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Editorial

A curious series of handmade signs started replacing commercial advertisements in some bus shelters near e-flux in the Clinton Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn over the last few weeks. Amidst the new US government's breakneck pace of undoing itself, the signs' cheerful colors, reminiscent of children's crafts, and their calls to protect democracy and resist seem to inhabit a level of power surreal in its mismatch with that of Trump, Musk, and their cabal armed with AI engineers and turbocharged by historically unprecedented wealth. Amidst the near-absence of effective opposition from the stunned onlookers of more organized and powerful bodies in the Democratic Party, labor unions, and civil society, perhaps this does not bode well for the outcome. Then again, maybe this is how a new form of opposition begins.

In this issue, Sven Lütticken analyzes contemporary repressive processes, specifically those that attack "forms of life" not suitable for neoliberal/neofascist governance. After a thorough intellectual history of *Lebensformen* (forms of life), beginning with Friedrich Schiller, Lütticken traces reappearances of the concept across aesthetics, the life sciences, and political theory over the last century. Arriving at the present, Lütticken suggests that the student movement against genocide exemplifies a "non-fascist life-form" that confronts the present necropolitical functions of civic institutions. In his four-part essay "On Paralysis," Evan Calder Williams has traced backwards from high-functioning bodies and well-organized systems worshipped today, uncovering a history of merciless bodily control. In the final installment in this issue, Williams looks at how circuits connecting bodies and their environment are conjoined by movement, severed by stoppage, activated by damage, and always made possible by labor rendered invisible.

What if the path to liberation lies not in self-possession but rather in dispossession, or the acknowledgement that one's body is not "one's own"? In "There Is No Death: A Sketch Towards Entrancement," Thotti challenges Western notions of sovereignty through trance. Weaving together Yoruba initiations, Ernst Jünger's time wall, and Heidegger's concept of "mineness," the essay playfully explores the ways entrancement dissolves the distinctions between human and nonhuman, self and other. This issue also features a new translation of a 1999 essay by artist, curator, and researcher Marion von Osten (1963–2020) that reflects on the rise of discourse- and collaboration-driven art spaces and social contexts in the 1990s, and how their independent "cultural production" contrasted with the weaponization of criticism as a magical cudgel for bludgeoning opponents with universal knowledge.

Adding a historical appraisal to After Okwui—a series commissioned by contributing editor Serubiri Moses—KJ Abudu discusses Okwui Enwezor's important 2002 essay "The Black Box" to ask what conjunctions of ethics and aesthetics, poetics and politics, we are tasked to figure

during this "heightened moment of accumulating imperial debris and accelerated mass mobilization." How can Enwezor's curatorial and theoretical approaches offer pathways towards––or reveal the fundamental limitations of––Western institutions' abilities to disinherit colonial modalities? In the first of a two-part essay, Rodrigo Nunes offers a trenchant analysis of the formation of the physician, writer, and Bolshevik revolutionary Alexander Bogdanov's "tektology": a radical attempt to construct a universal science that bridges social, physical, and biological systems of knowledge. Nunes underlines how Bogdanov was thinking against Hegelian dialectics, which he deemed insufficiently universal, and instead developed theories of resistance and organization from divergent disciplines.

Ou Ning's "The Ideal World," an excerpt from his book *The Agritopianists: Thinking and Practice in Rural Japan*, looks at Mushakoji Saneatsu's audacious New Village experiment, which lasted from the 1910s to the 1930s. The intellectuals and outcasts that formed this horseshoe-shaped community along the Omaru River in Japan created sophisticated models for collective land ownership without class hierarchy, incorporating art production into labor, and integrating with refugees in an imperial era, all as a radical third position, flourishing between capitalist individualism and revolutionary overhaul.

X

Originally published in 1999 in the first issue of k-bulletin*, , a magazine self-published by the collective Labor k3000 of which she was a member, "Knüppel aus dem Sack" (Cudgel, Out of the Bag) is the first in an occasional series by and about the artist, curator, and researcher Marion von Osten (1963–2020). With both humor and urgency, the essay gives a sense of the stakes in the 1990s in von Osten's artistic and discursive context, where cultural production was a means of creating social infrastructures, whether to articulate a feminist critique and produce discourse even when not considered part of an artist's given role, or to question the division of labor by traversing theory, art, critique, design, and other forms of practice. These matters informed von Osten's work as curator at the Shedhalle Zurich from 1996 to 1998, where she (co-)curated exhibitions such as "Sex and Space" (1996) and "MoneyNations" (1998), and would remain relevant throughout her career.*

—Jonas von Lenthe

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Marion von Osten

Cudgel, Out of the Bag

I wasn't told many fairy tales as a child. The fairy-tale vinyl record had come into fashion, so rather than wait for daddy to tell me "Sleeping Beauty," I was usually in front of our record player's built-in speakers listening to the narrator's fine voice. When a fairy tale was told "for real," it was a defining event. This is why the "Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was" gave me weeks of nightmares. Another tale whose title I can never recall became an obsession for the rest of my childhood—and voilà, it lingers even today. There's a guy in that tale who, for reasons I no longer remember, had a cudgel hidden in a bag. And when he exclaimed, "Cudgel, out of the bag," the cudgel actually jumped from the bag and clobbered those who were after him or wished to hurt him.

I think it was the same guy who could also make a donkey shit gold ducat coins. This fairy-tale Mr. Hyde was actually a good poor fellow whom life—that is, the world as it is and the powers that be—had ridden pretty hard. Someone who didn't stand a chance. The cudgel, the ducat donkey, and something else (check your own Brothers Grimm edition) gave this person power that his social and economic situation wouldn't have provided. At an adolescent age soaked in philosophical intensity, I contemplated the subject from every angle. What might the "cudgel in the bag" stand for? How might I myself, who felt profoundly misunderstood, possess such an instrument? Drifting into sleep, I imagined myself having powers to give my teachers, parents, brother, and his dumb friends a good tongue-lashing.

Just before my eighteenth birthday, my grandfather, who

German fairy tale Tischlein deck dich! Eselein streck dich! Knüppel aus dem Sack!, illustration by Heinrich Leutemann or Carl Offterdinger, 19 century. License: Public Domain.

had told me this tale, let me in on the story behind it. His own grandfather, it turned out, had told him the same tale, but with an additional piece of information: in the nineteenth century, socialists fighting in the streets of the Ruhr had adopted "Cudgel, out the bag" as a rallying cry. My grandfather also told me he had witnessed such street fighting as a little boy. His own grandfather had pulled out a wooden slat with a long nail sticking out and laid into a policeman's horse until the animal, panicked and bleeding, threw off its rider. My grandfather's vivid recollection of that story had an effect on me similar to the one that the "Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was" had years earlier. It fascinated me.

Eighteen years later, I'm pondering the metaphor of the "cudgel" for a different reason. We're at one of the magazine projects initiated by women artists, or, more properly put, women cultural producers. Since *k-bulletin* proposes to approach the field of visual art from a fresh critical angle, I asked myself: What subjectivity is associated with editing an oppositional magazine, and with critical writing? If the idea of the homemade magazine has made a comeback and more people around me are doing layout with vintage illustrations, I personally have no objection at all. But what to make of the criticism that "critical cultural praxis" practitioners exist primarily within texts? Has the critic-journalist emerged as a role model in this scene, or are we seeing a different mode of production?

Homme de Lettre

"At long last, someone picks up the bullhorn he has invented to speak truth to power." The critic's gesture of "telling it like it is" (denouncing systemic ills and outlining alternatives) resembles my childhood fairy tale. In the tale, that gesture wields money and weapons to benefit people in a Machiavellian power grab; the production of oppositional media, by contrast, emulates the tradition of the classic intellectual that flourished in late

nineteenth-century France. The Dreyfus affair marked the birth of this new subjectivity of the intellectual—personified by the artist-writer Émile Zola—who dared to intervene into government affairs. Shortly before, Gustave Courbet and the Commune had toppled monuments; now the Dreyfus scandal and Zola's protest created a new figure, one who transformed the gesture of destructive rebellion into the oppositional *homme de lettre*'s pen.

The universal intellectual as society's corrector allowed many activists, mostly men, to write with the tacit understanding that there would always be a clearly defined addressee for their ideas. This figure was wedded to the notion of the unity of state and people, the great mission of popular education, and parliamentarism. The conception of the public sphere associated with this subjectivity returns in avant-garde models, particularly in manifesto writing. The self-appointed leadership of the one who "tells it like it is" spawned the editorial and the essay as new literary forms and brought with it the dedicated design of textual and visual information (newspapers as well as agitprop trains—the itinerant media of the Russian Revolution). Those tasks in turn put new creative professions on the map: the typesetter and the typographer (now merged in desktop publishing), the illustrator, the photojournalist, and the graphic artist (now the digital image editor).

After World War II, the role of the universal intellectual expanded beyond the writer's desk to include politically engaged public figures with specific dissident identities (see Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Roland Barthes, et al.).

Foul Language

Decades later, by the time of the post-'68 generation, the analytical thinker no longer seemed revolutionary. Or rather, the gestures of the universal intellectual and the paradigm of Enlightenment realism curdled into models of consensus and academic routine. Beginning in the late 1970s, the pop-star poet, drawing from Artaud and Rimbaud and Zola, supplanted the analytical "mind." This shift can be seen as a reappropriation of language: speech acts could not be legitimized solely by schoolmasterly or avuncular displays of knowledge.

In the late seventies theorists championed the idea of "foul language," recoding meanings as direct action to undercut the "Enlightenment" project and its institutional codification. These approaches must be seen as an immediate reaction to efforts to render counter-information as power, which gained wide currency during the revolts of 1968. Such efforts, in striving to disseminate "more truthful and correct" information, rested on the same Enlightenment foundation as the bourgeois media and institutions they critiqued. And events had demonstrated that the circulation of "better" knowledge alone didn't change society.

