acquire a stone from the Bahnhof and used it as a gravestone for her. For an immigrant living in Germany, such a gesture would be nearly impossible because the amount of bureaucracy one would need to go through would be too exhausting.

This is not something that Immanuel Kant could have imagined, because the great philosopher of cosmopolitanism never left Königsberg (now Kaliningrad in Russia). According to Kant, world citizenship grants a "right of resort" or right to hospitality. He argued that the earth is shared by everyone, and that one should have the right to visit other countries and be welcomed as a guest. And he was quite right: the earth shouldn't be regarded as someone's private property, and one ought to have the right to wander on this planet without being harmed or arrested. Even if one is refused entry to a country, it should not be done with hostility.

However, the concept of world citizenship is still built upon an opposition between home and non-home, internal and external. Today, the right of visitation (to non-home, external nations) is contested by the ownership of all kinds of resources including natural and human resources, and a foreigner's activities are limited to sightseeing and shopping. The concepts of the border and the visa, inventions in the name of national security, are grounded upon the concept of private property and the household. In many modern Western states, a good citizen is a good taxpayer; naturalization is evaluated according to the amount of tax and pension one has paid. Today we have tourists who are not entitled to work in foreign countries, but who have the right to travel—provided that their passport, the symbol of the status of their *Heimat*, is strong enough. The Japanese, for instance, have the right to visit more than one hundred and ninety countries without a visa, while Afghans in 2023 could go to no more than thirty countries.

In "Christianity or Europe" (1799), Novalis reproached the uniformity of reason he sensed in the work of Enlightenment thinkers, and romanticized the "beautiful

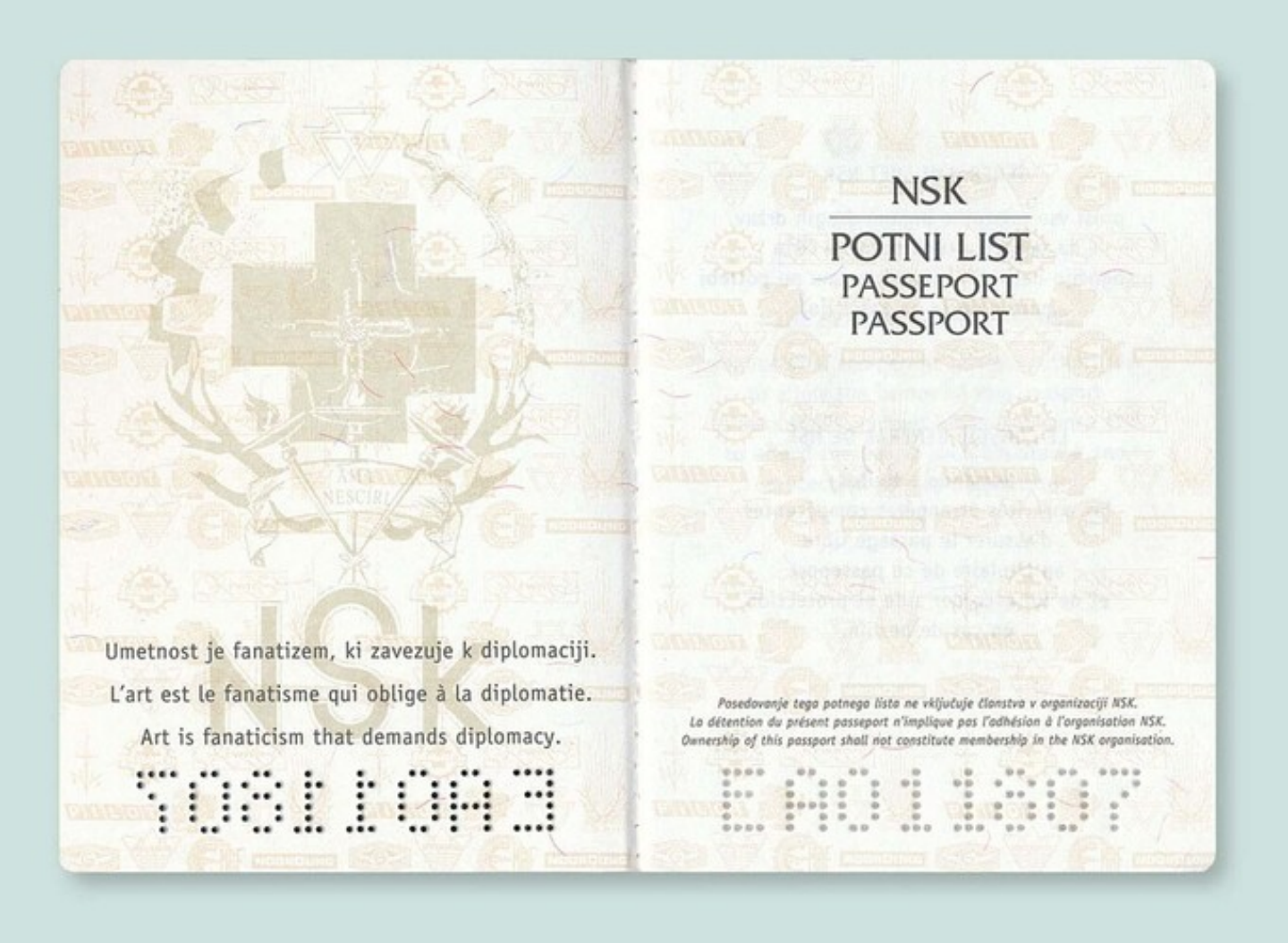
Jan Matejko, Astronomer Copernicus, or Conversations with God, 1872, Jagiellonian University Museum. License: Public Domain.