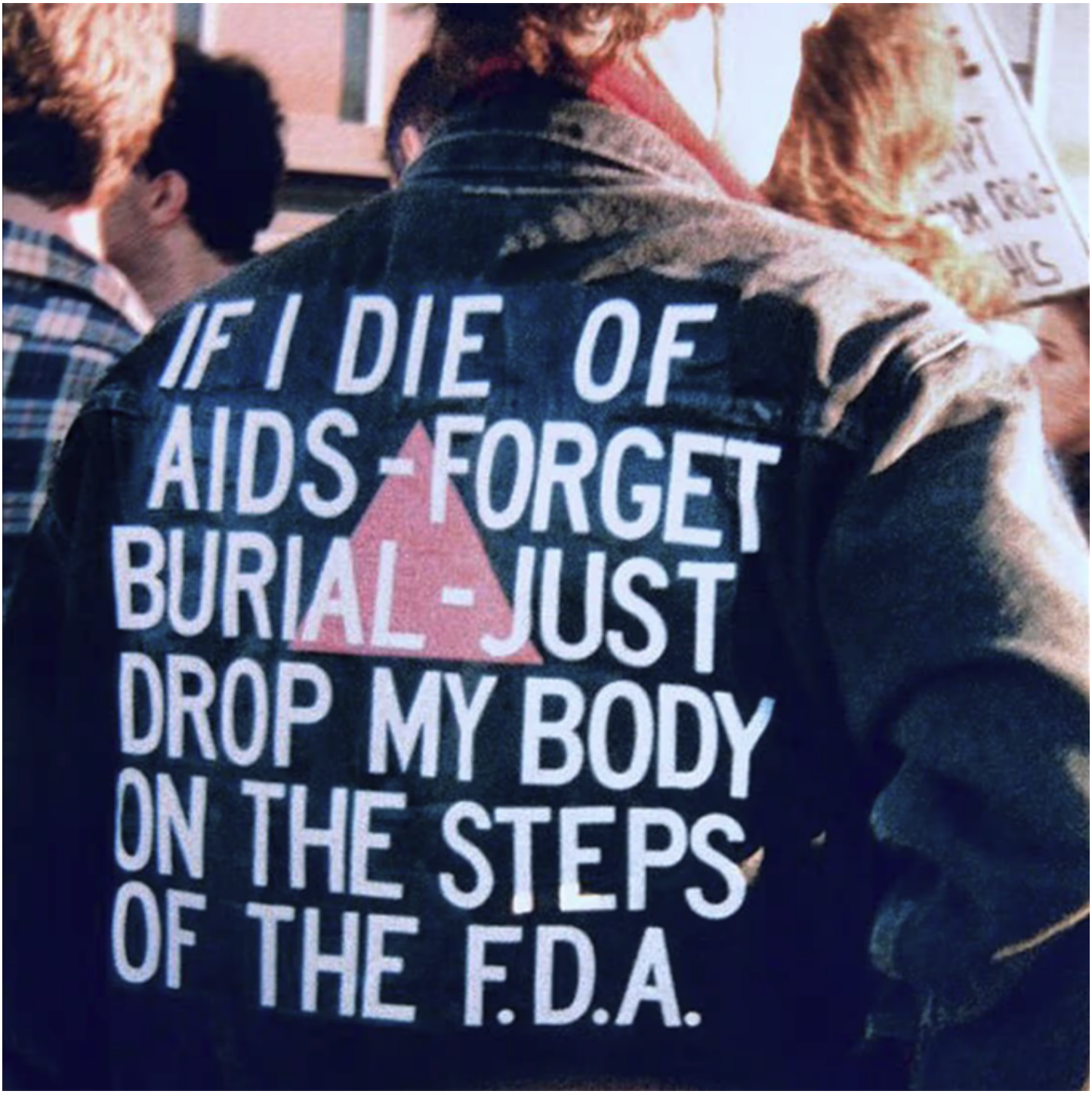
Radio Alice and Italian operaismo of the late seventies, Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols in England, and many others countered with two strategies: First, social change would be achieved by addressing primarily a specific scene (one's own milieu, one's hometown) rather than a mass, let alone the people (the workers). And two, they recognized that speech acts were always also acts of self-empowerment, and so a more radical self-empowerment would mean that even those with no solid place in the education system (unemployed teenagers, bad students) could take advantage of various languages. That's why provocative actions—Johnny Rotten's "God Save the Queen" on television, playing guitar with just two chords, pirate radio stations—took aim at the heart of the bourgeoisie's knowledge distribution. "Telling it like it is" now no longer spoke to a broad consensus, and instead aimed to transgress it. The provocateur model was soon picked up in fine art as well. Painting oneself jerking off at the movies, licking the guitar, and the like were desperate attempts to translate foul language and shocking breaches of convention into the visual register.

The badly behaved pop star or artist had heavy connotations of masculinity, and in the eighties his ambivalence proved to be his undoing amid society's contradictions. By the end of the decade, women weren't the only ones getting fed up with this hero of self-legitimization; so were people who saw how issues like AIDS were being used to justify public discrimination against same-sex lifestyles or how racism spreading through everyday life (in Germany) was escalating into arson and murder. More was at stake than foul language: this was plainly about dirty politics.

Theory, Text, Layout, Shedhalle

> Very basically, I would try to identify theory as the attempt to stop looking for meaning in the object and instead consider the production and reception of that object to be crucial. In the perspective of theory, any reality is always also an effect of the discourse. Once a discursive fact has been created, it has palpable real effects.
>
> —Isabelle Graw

What Isabelle Graw, editor of *Texte zur Kunst*, said in "Für Theorie," a talk she delivered at the "First Congress for the Defense against Counter-Revolutionary Evil" in 1993, is representative of an entire generation that was re-politicized in the late eighties and early nineties and took possession of theory not as an academic project but as a practice of independent thinking. This homegrown



David Wojnarowicz in 1988.

theory production (or appropriation of theory) is bound up with a new conception of the subject: its protagonist is not a scene, proxy, or medium awaiting inscription, i.e., a victim of social relations who shouts "Fuck you!" under duress. They understand themselves to be an agent and political subject for whom subjectivity—their gender, cultural, or ethnic difference—isn't a given. The form of the self, like the interpretive grid patterns of class, race, and gender, was deconstructed to reveal a social, political, and cultural construction and its performance: the daily iteration of the experience and enactment of unvarying discursive arrangements and roles, of the significance of institutions as well as legal texts and government structures for the maintenance of differences. French poststructuralism and the writings of Judith Butler and Donna Haraway empowered a number of groups, led by

women and homosexuals, to conceive of themselves as "speakers" and "theorists" even when they had no academic training. Again, the foremost concern was to de-hierarchize the distribution of knowledge.

This "revolution" of the conception of subjectivity around 1990 also spawned new techniques of representation, methods of production, and literary and visual forms as well as new critical and artistic positions.

Their objective was to understand the art system as part of social reality and find ways to address its power structure. This undertaking, which also entailed trying to shape what culture at large might be, prompted forms of self-organization as well as exhibitions that solicited debate on substantive sociopolitical concerns and provided platforms for speakers from outside the art field. No longer content with their traditional role, artists in the nineties became actively involved as critics, mediators, and organizers, exploding the (art) system's rigid division of labor. Instead of pursuing individual creative achievements, they devised various strategies of collective and collaborative work, in record labels, groups, bands, temporary project-based coalitions, or creative contexts established for the longer term (Berlin's Schröderstraße, etc.). In methodological terms, they tied in with discussions that had already been developed in feminist theory and other left-wing settings and sought to break up hierarchical labor relations. Magazine projects like Berlin's *A.N.Y.P.* and *ArtFan*, or *Vor der Information* out of Vienna, though quite different in terms of content and visual design, are characteristic examples of producers' new understanding of subjectivity and the new field of praxis they charted for themselves.

For exhibitions, production practices evolved on the level of aesthetics—as in "context art" and "institutional critique" or formats akin to cultural studies—that "stopp[ed] looking for meaning in the object and instead consider[ed] the production and reception of that object to be crucial," a mode of representation reminiscent of

textual publications. Layout—the art of combining text and image—as well as a newfound love of typography and, last but not least, the "notes and files" aesthetic for which Zurich's Shedhalle became famous in the mid-nineties integrated the interrelation between theory and production as such into the display, making it part of an overall exhibition layout.

Cassandra in Crisis

These practices yielded forms of presentation and representation that were subsequently used as a wedge; they were variously panned, dismissed as incomprehensible, overly intellectual, didactic, not "art" enough, not "well made," or nonetheless given the stamp of approval (and marketability) by galleries and institutions.

Critics of Shedhalle and similar institutions' overly textual aesthetic and the resulting "service look" assume that different cultural artifacts (exhibitions, books, magazines) require fundamentally different methods of production and patterns of reception. The argument that "I don't read in an exhibition, I prefer to read a book at home" is oblivious to the fact that the "books" on display didn't actually exist as books available to read at home; they presented views that were primarily illegitimate and incompatible with bourgeois knowledge production. Such critics moreover insist that reading text differs entirely from looking at pictures, a claim impossible to substantiate outside biological models, and willfully blind to the performative and discursive malleability of those learned behaviors (reading at home and looking at art). Then, too, a specific idea of what constitutes a proper exhibition maintains belief in the existence of autonomous visual works as well as universal art spaces, and ignores the social, economic, and political interactions occurring in these "spaces" (institutions, art magazines, homegrown projects) that shape any setting or cultural object. The dualistic perspective in which production yields either text or visuals ignores the fact that any cultural object must be

visually mediated to enter circulation and is moreover tied to social contexts. A text, too, is a result of visual design, i.e., ultimately an artifact. With a magazine, for example, the content and what the eye sees are as inseparable from each other as from its authors—those who write for it and those who do the layout and design. The handling of text and image is always embedded in a social sphere (scene) and its evaluative canon; it is there that the material becomes relevant in the first place. The fact that the production of an exhibition, or a magazine, is more than its final form has been most evident when producers have established lasting collaborative formats. That's why I think it would be interesting in the future to examine the extent to which a predominantly performative praxis recaptures the resulting product, and what that implies for the product itself and for our engagement with it.

Critics of "critical cultural praxis" appear to have dismissed the fact that, at least until the mid-nineties, exhibition projects inspired by a probing study of subject positions outlined by gender theory "not only considered the semantics of 'gender,' but also sought to pinpoint where gender became reality or induced real effects" (Graw, "Für Theorie"). Artists, then, have also had to face the reality that feminist projects were associated for years with embodiment, spirituality, warmth, materiality. A feminine aesthetic of sensuality and vividness had become ingrained in art and the reception of feminist positions. Subjectivity, emotion, and expression were *the* registers of social articulation that women in art had to work with. When the new feminist movement that arose in the early nineties repudiated these ideas, it did so for good reasons, both political and formal. The new subject positions enabled its exponents to rework and appropriate conceptualism, which had been dominated by men, and leave the sewing room of difference behind. Meanwhile, their practices challenged the hegemonic bourgeois and Eurocentric definitions of art and culture and the related insistence that a cultural product could be assessed based on purely formal criteria.

With its contributions to a feminist history in the nineties, Shedhalle's cultural project coincided with these developments, committing itself to them and helping to shape them. In the past several years, the Shedhalle team has analyzed, discussed, and revised the formats and methods of exhibition-making and the uses of theory, text, and layout. Critical responses have failed to keep up; from *Die Beute* to *Jungle World*, reviewers still point to the same aesthetics of education and didacticism without noticing how the exhibition formats have changed.

It makes me wonder what actually made a ring binder, a photocopier, or a flyer in an art institution provoke such vitriol. The flyer, at least, has been recognized as a cultural and aesthetic object, which it hadn't been before. The ring binder and the copier were only briefly in the "wrong" place, not at the university or in the critics' private study. Though the schoolroom aesthetic got on my nerves too, the act of publishing knowledge and references in a setting far from any tradition of privileged knowledge needs to be understood as the simple opposite of the schoolroom.

Meanwhile, the institutionalization of this approach, its consolidation in a habitus, merits far more scrutiny.

The critics who write more than anyone and made careers out of raising their avuncular fingers in admonition—in short, "knowing better"—need to confront the question: Which "didactic" or "educational" gesture underpins their own lifting of the veil to reveal an undertaking that has "long foundered"? As the nineties draw to an end, it may be time to ask whether texts, theses, and reviews should be shaping the discourse. If artists and critics today associate contentions over the "political" in art with the medium of published writing rather than with their own practices, then a shift has occurred in which writing becomes more important than any other form of cultural production or articulation. The ubiquitous "Have you read what this or that person has written about this or that issue?" not only dominates the debate around dissident approaches, but also plays into the hands of those who preserve the simplistic belief in the text-image antithesis, and by extension the division between intellectual labor and manual labor.

In this way, criticism of exhibitions that grapple with theoretical or political questions can now claim to "hit the nail on the head" when faulting those projects with "preaching to the choir." Not a single line is wasted on noting that the modus operandi of art magazines and the art market is exactly the same. In this way, the allegation of "self-referentiality" leveled against grassroots or collectively organized projects restores to the traditional channels for visual art—the art space and the art magazine—the aura of the universal public sphere.

I'm not defending the "oppositional" element's systemic immanence, nor am I against the freedom to critique—on the contrary! The problem emerges when the accusation of being "not familiar with the issue" leads people whose viewpoints are actually not far apart to adopt defensive postures, degenerating self-empowerment into a zero-sum game of small distinctions. These nocturnal "cudgel" fantasies (materialized the next morning as the laptop keyboard) destroy the very cultural environments that are vital for discussing concerns and developing methodological innovations. Such environments are what foster mutual interest and what you might call "good moments," which, at least in my experience developing exhibition and event projects, lay the foundation for the trust necessary for engaging with one another's ideas. That's why we need to take a closer look at what various oppositional practices actually accomplish, asking, for example, how "being focused on oneself"––once a conscious political stance of workerist movements––has come to be such an offense. This includes the question of

whom we are addressing and where we eventually want to be—especially if we don't want it to be the teachers' lounge.

Beyond their physical appearance, cultural productions always have a performative significance for social contexts. The genesis of a homemade magazine like Zurich's *k-bulletin* is inseparable from the social and discursive space that gave rise to it. At the very least, such modes of production create a place where "good moments" can occur, where we can think about images and writing as mediums of critical engagement between producers—instead of relishing every opportunity to call our cudgels out the bag. Even editing a magazine, commonly considered a text-heavy business, isn't done entirely on writing desks.

X

Translated from the German by Gerrit Jackson.

The **original German essay** was published in 1999 in the first issue of *k-bulletin*, a magazine self-published by the collective **Labor k3000**, and republished in 2017 by **Brand-New-Life**.

The artist, curator, researcher, and educator **Marion von Osten** (1963–2020) was based in Berlin since the early 1990s. Her transversal and always collaborative approach manifested across various media, including exhibitions, conferences, and installations, as well as films, discussions, texts, teachings, and self-published journals. Her projects were all intertwined and driven by her specific way of working rooted in artistic research and feminist organizing, with a transnational focus and a commitment to the project of decolonization. Among her works are the international exhibition series *bauhaus imaginista* (2017–2019), *Viet Nam Discourse* (2016–2018) at Tensta Konsthall, *Project Migration* (2002–2006) in Cologne, and *Sex & Space*(1996) at Shedhalle Zurich. As collective infrastructures, her collaborations included Labor k3000, kleines postfordistisches Drama (Minor Post-Fordist Drama, kpD), and the Center for Postcolonial Knowledge and Culture (CPKC).

Jonas von Lenthe works as archivist, publisher, and curator. He is the founder of the Berlin-based publishing house Wirklichkeit Books, where he has edited various publications, including most recently the German translation of Enzo Traverso's *Gaza Faces History* (2024), as well as *Hierarchies of Solidarity* (2024) and *English in Berlin – Exclusions in a Cosmopolitan Society*(2022) by Moshtari Hilal and Sinthujan Varatharajah. Together with Lucie Kolb and Max Stocklosa, von Lenthe co-edits the publication series Material Marion von Osten (2024, ongoing, Wirklichkeit Books). From 2022 to 2024 he was the head archivist at Kunstverein München together with Johanna Klingler. Von Lenthe met Marion von Osten while working as a research assistant for the international exhibition project *bauhaus imaginista* (HKW Berlin, Sesc São Paulo, National Museum of Modern Art Kyoto, among others), under the artistic direction of Grant Watson and Marion von Osten.

Sven Lütticken

Forms of Strife

In catastrophic times, at drawn-out moments of accelerating disaster, arcane concepts either fade into the distance or reassert themselves with anachronic urgency. With the concept of "forms of life," it has been the latter. In German philosophical discourse, the term *Lebensform* (plural *Lebensformen*) had its heyday in the 1910s and 1920s. Internationally (in Italian, English, French) it resurfaced in the 1990s and early 2000s with a habit of reappearing across the dividing lines that separate certain arcane subsects of theory. On a larger scale, the notion also spans different fields of knowledge: aesthetics, life sciences, and political theory.

In aesthetics, Schiller's articulation of the complex relation between "the art of the beautiful" and "the still more difficult art of living" set the stage for discussions of the form of social life.[1] If, in Rancière's words, "art's singularity stems from an identification of its own autonomous forms with forms of life *and* with political possibilities," nonartistic forms likewise demanded attention, and were explored for their aesthetic as well as political potential—communal life-forms or workers' councils, for example.[2] Meanwhile, in nineteenth-century European humanities, "living things" became the center of attention, as Helmuth Plessner once phrased it: the humanities dealt with what was neither purely with *res cogitans* nor *res extensa*, neither pure spirit or pure reason nor external things. This is where an idealist *Geisteswissenschaft* needed to become a *Kulturwissenschaft*, attentive to culture as embodied and embedded, as social practice.

Around 1900, the impact of modern biology as translated into the register of vitalist philosophies (*Lebensfilosofie*) exacerbated this tendency: far from autonomous, the forms of art were seen as constituting a vital biological necessity. That such vitalism could easily pull or push its adherents into a dubious political direction is all too evident—and there is no shortage of 1930s and 1940s ramblings on *deutsche Lebensformen* or the *jüdische Lebensform.* The reclamation of the Lebensform concept since the late 1990s—part of what Nitzan Lebovic has termed "the curious revival of the biopolitical philosophy of the German 1920s at the heart of contemporary political philosophy" — suggests that the critical use-value of the notion became newly evident in the wake of Foucault's historical theorization of modern biopolitics.[3] It is in the wake of this inquiry into modern politics as fundamentally engaged in the *Gestaltung* of life and into which lives are worth living that Lebensform returned to the fore. If the notion had always involved a dialectic of artistic form and social form, the biological dimension—which had previously mostly been filtered through vitalist rhetoric—now came into view more clearly. Nazi eugenics, to give a stark example, was a perverted aesthetic ideal of racial purity and physical perfection that was politically implemented in the forms of necropolitical programs.

If "we cannot survive the current form of life," as Richard Gilman-Opalsky has put it, the dominant form of life of ever

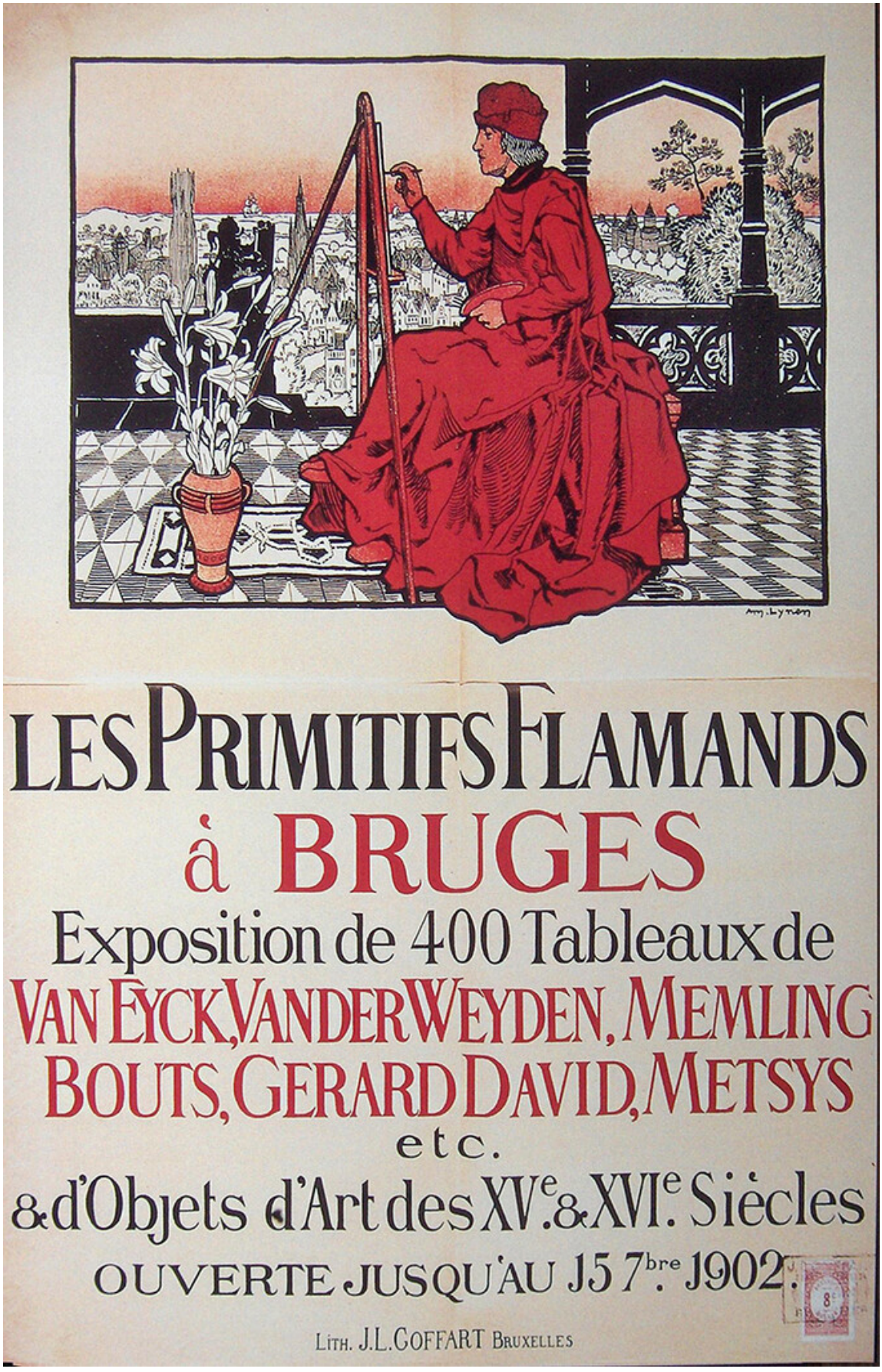
Deforestation in Riau province, Sumatra, to make way for an oil palm plantation, 2007. License: CC BY 2.0.