and splendid times" of the Middle Ages, when love and faith effectively suppressed individualism and violence.[1] But what Novalis regarded as a cosmopolitanism has become paradoxically anti-cosmopolitan because, once again, it has turned to a longing or nostalgia for a *Heimat* which is no longer. What might be the response of philosophy in the twenty-first century when confronting the techno-economic force that seems to have put an end to so many beliefs of the past? Can we only envision the annihilation of technology as an antidote to the annihilation of nature? If *Heimat* was the condition of world citizenship, what happened to the world citizen when we entered into an epoch of *Heimatlosigkeit*? Heidegger does far more than just denounce technology: consider his reference to the mysterious verse of Hölderlin's *Patmos*, "But where the danger is, grows the saving power also." This is comparable to what Hegel called the cunning of reason: the danger is a constant reminder of a different path which sheds light upon the question of Being. Thus, if modern technology means the end or completion of Western philosophy and metaphysics, then something has to arise from such an end, something that exceeds technological enframing (*Gestell*).

Heidegger answered these questions with "the other beginning," and Derrida responded with "the other heading."[2] Heidegger was still haunted by *Heimat*, but such a *Heimat* in the end was no longer the black forest but Greece, a Greece seen as both beginning and end. The return to Greece is a recursive movement; however, the completion of the loop took more than two and a half thousand years. Are we now entering into another loop, or are we heading elsewhere?

Didn't Heidegger then play the role of Hyperion, and in this sense, isn't Heidegger united with Hölderlin?

Heimatlosigkeit will continue to be a characteristic of twenty-first-century planetarization unless a conservative revolution takes place everywhere in the world and all of a sudden the world order is changed, as Fichte imagined in *The Closed Commercial State* (1800), in which he proposed that each state should close off its commercial



The NSK Passport. Anybody can become a bearer of an NSK Passport and acquire the status of an NSK citizen. In its founding statements, the NSK State rejects the categories of (defined) territory and the principle of national borders and advocates the law of transnationality.

activities from other states. Today Fichte could be regarded as a thinker of anti-globalization; his proposal could be read in today's vocabulary as "decoupling." Since 2019, the United States and China have entered into a trade war; during the pandemic, China, a communist regime, accused the US, a capitalist regime, of being anti-globalization and damaging the free market. This would have been unimaginable during the 1990s, when the US was the strongest promoter of globalization and when free market ideology announced the "end of history." One could certainly read this dialectically, and propose the end of the end of history as a negation of negation; however, this does not really enlighten us much further than affording the satisfactions of playing a dialectical game.

Can we take *Heimatlosigkeit* further as a *default* then? Or as a *fate* even? If we don't look at the world from the standpoint of home, can we look at it from the perspective of *Heimatlosigkeit*? Specifically, could we try to engage with this world from the perspective of ruins—the ruins that are produced by economic and technological globalization? World history, we could then say, is a history of liberation from *Heimat*, which was initially physically bounded, and later came to be defined culturally. But what would it mean to think from the standpoint of *Heimatlosigkeit*?

In this sense, maybe Jean-François Lyotard has already given us some hints with his thesis on the postmodern. The postmodern condition is a technological condition, in the sense that technological development has sublated the modernity that produced it. If the modern began with a sense of certainty and security, as in Descartes's meditations, where such certainty is the only possible beginning of knowledge and its guarantee, the postmodern condition is one under which knowledge no longer emanates from the human subject. Instead, technologies—robotics, artificial intelligence, databases, synthetic biology, etc.—exceed human-centered

knowledge production and subvert the relation between the subject and its knowledge. Under the postmodern condition, one no longer finds oneself at home. Instead, one finds oneself in an insecure and uncertain world which is at the same time open and fearful. The postmodern is today largely understood as an aesthetics or a genre of literature or cinema, but for Lyotard it was far more than that. The postmodern condition gestures towards the questioning of the significance of not being at home, of being *unheimisch* and *unheimlich*.

The standpoint is shifted, the world is turned upside down. When Husserl wrote his polemical essay "The Original Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move," he was also thinking of the earth as a home, but not as a celestial body, as Copernicus had treated it.[3] Husserl wasn't wrong, and neither was Copernicus, but whether the phenomenological method is superior to the mathematical method is another issue. We are told by Nietzsche that "since Copernicus, man has been rolling from the centre toward X," faster and faster into nothingness;[4] and yet after Copernicus, the philosophy of the subjective prevailed, as Descartes's meditations restored the human being to its status as the origin of all certainty. Later, Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* attempted to give the most indubitable place to the ego. Husserl was right to emphasize the phenomenological aspect of the body, but he did so only on the basis of thinking the body from a specific point of view, namely that of a human standing on the earth. When the standpoint is switched, then the phenomenological method becomes questionable. Copernicus and the modern physicists who followed him considered the earth from a standpoint that is no longer on the earth but outside of it—a standpoint that was not yet phenomenologically valid. With the launch of the Sputnik and later the Apollo program, which were able to send back images of the "blue marble" observed from outside, the situation radically changed. Hannah Arendt was very much aware of this when she declared in *The Human Condition* that this was the foremost scientific event of the twentieth century.[5]

Space exploration has definitively rendered the earth just one celestial body among many. The earth was considered by Buckminster Fuller as a spaceship, with humans as its passengers. The earth may have been an original ark upon which humans embarked, but now it is possible for humans to leave this ark, something which inspires great excitement: Mars is a potential alternative; as Elon Musk tells us on the website of SpaceX: "I can't think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars." Although at present this remains a futuristic prospect, the view of the earth from outside has already rendered Husserl's standpoint only one possibility among others. In other words, the earth has ceased to be *Heimat*, and is henceforth only a spaceship.

A standpoint defines the direction of the gaze, but also limits it and affects the body to which the gaze belongs. Looking at world history from the standpoint of Japan, and vice versa, before and during the Second World War, a Japanese philosopher might be forgiven for having overemphasized the importance of Japan as a decisive moment in that world history. During the first symposium "The Standpoint of World History and Japan" organized by the journal *Chūō Kōron* on November 26, 1941, Keiji Nishitani lamented Europeans' inability to look at the world from a different standpoint: "In general Europeans, even now, seem to me to be unable to shake their habit of always viewing the world from a European perspective [見地]."[6] According to Nishitani, Europe perceived a crisis without knowing that this crisis emerged out of the collapse of the relation that it had maintained with the East. As the dialogue unfolds, Nishitani recalls that, on his way back to Japan from Germany, he was offered a book titled *The Battlefront of the Coloured Race* by a man from Switzerland travelling on the same ship. Nishitani reports the conclusion of his reading as follows: "One of the most important consequences of this change [in reality] is that Europe is becoming merely one region among others."[7] Wasn't this precisely what brought a sense of *Heimatlosigkeit* to Europe? And wasn't it this change of standpoint that allowed Nishitani to reclaim his own *Heimat* as, in a certain sense, post-Europe—as that which succeeds Europe as the center of the world? As he says:

> The transformation now under way is the stuff of crisis for Europeans, while here it takes the form of a new world order. And when we discover that we are able to conceive of new concepts of world history and the philosophy of world history *here in Japan now* [現在日本で], this ability arises, I suspect, from the [very] gap in consciousness about which I have been speaking.