later capitalism is also actively waging war on alternative, divergent Lebensformen. Today's so-called culture wars are not wars on "culture" in a merely superstructural sense, as an ideological surplus that one could isolate from the material base. Rather, and much more dangerously, the culture wars are biopolitical and necropolitical; they are wars on cultures as forms of life. Adopting this perspective emphasizes the need to think of art and politics as critically practiced forms of life in alliance with those lives that are under pressure, delegitimized, criminalized, subjected to the genocidal logic of what Germans know as *Staatsräson.*

From Art Nouveau Salons to the Communist Party

As is well known, the Situationist International's view of transformative aesthetic practice was inspired by the conservative Dutch cultural historian and theorist Johan Huizinga and his account of *Homo ludens* (the play instinct in society). Via Constant, this Situationist interpretation of *Homo ludens* would also inform the Dutch Provo movement. Another notion employed by Huizinga in *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, precisely that of Lebensform, was not picked up by the Situationists—though Debord, for one, was certainly familiar with Huizinga's monumental study, and the concept could conceivably have entered into a productive relation with the Situationist trope of the constructed situation. It was for a slightly later generation, including the Debordian that is Giorgio Agamben, to bring about this missed encounter.

The subtitle of *The Waning of the Middle Ages* stresses that this is a book about the "forms of life and thought" of the period.[4] Published in 1919 but crucially shaped by Huizinga's visit to the influential 1902 exhibition of the art of the "Flemish Primitives" in Bruges*, Waning* has one foot firmly in late nineteenth-century aestheticism. The exhibition interspersed paintings with other artifacts, and the poster (designed by Amédée Lynen) showed a painter in highly impractical but elegant robes at work in a Van Eyck–like architectural setting, with a townscape in the background. Here, painting is anchored in a wider material culture and the "art of living." In the opening lines of



Amédée Lynen, poster for the exhibition "Les Primitifs Flamands à Bruges," 1902.

Waning, Huizinga claims that when the world was five centuries younger, all forms of life were much more clearly delineated. Life was form, style, art: "All these beautifully stylized life-forms [*levensvormen*; Huizinga uses the Dutch version of the German term], which were meant to transcend raw reality into a sphere of higher harmony, were part of the great art of life [*levenskunst*], without immediately registering as art in the narrow sense."[5] It is only after the Renaissance—here Huizinga invokes Burckhardt—that art and life became separated, and social life became increasingly formless and unaesthetic.

Stefan Helmreich and Sophia Roosth have traced the concept of Lebensform back to the early nineteenth century, arguing that it

> bears an inheritance from Kant and Goethe (though this exact word was used by neither) in which form is aesthetic, self-determining, and teleological, as well as (generously assuming sufficient knowledge of the mechanism of its formation) deductively predictable (even if the favored apprehensional approach was often a combination of the intuitive and empirical).[6]

Tracing the concept's transformations, Helmreich and Roosth map a shift from deductive to inductive reasoning in the course of the nineteenth century, and argue that since Humboldt, Lebensform was often seen as emerging "from organisms' habits and habitation."[7] This facilitated the concept's "social turn" in the early twentieth century, which Huizinga's use reflects. By that time, the term was as ubiquitous and quietly hegemonic as "discourse" and "biopolitics" are in numerous academic contexts today. The term "Lebensform" graces the titles of serious philosophical tomes and books on etiquette alike.

One boundary-crossing, popular, and influential volume is W. Fred's *Lebensformen: Anmerkungen über die Technik des Gesellschaftlichen Lebens* (1911), which is something of an etiquette book. The pseudonym of Alfred Wechsler, an art and cultural critic, W. Fred took cues from Castiglione's *I Coregiono* (*Book of the Courtier,* 1518). As is the case for Huizinga, Fred is clearly marked by Jacob Burckhardt's *Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, in which Burckhardt analyzes the city-states of Renaissance Italy as artworks in and of themselves created by despots. In his earlier book *Modernes Kunstgewerbe* (1901), Fred notes that "what Jacob Burkhardt said in his book about Renaissance culture, that the state must become a work of art, has been modified in our day: We want everyone's life to be a work of art! And making it so can be a work of interior art."[8] In *Modernes Kunstgewerbe*, Fred discusses the likes of Hermann Obrist, Henry van de Velde, and Otto Wagner—and art nouveau and Jugendstil inform his concept of forms of life.

In Lebensformen, Castiglione becomes a mediator between Burckhardt's notion of the Italian Renaissance city-state as artwork and individual life-forms.[9] Fred argues that since the Italian states were so small, and since their leaders could only survive if they were strong and resourceful personalities, they were interested in attracting " *hervorragend gebildete Kräfte*" (well-trained/developed employees) to their courts—and Castiglione sought to produce (or refine) such " *vollendete Menschen*" (accomplished/perfected people), or at least perfectly formed courtiers.[10] Taking it upon himself to become the Castiglione of a vastly different society (the urbanized nation-state of industrial capitalism), Fred insists on a difference between the *individual* Lebensform and *social* Lebensformen that individuals cannot control.[11] Coming to terms with these socially binding forms (through clothing, customs, conversational skills) requires *Lebenstechnik*. Such a technique of life involves the mastery of forms that are so many languages: *Alle Formen sind Sprachen*.[12]

Rather than simply adopting preexisting forms, individuals adapt and modify these forms in mastering them, thus perfecting themselves qua individuals and becoming living artworks rather than merely biological life-forms: "For since we must say that man, as we see and feel him, is not a clear result of nature, but an artistic product of culture, let us also decide to make the following demand: Man must be a works of art that we want to shape as perfectly as our powers permit."[13] Here, Lebensform takes on overtones of Lebens *re* form, but not in the guise of a "return to nature"—rather in that of an aestheticist "turn to art."[14] If the past is only a "building site" while "the future is the realm of infinite possibility," Fred sought to update a historical example to shape the future.[15] The new Castiglione, however, seems to have disregarded the social realities of the early twentieth century, marked by industrialization and the rise of mass movements; his future remained anchored in an idealized past.

Published in the same year as Fred's *Lebensformen*, Georg Lukács's *Soul and Form* predated the latter's political turn, offering an idealist take on form as mediating between life and the Platonic realm of the soul: "Forms sets limits round a substance which otherwise would dissolve like air in the All."[16] In this collection of essays, the young Lukács reflects on the essay form itself as an artistic genre that can deal with art but also with "the form of life": "Poetry takes its motifs from life (and art); the essay has its models in art (and life)."[17] In an essay on Kierkegaard with the title "The Foundering of Form against Life," he argues that "Kierkegaard's heroism was that he wanted to create forms from life" and that he "did achieve a noble and rigorous life-system," but at great cost, and he "had to conquer the aesthete, the poet in himself."[18] Another essay approaches the issue of "art for art's sake" not through canonical aesthetes such as Flaubert but through the German writers Theodor Storm and Gottfried Keller. Here, the compatibility of bourgeois

life and (a certain version of) art for art's sake comes into view. For these writers, a bourgeois profession was not just an occupation but a life-form (Lebensform); it signified the primacy of ethics. Lukács thus engages with the social life of art through a focus on bourgeois habitus and mentality, as articulated by a few authors.

a Marxian framework. Noting that the still unconquered power of capitalist forms of life infect the proletariat itself, Lukacs posits that a lengthy and difficult process of self-education is necessary to create the right revolutionary consciousness. This process must find its organizational support in the party form:

Sandor Garbai and Bela Kun, leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1919. License: Public domain.

In *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), Lukács focuses more narrowly on artistic form, though artistic form as informed by the experience of modernity. The novel as genre is always in the process of becoming, being historical and therefore contingent to the core: "Art always says 'And yet!" to life. The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of a dissonance. But in all other genres ..., this affirmation of a dissonance precedes the act of form-giving, whereas in the novel it is the form itself."[19] In *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), written after Lukács's involvement in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, the notion of Lebensform is reimagined and dialectically transformed in

The weak point of all the non-Russian radical groups in the International lay in the fact that while their revolutionary positions diverged from the opportunism of the open Revisionists and the Centre they were neither able nor willing to give them any concrete organisational form ... Really active participation in every event, really practical involvement of all the members of an organisation can only be achieved by engaging the whole personality. Only when action within a community becomes the central personal concern of everyone involved will it be possible to abolish the split between rights and duties, the organisational form of man's separation from his own

> socialisation and his fragmentation at the hands of the social forces that control him.[20]

The question of the pervasiveness of the capitalist form of life (the dominance of the value form and of wage labor, with its accompanying institutions and habits) and of the difficulty of creating communist Lebensformen under capitalist conditions is the central problem of prefigurative practice. Otto Neurath, for one, discussed the problem in those terms.[21] This is one indication that the notion of the term "Lebensform" always held critical potential; while it would come to be identified with conservative authors such as Eduard Spranger, and while it was fatally open to crude biologicism and racialization, there are countervailing genealogies available to us.[22] Fred's *Lebensformen* is a likely source of Ludwig Wittgenstein's use of the concept, possibly mediated through a review by Hugo von Hoffmannsthal.[23]

Wittgenstein used the notion in conjunction with that of *Sprachspiele* or "language games" in order to indicate that "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life."[24] Lebensform thus marks the performative, relational, situational turn in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. The Wittgensteinian pairing returned in the work of Paolo Virno, who defined "the contemporary multitude" in terms of "its forms of life and its linguistic games," going so far as to state that the multitude is a concept that unifies the two Wittgensteinian terms: "In order to name with a unifying term the forms of life and the linguistic games which characterize our era, I have used the notion of 'multitude.'"[25]