What we hear in these symposiums of the Kyoto School philosophers is that Europe's loss of centrality in the world is taken to imply also the prominence of Japan as agent of world history.[8] In other words, Japan's significance can only be seen from the standpoint of a world history in which the world spirit has already departed from Europe owing to its decline, as witnessed by Oswald Spengler and many others. However, we might want to ask whether Japan was not also disoriented in this process of modernization—that is to say, whether its becoming the center of East Asia was not also something *unheimlich*. It didn't seem so to Nishitani, but we or the next generation may be able to analyze it differently. In order to compete with Europe to be the center of the world or to be the world itself, Japan had to undergo a more intensified process of modernization so as to catch up and surpass the European nations. The "inferiority" of Japan or Asian countries in general to Europe could only be sublated through the reorientation of Japan from the standpoint of world history, a world history evaluated from the

Earthrise, October 12, 2015. Image by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera science team.

standpoint of Japan. There is a paradox at play here, since it was this same process of modernization that gave Japan (as well as other East Asian countries) confidence to enter onto the stage of world history, but it also produced a *ressentiment* of *Heimatlosigkeit*, which resulted in a persisting antagonism between East and West in the East Asian psyche. What we have here is yet another process of dis-orientation.

In 1941 Nishitani envisioned a "post-Europe" whose existence would later be pronounced from within by Jan Patočka: after the Second World War, Europe ceased to be the world power.[9] In recognizing this fact, Nishitani wanted to elevate Japan to the status of the main protagonist of world history, one that emerges in light of the decline of the West, while Patočka, like Heidegger, would seek to go back to the ancient Greeks—although rather than the question of Being, he sought an answer in Plato's doctrine of the care of the soul. But was Nishitani's analysis of the decline of Europe accurate? Or did a misjudgment of it lead to a profound disorientation that he himself failed to grasp? Nothing is more ironic than when we compare what Nishitani said about the Second World War with what Heidegger later analyzed as the end of philosophy. Recall Heidegger's famous verdict in his 1964 "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking": "The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means: the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western European thinking."[10]

This contrast reveals something *unheimlich*. The new world order that Nishitani and other Kyoto School thinkers talked about, and which was used to justify the moral obligation of Japan to invade other Asian countries upon gaining self-consciousness of its own place in world history, is nothing but the continuation of Western European thinking. It would be curious to know what Nishitani would have had to say about Heidegger's assertion. Surely world history seen from the standpoint of Japan awakened by European, or more precisely German historicism, continues to be the unfolding of the Western Geist. In other words, *Heimat* is that which manifests itself like a mirage emerging from the desert of *Heimatlosigkeit*.

However, when one looks at the world from the standpoint of *Heimatlosigkeit*, something is opened up in an uncanny way, because there is no longer a home, fixed identity is sublated, and history and place are charged with new meanings. The ideology of *Heimat* as a fixed time and place reveals itself to be reactionary, in the sense that it cannot negate the planetary condition. It can only reproduce a politics of nostalgia and exclusion. Confrontation with the Other and freedom of movement reproduce the ideology of *Heimat*. This doesn't mean that we consider planetarization as something desirable, but rather that, as a historical consequence, it cannot be completely negated. However, we have to overcome it. And to overcome planetarization is to re-orient ourselves, in order to redefine a locality or a situatedness. Indeed, one of the major failures of the twentieth century was the inability to articulate the relation between locality and technology, and a reliance upon an almost standardized ecological thinking endowed with a strong European humanism; technology was received as a provocation to either a reactionary politics based on a dualism between tradition and modernity, or a fanatical accelerationism which believes that the problems that we have inherited will finally be resolved by technological advancement, whether it be geoengineering for repairing the earth or the subversion of capitalism by accelerating toward full automation. From the economic and technocratic perspective, there is very little value in taking locality into consideration besides its relevance to the availability of natural resources or other potential economic values.

It is clear that, for Heidegger, to overcome doesn't mean to negate. Instead, it means to look for another path which bypasses the framework of planetarization. The homecoming of Heidegger to ancient Greece was an attempt to retrieve the question of Being. This questioning however also prevents Heidegger's thinking from opening to the Other. One steps back in order to move forward; however, such a stepping back is also a distancing from the Other. Even though Heidegger became interested in Daoism and Buddhism through his Japanese students, he refused the idea that looking to the East could afford the possibility of overcoming modernity, since for him to overcome modernity meant first of all to adopt an orientation toward *Heimat*. In so doing, Heidegger became a "state thinker," as did his disciples such as Keiji Nishitani and Alexander Dugin.

One might contest that Heidegger is not a state thinker but a thinker of the people. We will have to make a distinction here: a state thinker is one who takes the state as the absolute for the people, that is to say, one for whom without the state there is no people; a thinker of the people is one who reactivates the historical resources sedimented among the people in order to call for and welcome a new becoming. We leave it to the reader to judge which kind of thinker Heidegger is. But more importantly, perhaps we have to confront the following question: *How can one avoid becoming a state thinker; can one avoid it at all*? It was the hero who founded the city in ancient Greece, and to become a state thinker is to yield to the temptation of such a heroic act; even the wise Plato couldn't resist returning to Syracuse twice to persuade Dionysius II to realize his theory concerning laws and government, even though his first visit to Syracuse ended up in unfortunate circumstances, when he was sold as slave by Dionysius I, the father of Dionysius II, as we are told in the *Seventh Letter*. The state needs thinkers, thinkers need the state, and therefore thinkers become the thinkers of *Heimat* because *Heimat* legitimates the state as the organism of the people.

A state thinker elevates their *Heimat* above other places in the world and attempts to seize the decisive moment of historical development from its standpoint—the unification of philosophy and power. In past centuries, almost every philosopher was addressed according to nationality, and a new school of thought was often prefixed with a nationality. A thinker can only go beyond the nation-state by becoming *heimatlos*, that is to say, by looking at the world from the standpoint of not being at home. This doesn't mean that one must refrain from talking or thinking about a particular place or a culture; on the contrary, one must confront it and access it from the perspective of a planetary future.

Heimatlosigkeit becomes a standpoint from which to reflect on the planetary condition, and world history can only be reviewed from the standpoint of *Heimatlosigkeit*. One nation can no longer be said to be ahead of others in the journey of the world spirit; instead, philosophical reason must address the planetary condition and therefore become planetary. But in this case, not being at home is at the same time being at home, since home and not being at home are not opposed to one another. Not being at home means being somewhere else; being somewhere else doesn't have to be opposed to being at home. Instead, not being at home allows one to know better both being at home and being in the world.

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1
See P. Kleingeld, "Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis's 'Christianity or Europe,'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 2 (2008).

2
Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* , trans. P.-A. Brault and M. B. Naas (Indiana University Press, 1992).

3
Edmund Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology: Including Texts by Edmund Husserl* , trans. L. Lawlor and B. Bergo (Northwestern University Press, 2001).

4
"The nihilistic consequences of contemporary natural science (together with its attempts to escape into some beyond). The industry of its pursuit eventually leads to self-disintegration, opposition, an antiscientific mentality. Since Copernicus man has been rolling from the center toward X." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* , trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (Vintage, 1968), 8.

5
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

6
D. Williams, *The Philosophy of Japanese Wartime Resistance: A Reading, with Commentary, of the Complete Texts of the Kyoto School Discussions of "The Standpoint of World History and Japan"* (Routledge, 2014), 115; see also K. Nishitani, M. Kosaka, S. Suzuki, and I. Koyama, *The Stan dpoint of World History and Japan* (『世界史的立場 と日本』) (Chūō Kōron, 1943), 11.

7
Williams, *The Philosophy of Japanese Wartime Resistance* , 118. The translation continues as follows: "… instead of the region that dominates the rest. Europe is ceasing to be the world," but this "complementary" part is not to be found in the Japanese original; see *The Standpoint of World History and Japan* , 15.

8
Yoshimi Takeuchi, in his book *Overcoming Modernity* (1959), attempted to analyze a "dual structure of the Greater East Asia War," which is at the same time a war against Western imperialism and a war of colonial invasion. See Y. Takeuchi, *Overcoming Modernity* (近代の超克) (Chikuma Shobō, 1983), 83; Wataru Hiromatsu, on the other hand, in his *On "Overcoming Modernity": A Perspective on the History of Shōwa Thought* (「近代の超克」論—昭和思想史への一視角) (Kōdansha, 1989), replied that the Kyoto School thinkers wanted to overcome modernity from a culturalist point of view and undermine the question of capitalism, especially Japan's turn toward state monopoly capitalism. Many notable Japanese thinkers, including Masao Maruyama and Kojin Karatani, participated in this discussion, which is yet to be sufficiently evaluated. For a historical survey in English, see N. Matsui, "'Overcoming Modernity,' Capital, and Life System: Divergence of 'Nothing' in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of East Asian Philosophy* , 2023.

9
Jan Patočka, *Europa und Nach-Europa: Zur Phänomenologie einer Idee* (Karl Alber, 2020).

10
Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* , trans. J. Stambaugh (Harper & Row, 1972), 59.