Around 2005, Virno and Agamben were both involved with the Italian journal *Forme de vita*.[26] As an archaeologist of Lebensform, Agamben is connected to the early twentieth-century discourse in manifold ways, for instance as a reader of Huizinga and of Carl Schmitt (the latter did not use the term extensively, but he did review Rudolf Kjellen's book *Der Staat als Lebensform*).[27] There are also more obscure sources, such the vitalist Jungian biologist Adolf Portmann.[28] With Agamben, it is less clear than with Virno that the Lebensformen refer to the demotic practices of the multitude in "our era." It is well known that a key problem for Agamben is the reduction of life to bare life (or naked life) in modern biopolitics—and particularly in the concentration/extermination camp. This is life reduced to a (barely) biological remainder. On the other hand, there is the promise of "a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life."[29]

While Agambian form of life is temporally unmoored, a matter of potentiality more than actuality, to some extent Agamben sees its promise fulfilled in the monastic life of the Middle Ages. In modernity, it is questionable whether any endeavor to merge life with its form would be tenable. The apotheosis of the law in its suspension (the state of exception) generates an indistinguishability of law and life. The forms of life corresponding to the abstract, formal rule of law (the Kantian "pure form of law") are impossible forms. In Agamben's millenarian terms, any form of prefigurative practice remains a matter of potentiality, of preferring-not-to, of siding with the potential to not-be.[30] This is where it is necessary to go beyond Agamben, specifically his account of habit.

Habit Maketh Praxis, Praxis Unmaketh Habit

If we look at the process during which Agamben developed his understanding of forms of life, from the essay "Form-of-Life" (1993) and *Homo Sacer* (1995) to *The Highest Poverty* (2011) and "What is a Destituent Power?" (2014), the concept of "habit" comes to the fore in the later writings as a crucial qualifier and conceptual mediator.[31] In contrast to a life submitted to the *law*—a law that can be abrogated by the law's sovereign self-suspension in the state of exception—the Christian monastic orders such as that of Saint Francis shaped life though *rules.* The *regula vitae* generates the *forma vivendi* of common habits and common use.[32]

Noting that "the context of the monastic life, the term *habitus*—which originally signified 'a way of being or acting' and, among the Stoics, became synonymous with virtue … seems more and more to designate the way of dressing," Agamben contends that monasticism "transformed clothing into a *habitus*, rendering it indiscernible from a way of life."[33] Agamben argues at length that monasticism is marked by a systemic conflation of life and rule (norm) that breeds form, that generates habitus: "The decisive core of the monastic condition is not a substance or content, but a *habitus* or a form. Understanding that condition will require us to turn toward the task of confronting of the problem of 'habit' and form of life."[34]

Here, one can speak of a missed encounter between Agamben and Pierre Bourdieu. The latter based his notion of *habitus* indirectly on medieval sources—and more directly on Erwin Panofsky's reading of those sources in his *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, which Bourdieu translated into French in 1967.[35] While the notion of habitus had been used in sociology by Marcel Mauss, Bourdieu took cues from Panofsky's attempt to demonstrate "a connection between Gothic art and Scholasticism which is more concrete than a mere 'parallelism' and yet more general than those individual (and very important) 'influences' which are inevitably exerted on painters, sculptors or architects by learned advisors."[36] For Panofsky, what he calls mental habit is both diffuse and pervasive:

> In contrast to mere parallelism, the connection which I have in mind is a genuine cause-and-effect relation;

> but in contrast to an individual influence, this cause-and-effect relation comes about by diffusion rather than by direct impact. It comes about by the spreading of what may be called, for want of a better term, a mental habit—reducing this overworked cliché to its precise Scholastic sense as a "principle that regulates the act," *principium importans ordimen ad actum*.[37]

While Bourdieu would become more critical of Panofsky over time, in his 1967 postscript he praises the art historian for going beyond intuitive analogies to demonstrate that both scholastic philosophy and gothic architecture follow the same structural logic.[38] Later, habitus would be defined by Bourdieu as the "structuring structure" that is "necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions." Not being limited to specific cases, it serves as "a general, transposable disposition" that informs "beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt."[39] As a conserving, conservative force, habitus "produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle."[40] Of course, we may well wish to defend a concept and a *practice* of practice that goes beyond reproduction—a critical practice, perhaps along the lines of Andrea Fraser's conception of artistic practice:

> Artistic practice resists, or aims to resist, functioning as the representative culture of a particular group—whether the makers, lookers, and buyers of art or any new or previously unserved community. It resists, or aims to resist, serving as the means of reproduction of particular competencies or dispositions. Instead, it functions, or aims to function, as analytical and interventionary.[41]

Thus understood, practice always involves moments of dishabituation.

In her account of the "habitual new media" of the twenty-first century media landscape, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun performs a *tour d'horizon* of theories of habit, including Bourriaud's and Agamben's. Noting that in neoliberalism, "individuals' habits—their ability to quickly use freely available information—allegedly separates the winners from the losers," Chun asks whether such individual habits are what remains when, as per Thatcher's dictum, there is "no such thing as society."[42] However, surely such individual habits, for instance those of a successful entrepreneurial subject, are themselves socially (re)produced and socially valorized. A *critique of habit*—and this would not be news to Chun, of course—must address individuation as a social process, and the homologies between precious and precarious subjects. ("Yes, we are all individuals": we saw the consequences of "herd individualism" in Western societies during the Covid crisis.)

Further pointers toward a critique of habit(us) are provided by Rahel Jaeggi in her *Critique of Life-Forms.* Taking cues from Max Horkheimer's assertion that "the critical theory of society … has for its object men as producers of their own historical form of life in its totality," Jaeggi engages with forms of life as "always at once given and made."[43] Situating life-forms in the Hegelian sphere of objective spirit (the cultural and social reproduction of life), Jaeggi likewise takes on board Bourdieu, Agamben, as well as Arendt, and makes an inventory of a whole set of categories that all have a bearing on Lebensform, without being in themselves sufficient, such as rules and norms, homing in on "Customs as a Mixture of Prescriptions and Rules."[44] As for habit, the individual overtones of this concept are once more emphasized:

> Discourse about habits of life [*Lebensgewohnheit*] also comes very close to the concept of forms of life. It has connotations of regularity, stability, and self-evidence that are also characteristic of forms of life. Nevertheless, with "habits" we tend to associate isolated practices, whereas the concept of a form of life refers to clusters, or even a coherent ensemble, of practices. If one of my habits of life is to work at desk number 48 in the reading room of the Berlin State Library, this alone does not constitute a form of life.[45]

However, Jaeggi also acknowledges that practices (and hence life-forms) have a habitual nature and discusses "Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus" as "the internalization of objective living conditions."[46] This leads her to a discussion of professional ethos, discussed in the Hegelian terms of practices that "do not correspond to their concept." Thus, what forms of life—as reproduced and enacted by habitus—require is an immanent critique. Such a critique is evidently not the application of external norms to a phenomenon, but neither is it merely about the contradiction between self-proclaimed norms and lived reality. The latter approach, *internal* critique, accepts these norms, whereas *immanent* critique can also contextualize and critique the norms themselves, deriving its always situational criteria from engaging with the inner contradictions of both norms and the "patterns of movement exhibited by reality itself."[47]

If forms of life are problem-solving entities, then the question is: When do they themselves become a problem, to the point of becoming unlivable?[48] Jaeggi discusses this in relation to the family as form, but the same question can be applied to institutional life-forms, habits,

and practices in art and academia. In these and other contexts, what Fraser calls a reflexive methodology requires "the full objectification, not only of an object, but of one's relation to an object," and becoming conscious of "the social fields in which we exist and the internalized schemes of perception and appreciation, classification and hierarchization, interest and practice produced in those very fields, which [Bourdieu] called habitus."[49] How do we, in our daily practice, *enact* our (psychological, social, economic) investments? The question has, if anything, become even more pressing as the economic, social, and ideological constraints for practice become yet more suffocating. Teargas in the postcolonial colony, teargas on campus, students facing expulsion and deportation for siding with the subaltern. What is at stake here and there is the survival of forms of life—those that are forced to become forms of strife in order to continue to able to reproduce their social and even biological fabric.

Latter-day critical theory has long oscillated between Habermas's residually social-democratic liberalism—with its investment in the public sphere of deliberative democracy—and reengagements with the Marxism that had been occluded during the Cold War.[50] The former results in an identification with the institutions of "liberal democracy" that is ultimately predicated on the viability of these institutions and their life-forms. Even when rejecting liberal idealism in favor of a more materialist and rigorous understanding of the capitalist nation-state and its institutions, immanent critique is ultimately a reformist project that seeks to improve these institutions from within, though "transformative immanence," thus making them live up to their norms. This strategy has failed rather dramatically, making propositions such as that of Moten and Harney's undercommons all the more alluring; when transformative immanence is a pipe dream, what's left is the forming of maroon communities—immanent desertion rather than immanent critique.

Yet we are in a position where a tactical and disabused defense of certain infrastructures is more necessary than ever—in the face of concerted attacks on dissent and on various (overlapping) communities within academia, ranging from Palestinians and other racialized groups to leftists and LGBTQ+ students. More generally, the neoliberal attack on the humanities in countries such as the UK and the Netherlands makes universities increasingly inhospitable to heterodox forms of life, of intellectual praxis and critical inquiry.[51] Under the circumstances, it is vital that existing institutional forms and habits are supplemented and challenged by forms of self-organization whose autonomy often comes at the cost of extreme precarity.[52] In line with Daniel Loick's recent theorization of counter-communities—in dialogue with both Jaeggi's forms of life and Moten and Harney's undercommons—we must develop the art of concatenating forms of life and forms of resistance inside and outside established institutions.[53]

Non-Fascist Life-Forms against Ecocide and Genocide

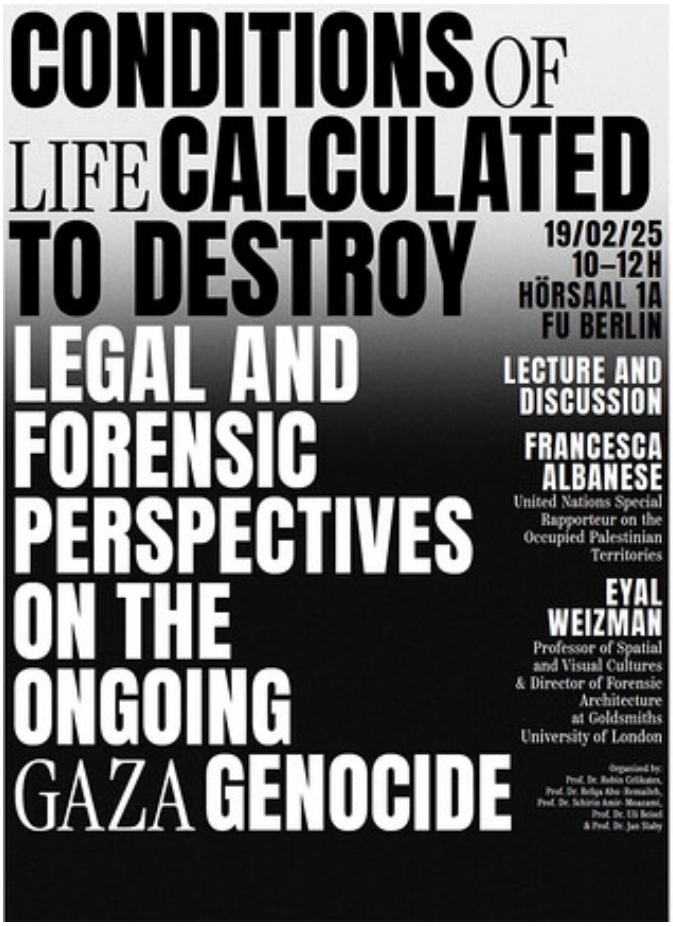
Building on Foucault and Agamben, among others, Achille Mbembe has theorized a colonial continuum of necropolitics:

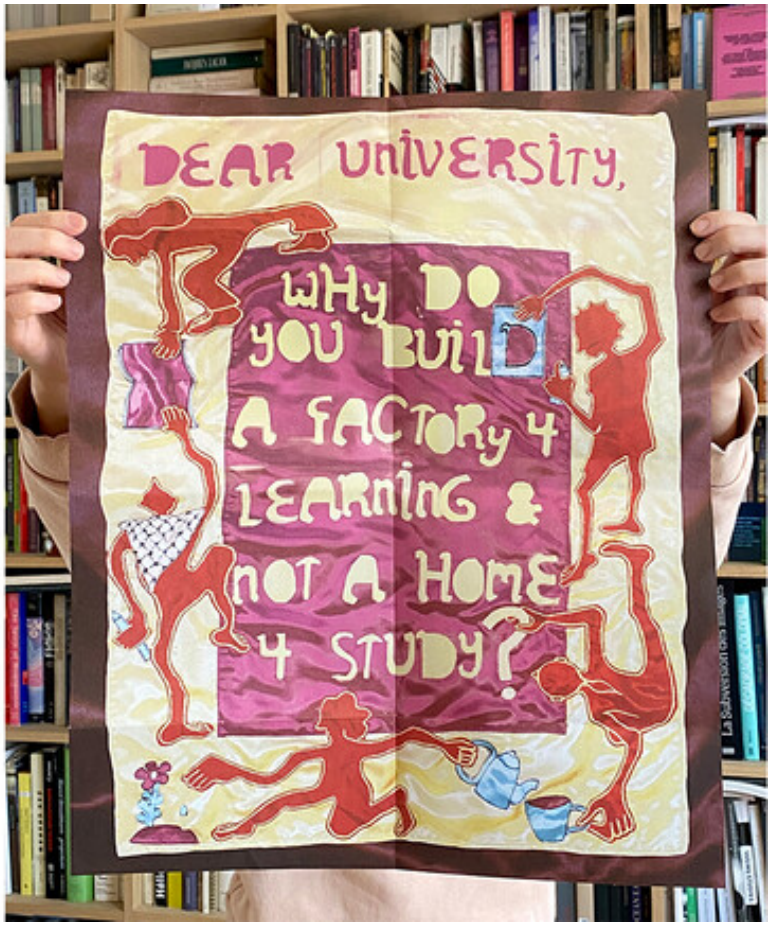
> The colonial process always revolved around a genocidal drive. In many cases, this drive never materialized. But it was always there, in a latent state. It reached its maximal point of incandescence in times of war—of conquest, occupation, or counterinsurgency. This genocidal drive proceeded in molecular fashion. For the most part simmering, it crystalized from time to time by shedding blood (slaughters, massacres, repressions), events that continually recurred. Its point of paroxysm was war.[54]

Cases abound, from Indonesia to Vietnam, from Algeria to the Congo to Namibia to South Africa—not forgetting the Americas. In the contemporary context, it may be Palestine that offers the most striking example of "late modern colonial occupation [as] a concatenation of multiple powers: disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical," but precisely insofar as Palestine functions as a model and a laboratory.[55]

In Israeli operations in Gaza, backed by the US and EU, genocidal and ecocidal logic are closely interlinked. In fact, one could argue that genocide and ecocide here show themselves to be two sides of the same coin, and that the overall target of necropolitics is precisely constituted by forms of life in their most encompassing sense. While Agamben insists that human social/cultural life, or *bios*, can be clearly demarcated from purely biological life, or *zoe*, these terms appear to be much more synonymous in Aristotle (his source).[56] What is under attack in Palestine—and in many other parts of the Global South *and* the Global North—are human forms of life as embedded in a network of nonhuman life-forms, as manifested in forms of pastoralism and the foraging of plants. Forensic Architecture's "Cartography of Genocide" online platform and accompanying report stresses that "Israel's military campaign in Gaza is organized, systematic, and intended to destroy conditions of life and life-sustaining infrastructure"—and even before the recent war in Gaza, Forensic Architecture had long investigated Israel's weaponization of "nature" against indigenous populations.[57]

Slated for February 19, a group of professors at Berlin's Freie Universität planned a program with UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese and Eyal Weizman with the title "Conditions of Life Calculated to Destroy."[58] After initially signing off on the event, the university's dean then caved to pressure and cancelled it a few days before it was supposed to take place. A different event with Albanese and Weizman, as well as other participants, was





Left: Poster announcing the event "Conditions of Life Calculated to Destroy" at Freie Universität Berlin, 2025. Right: Carla Arcos, foldout cover from the volume Promiscuous Infrastructures: Practicing Care, published by the Journal of Aesthetics & Protest and WdKA Research Center, 2024.

to take place at the venue Kühlhaus Berlin on February 18; the venue likewise cancelled the event at the last moment. In the end, the left-wing newspaper *Junge Welt* agreed to host this gathering, in a much smaller space that also had to accommodate five uniformed police offers and their own interpreter, while some twenty police vans were parked outside. Thankfully livestreamed, the program contained a few digs at the "not so free university." The next morning, the cancelled event at said university took place after all, in a bizarre form: a discussion between Albanese, Weizman, and Robin Celikates at yet another venue (bUm – Raum für solidarisches Miteinander), which was livestreamed in a lecture room at the Freie Universität. Police materialized in both locations, and the livestream at the Freie Universität was only allowed to proceed after complex negotiations.[59]

There is, of course, a vast qualitative difference between the exterminatory violence to which Palestinians are subjected and the "first-world problems" of academics in Berlin; yet the two are profoundly interrelated. As with previous teach-ins and related gatherings, quite a few of those who were present at the *Junge Welt* event would have been precarious and racialized members of the Berlin academic community (students, PhD candidates) who could face politically motivated expulsions or even deportations. In alternative venues such as *Junge Welt*'s small storefront space, a displacement of the university and its Lebensform occurs—enacted by the marginal minority of Berlin-based academics and activists, including members of the Palestinian diaspora.

University life will continue its business as usual, just as the next Documenta will continue regardless of Germany's repression of dissent in the name of a white supremacism disguised as "anti-anti-Semitism." The people that insist on gathering against genocidal Staatsräson, both on and off campus, do *between forms of life*. These life-forms may be surviving or collapsing in various ways, forced to adapt or reaching critical points of decomposition. It is against the generative potential of such encounters—the potential of forms of life coming together, blending, and morphing into new formations—that fascist politics today is ultimately aimed.

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1
Friedrich Schiller, *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795), Letter XV, quoted by Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy," *New Left Review* no. 14 (March–April 2002): 133.

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Jacques Rancière, "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art," in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Polity, 2009), 60.

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Nitzan Lebovic, *The Philosophy of Life and Death: Ludwig Klages and the Rise of a Nazi Biopolitics* (Palgrave Macmillian, 2013).

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Johan Huizinga, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen: Studie over levens- en gedachtenvormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden* (Contact, 2007). The (problematic) first English translation added "art" as a separate entity, which is arguably redundant, since Huizinga claims that it is only with the Renaissance that art and life begin to diverse. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study in the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Penguin, 1924).

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Huizinga, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* , 77. Translation by the author.

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Stefan Helmreich and Sofia Roosth, "Life Forms: A Keyword Entry," in Stefan Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life: Essays in the Anthropology of Biology and Beyond* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 24.

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Helmreich and Roosth, "Life Forms: A Keyword Entry," 20, 24.

8
W. Fred, *Modernes Kunstgewerbe* (Heitz, 1901), 5–6. Translation by the author.

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"Der Staat als Kunstwerk" is the first section of Burckhardt's 1860 *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien.*

10
W. Fred, *Lebensformen. Anmerkungen über die Technik des Gesellschaftlichen Lebens* (Georg Müller, 1911).

11
Fred, *Lebensformen*, 18.

12
Fred, *Lebensformen,* 22. Translation by the author.

13
Fred, *Lebensformen,* 47.

14
See also the documentation of Stephan Dillemuth's sprawling project on Lebensreform ca. 1900 http://www.lebensreform.info/.

15
Fred, *Lebensformen*, 509.

16
György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Columbia University Press, 2010), 23.

17
Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 26.

18
Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 56.

19
Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature,* trans. Anna Bostock (MIT Press, 1971, 72.

20
György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* , trans. Rodney Livingstone (MIT Press, 1971), 302, 319.

21
Otto Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf* (Laubsche Ver lagsbuchhandlung, 1928).

22
Spranger's *Lebensformen* (1921), with its anti-Freudian typology of human characters, did generate some interesting responses. Spranger did not regard the technical as being a distinct Lebenform, an autonomous *Wertgebiet* with a specific character type, since technology is purely instrumental and has no values of its own. In their 1931 book *Befreiung der Technik*, Friedrich Dessauer and Karl August Meissinger go against Spranger by positing a " *technischer mensch* " as a counterpart to Spranger's *theoretischer Mensch* , and as distinct from all the other types. Dessauer and Meissnger, *Befreitung der Technik* (Cotta: 1931).

23
Jesús Padilla Gálvez and Margit Gaffal, "Forms of Life and

Language Games: An Introduction," and Norberto Abreu e Silva Neto, "The Uses of 'Forms of Life' and the Meaning of Life," in *Forms of Life and Language Games* , eds. Padilla Gálvez and Gaffal (Ontos, 2011). Possible additional sources include the more specialist and obscure volume *Lebensform und Lebensfunktionen der Rede* by H ermann Amann. Padilla Gálvez and Gaffal, "Forms of Life and Language Games: An Introduction," 13.

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, from the *Philosophical Investigations* , quoted by Jesús Padilla Gálvez, "Language as a Form of Life," in *Forms of Life and Language Games,* 37.

25
Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* , trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Semiotext(e), 2004), 97.

26
Agamben's collaboration was, however, limited to the first (of six) issues, *La natura umana* (2004); see https://www.deriveapprodi.com/prodotto/la-natura-umana/ .

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Agamben references Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* in *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford University Press, 1999), 34, 121, 123. Schmitt's review of *Der Staat als Lebensform* was published in *Wirtschaftsdienst* , no. 10 (1924).

28
Lorenzo Chiesa and Frank Ruda, "The Event of Language as a Force of Life: Agamben's Linguistic Vitalism," *Angelaki* 16, no. 3 (September 2011): 169.

29
Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life" (1993), in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* , trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4–5.

30
Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* , trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford University Press, 2013), xi; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 51–52, 55.

31
Giorgio Agamben, "What is a Destituent Power?," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no.1 (2014).

32
Agamben, *The Highest Poverty,* 86–108. Here we see that Agamben, typically, favors a discussion of the premodern history of a concept over addressing his more immediate theoretical predecessors of peers.

33
Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 13.

34
Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 57.

35
Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: Wimmer Lecture , 1948* (Archabbey Press, 1951); French edition: *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique* , précedé de *L'Abbé Suger de Saint-Denis* , trans. Pierre Bourdieu (Minuit, 1967).

36
Pierre Bourdieu, "Postface," in Panofsky, *Architecture gothique et pensée scholastique,* 147; Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture*, 20. It should be noted that Panofsky himself does not use the term "habitus"; it is Robert Marichal, in a Panofsky-inspired article extensively used by Bourdieu, who does. See Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 104-–7.

37
Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture*, 20–21.

38
Bourdieu, "Postface," 135–38. On the negative turn in Bourdieu's appraisal of Panofsky, see 112–13.

39
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* , trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984), 170.

40
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* , trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78.

41
Andrea Fraser, "It's Art When I Say It's Art, or..." (1995), in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser* , ed. Alexander Alberro (MIT Press, 2005), 41.

42
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2016), 11, 8.

43
Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Harvard University Press, 2018), ix, 74.

44
Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 97.

45
Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* 38.

46
Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* 338 (note 50).

47
Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* 191.

48
Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* 153.

49
Andrea Fraser, "'To Quote,' Say the Kabyles, 'Is to Bring Back to Life'" (2002), in *Museum Highlights* , 84.

50
In the late 1960s, a young generation of critical theorists associated with the student movement "remarxified" the Frankfurt School, although the Habermasian vein would remain dominant.

51
In Dutch academia, the manufacturing of consent proceeds not primarily by criminalizing opposition to settler-colonial genocide or by outlawing "gender" and other "woke projects," but through a mismanaged society of control that appears designed to drain everyone and reduce the academic form of life to a state of survival. Even so: in the "liberal" Netherlands, far-right anti-LBGTQ+ activism within academia is on the rise, coming from organizations within the student population that seem well-networked with right-wing media and political parties.

52
It should be noted that some of the most principled defenders of the university as a space for criticality and contestation in Germany have been precisely exponents of critical theory such as Rahel Jaeggi and Robin Celikates (the latter being one of the organizers of the event, discussed below, with Francesca Albanese and Eyal Weizman at the Freie Universität on February 19, along with colleagues including Refqa Abu-Remaileh, Schirin Amir-Moazami, and Uli Beisel). See https://criticaltheoryinberlin.de/en/ .

53
Daniel Loick, *Die Überlegenheit der Unterlegenen* (Suhrkamp, 2024), 16–20.

54
Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), 128.

55
Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 82.

56
See James Gordon Finlayson, "'Bare Life' and Politics in Agamben's Reading of Aristotle," *Review of Politics* 72, no. 1 (Winter 2010).

57
"We use here the term 'genocide' within the meaning developed by Raphael Lemkin, whose thinking behind this term was instrumental for the definition formulated in Article II of the Genocide Convention. Genocide, according to Lemkin, signifies a coordinated plan of actions aimed at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves." Forensic Architecture, Eyal Weizman, Samaneh Moafi, Nour Abuzaid, Shourideh C. Molavi, Omar Ferwati, and Peter Polack, "A Spatial Analysis of the Israeli Military's Conduct in Gaza since October 2023" https://www.librarystack.org/a-spatial-analysis-of-the-israeli-militarys-conduct-in-gaza-since-october-2023/ .

58
The title evokes Article IIc of the Genocide Convention, which defines "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" as a genocidal act.

59
The archived livestream of the February 18 event (“Reclaiming the Discourse: Palestine, Justice, and the Power of Truth”) is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OxigLiaAQw&t=5s&ab_channel=DiEM25 ; for the February 19 bUm/FU livestream, see https://vimeo.com/1058614428 .

Thotti

There Is No Death: A Sketch Towards Entrancement

> So that you'll see that I am not me, that one's body is not one's own, that the things that make us and the forces which put them together are passing fancies.
>
> —Severo Sarduy, *Cobra*

When you fall and transform into a guinea fowl, as the novices in Yoruba ritual initiations do, you are carried across the beginnings and endings of the South Atlantic. Shipwrecks and enchaînements, but also ceremonies have survived the crossing, through bodies painted like the sacrificed guinea fowl that welcome God's breezes when the trance unfurls. The breath of another time possesses you. Consciousness dispossesses you, becoming a rarefied coexistence with another time of rapture. The time of the drums playing louder. The bells of the priestess becoming your head, calling for the defacement of identities, the shattering of straight paths—until the bird and the God-ancestor are entangled in the fabric of your mind's thread. In trance, birds don't exist. Flight, falterings, flutters of flocks—come, go, and leave like music through your ears.

All the creatures of the world leap at you, revealing a timeless conspiracy theory where you and humanity are tethered and fractured. It is impossible to distinguish yourself from the production of the world of ancestors coming to live in the hands that are dripping guinea-fowl white spots across the mosaic of your skin. And your pores whisper again: birds don't exist, birds don't exist, while it winds like a spiraling storm within you, turning your body into a spaceship.

This storm of formless accents distorts and rejoices within, manufacturing in you a familiar alien. You become an observer of your own thoughts, an archive of what you are not. Your own suspicion burgeons around the impossibility of sovereignty in the defacement of signs. "The observer of the medial surface waits for the medium to become the message, for the carrier to become the sign."[1] These signs are irretrievable—no *imago Dei*, creation everywhere—time born out of joint. Guinea fowl are birds of passage; they pass from white dots to murky plumage, in the rhythm of stars birthed from darkness like light entering the half-shut eyelids of the body that falls in trance. I want to sketch a guinea fowl as a galaxy, hearing stars chant through its beak like spirits speaking through a medium's lips.

In 1959, Ernst Jünger too gazed upon birds of passage gliding across the sky. The German philosopher strained amid Heidegger's legacy and a world in turmoil saw them as prophets of the time, fugitives fleeing apocalypse. The image of the migrating birds, early victims of climate and environmental catastrophe, heralded humanity's post-historical condition, which he compared to a

Jan Mankes, Guinea fowl, 1917. License: Public Domain.

projectile racing through space, perpetually accelerating.[2] Jünger asked repeatedly who initiated this catastrophe and who could bring it to a halt.

Jünger believed he stood at the zenith of historical promise in a world where technology had fortified the power of the pretentious lords of nature and earth. Yet, he felt a disquieting movement beyond control, lurking behind the time wall. The trajectory of humanity threatened collapse even within the mechanized repetition and the *Gestell* of technological existence. This terror transformed into prayer, as J ünger mused:

> If we lock a man in a tower with no light and he crawls there along the wall, he will be persuaded that he is moving endlessly. But he will not be persuaded that he is happy. Always, and indestructible until death, vibrated in him the presentiment of something else, of an infinitely greater thing, of a flood of light which frees him, calms him, even though he never saw the sun, never heard its name.[3]

Humans gaze at their fate like birds of passage, yearning for a last flight to a home and time they can no longer recognize, if it ever existed at all.

Jünger acknowledges, however, that "rupture points are discovery points."[4] This is what he attempts to explore in his 1959 book *An der Zeitmauer* (*At the Time Wall*). Amidst a crisis of history and sovereignty, Jünger proposes a fusion of the cyclical model of temporality rooted in the natural rhythms of seasons, planting, and harvesting with the linear trajectory of history, its promise of Golgotha *, Aufheben*, progress, and individuation. His model is astrology, which, although departing from a closed system, is not bound to it. Astrology begins with the repetition of archetypes but retains a sense of historicity and individuality. It recaptures the individual fate that can be "guessed, feared, smelled," yet not "calculated or measured."[5]

In Jünger's astrological synthesis, history and post-history intertwine in the figure of the spiral, where "development advances and returns, albeit at different levels."[6] Lines are drawn in circles that repeat yet expand, moving in the haptic realms of star maps, where one can grasp and perhaps rescue the destiny of the projectile racing

Luigi Mayer, Chapel of Mount Calvary, 1810. License: Public Domain.

through the homogenous space of doomsday.

Spiral the apocalypse, delay it within the curved arms of the galaxy that flows in and out of its lines and sparkles. Roger Caillois warns us: "The spiral form fulfills two fundamental laws of the universe: symmetry and growth; it combines order with expansion. It is almost inevitable that animals, plants, and stars should all be bound by these laws."[7] To say that the spiral is order and expansion is to say that it aligns form and chaos, the lines that extend while echoing their previous circles and never forgetting their return. This is what allows Brazilian performance scholar Leda Maria Martins to suggest that "ancestrality is cleaved by a curved, recurring, ringed time; a spiraling time that returns, reestablishes, and transforms, affecting everything."[8] Time rejoins, time rejoices, time restarts, swirling in the in-betweenness of ancestry and promise, displacing the curse of a golden age that was never there and an end that never reaches daybreak. The spiral is the form through which one becomes past-future and future-past in the embrace of the unstable now being traced.

Yet how can one ignore the tens of thousands of ruins and remnants amid this spiraling? Corpses, chainsaws, fires, pesticides, fight, fight, fight, these are the tools forged by the opposable thumb in a desperate effort to remain irreconcilable with the many times outside oneself, to close the circle with the violence of a line. To persist as oneself in fable and phantasmagoria: three millennia of subjects, objects, machines, culture, nature, sovereignty, and bare life grouped into binaries and opposites of existence and nonexistence, humans and migrant birds. The anthropological engines that declare that everything belongs in a certain place, that declare guinea fowl to be beasts and not me; I am not the galaxy.

Agamben states in his autopsy of the anthropological machine, *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002), that "Homo sapiens … is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human."[9] The centrality of this machine, and its primary effect, is that it can never truly recognize what is human, only recognize nothingness, absence, and openness traced in separateness. Humans

Painting by Feliciano Pimentel Lana.

fill this openness—or wound—with opposition to the inhuman and the animal. As Agamben elaborates on the operation of the anthropological machine, "Man suspends his animality and, in this way, opens a free and empty zone in which life is captured and abandoned."[10] But to Agamben this suspended animality has a particular trait that contrasts it to the open and nothingness where, he says, human beings dwell.

In his analysis, the animal "does not see the open, because even at the moment it rushes toward the sun with the greatest abandon, it is blind to it; the lark can never disconceal the sun as a being, nor can it comport itself in any way toward the sun's concealedness."[11] This critical passage contrasts the animal that rushes blindly into the sun with humans who have the possibility of avoiding absorption into their environment by staying in the openness, by remaining separate and therefore capable of "disconcealing." This distinction between animal absorption and the human possibility of suspending it is what allows Agamben to echo Heidegger in equating animal behavior—its captivation by stimuli—with the mystical experience of trance:

> Animal captivation and the openness of the world thus seem related to one another as are negative and positive theology, and their relationship is as ambiguous as that which simultaneously opposes and binds in secret complicity the dark night of the mystic and the clarity of rational knowledge. And it is perhaps to make a tacit, ironic allusion to this relationship that Heidegger feels the need at a certain point to illustrate animal captivation with one of the oldest symbols of the *unio mystica*, the moth that is burned by the flame which attracts it and yet obstinately remains unknown to the end.[12]

Humans suspend their animality because animals are captivated by their environment and cannot own themselves. Trance is thus framed as the compulsion of a naive somnambulist moth. Trance belongs to animality and its absorption in its environment, the sin of abandoning self-mastery akin to Aesop's fable of the philosopher Thales, who, mesmerized by the stars and forgetting his surroundings, tumbles into a pit. Trance escapes humanity, its openness, disconcealment, and

A mixed flock of hawks hunting in and around a bushfire. Photo: Mark Marathon. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

solitude, where phenomenology wishes to dwell and construct the presence of Being through *mineness*.

It is no coincidence that immediately after his lengthy introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger grapples with elaborating his concept of "mineness" (*Jemeinigkeit*): "That Being which is an issue for this entity in its very Being is, in each case, mine."[13] While these preliminary remarks may sound innocuous, they lay the foundation for Heidegger's work on Dasein's mineness as central to ontological difference. Dasein's questioning of Being, the manner in which to be is always a question to humans, reflects a sense of ownership that humans have over themselves, given by their separation from their environment. Being is Dasein's property; oneself is one's own property and therefore one always questions being, much like a person who, no matter how familiar their own face is, still finds themself pausing before a mirror, reassessing, questioning what they see.

This makes clear why Heidegger begins his philosophy by contemplating death—not as a final instant, but as that which characterizes the very way humans can appropriate their existence. In dying, one discovers how one's being ultimately belongs only to oneself, as death is not shareable; it is always my death and allows for a definitive break with one's environment and time. Death becomes the threshold to escape the "they," the noise of the outside with its dying animals, worlds, and sacrificed guinea fowl.

Yet Heidegger's mineness is interrupted by the voice of a mysterious friend: "Hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its own most potentiality-for-Being-as-in *hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it.*"[14] This is a puzzling quote from *Being and Time* to the extent that it reveals an invasion into Heidegger's self-owning Dasein. If the authenticity of Dasein is to own itself—insofar as humans must become their own time, their own individual relationship with their mortality—how can there be an

Antonio Canova, Urania, the Muse of Astronomy, Reveals to Thales the Secrets of the Skies, 1799. License: Public Domain.

"authentic" inside friend who is other than oneself? How to understand the coexistence of this moment where, within Heidegger's schema, a trace of the outside persists and a friend's voice is still carried within?

We might retrace philosophy's footsteps to Socrates's daimon, which guides him through life in Athens and ultimately leads him to his judgment and execution.[15] In the *Symposium*, the daimon interprets and bridges the divine and the mortal, relaying prayers and sacrifices from men to gods, and vice versa. It "binds the all to itself."[16] The presence of the daimon within is further developed in Plato's *Timaeus*: "We say that God has given to each a daimon which inhabits the summit of the body, to lift up what is heavenly in us to heaven, away from the earth, being as we are heavenly creatures, not earthly ones."[17]

In the figure of the daimon—this guiding spirit—the frontier between humans, guinea fowl, and galaxies is bridged and everything lifts. Although the daimon may appear ungraspable within Greek philosophy, this lift and bind becomes tangible when the daimon feels so close, so warm, as the eyes close and the body spins, enlarging, possessing, and dispossessing through images and voices that return and populate the human body in the way that French anthropologist Roger Batiste describes the entrancement of the Africa-Brazilian religion of Candomblé:

> They are no longer seamstresses, cooks, washerwomen who whirl to the sound of drums on Bahia's nights; here is *Omolú* (God of healing) covered with straw, *Xangô* (God of thunder) dressed in red and white, *Yemanjá* (Goddess of the sea) combing her seaweed hair. The faces have metamorphosed into masks, losing the wrinkles of labor and the burdens of everyday life; the stigmas of

> existence all but vanished. Warrior *Ogun* (God of Iron) glows with the fire of anger, *Oxum* (Goddess of fertility) becomes a wheel of carnal lust. For a moment, Africa merges with Brazil; the ocean is abolished, and the time of enslavement is erased.[18]

Confusing and merging matter and self, you and the human who tumbles into guinea fowl and soars through galaxies. Are we not sketching a *barzakh*, the intermediary realm described by the Islamic philosopher Ibn al-Arabi, a space that straddles Being and nothingness? This barzakh is a delicate outline, for beyond the stark borders of mineness and otherness, truth and untruth, it is defined as "something that separates two other things, yet combines the attributes of both."[19] It embodies the simultaneity of yes and no, echoing Ibn al-Arabi's response to Ibn Rushd: "Between the yes and the no, spirits take flight from their matter, and heads are severed from their bodies."[20]

Trance lurks in the lapses of yes and no. It takes the form of the barzakh—a simultaneity of truth and the trickster. It proposes a demiurgic aesthetic in the sense that cosmos becomes craftsmanship, not fixation but making and unmaking, in which the accumulation of artifice calls upon the impossibility of deciding what is fact or fiction, what is medium and spirit. In this, the other world of creation swallows this world and entrances it in the absence of property and mineness, in the crossing of space and time, being and beings, as a continuous flux of fragments and participations.

It is this confluence that anthropologist Carlos Fausto illuminates in his expansive ethnography of Amazonian rituals and aesthetics. In *Art Effects: Image, Agency and Ritual in Amazonia*, Fausto contrasts the "exact correspondence between pictorial representation and its referent" typical of the Christian paradigm of *imago Dei* with the Amerindian visual regime, where the problem and ambition are not verisimilitude, the imitation of the human form, or the unity of the image.[21] On the contrary, its generative impulse is to figure transformation, imagining the transformational flux characteristic of other-than-human beings. It thus involves creating the most complex and paradoxical images possible, images with multiple referents, recursively nested, oscillating between figure and ground. This is the aesthetics of the trickster and deceit, built on the firm soil of ambiguity and instability, not truth.

For these cultures that Fausto analyzes, "there is no unitary subject with which to begin or end."[22] The very conditions of subjectification necessitate a swirl of instability, flux, fragmentation, and becoming. Thus, in this sketch, the words and spirals of guinea fowl and galaxies are symbiotic with the tree trunks decorated by the native peoples of Xingu, their surfaces graced with Vulture King plumes and painted with genipap during the *Quarup* ritual, summoning their dead back to life in the weeping wood. Trees and the dead resonate back like the tune of the *mbira* of Zimbabwe, an instrument that awakens spirits by sounding like all instruments played at once, shattering the unity of ear and sound. It is akin to the "simple style, with forms boldly delineated in a realistic yet charmingly cartoonish manner," with which anonymous Korean painters channel the visions of the *mansin* shamans, "coenabling extensions of the gods' ability to act in the here and now" and metabolizing artifice into life.[23]

These entranced aesthetics matter more than ever when it comes to contemporary despair. If they can be taken as mere fetishes of enchantment, ready to be preyed upon and subsumed into the rhizomatic ideologies of all late capitalism, they point to a manner of reappropriating a "mediascape that has little use for distinctions between real and fake, signifier and signified."[24] If Western modernity culminates in the inhabiting of the blurred lines between perception and reality, if the time has come to be a conspiracy theorist amid violent wish-fulfillment and manipulation, then it is essential to not only grasp these processes but to reclaim and reappropriate the means of production of the trickster.

The trickster belongs in this genealogy of lapses, in between yes and no, in the demiurgic alchemy that reveals that we can transform absorption into atmosphere, tautology into spiraling, property into radical sharing. It is possible to think of form as a rhythm that oscillates between self and its dissolution, the impossible and its actualization; it is possible to fly beyond occupied and occupant and all the violences of captivity. Trance is the possibility of transmuting the way we think of our media environment, "not as a scene of captivity but of captivation."[25]

Captivity can be summarized as the interplay between occupier and occupied. The violence of the former against the latter is not only visible in the actual appalling horrors of political oppression and domination, the tragedies of colonialism and imperialism, but in the very representation that there is a mineness to begin with. The belief in mineness is the belief that someone can exist in owning and holding captive while another can exist to be owned and be held captive. This belief transforms spirals into occupied properties and converts entanglements into scarcity.

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx asserts that "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we possess it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly consumed, worn, inhabited, etc.—in short, when it is used by us."[26] He counters this with the understanding that reality is never appropriated privately; it is woven socially through the senses, interlinked with a larger collective fabric, "just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has

Painting of Jeseok, a village patron god of Naewat-dang shrine, likely 15th century License: Public Domain.

no sense for the unmusical ear."[27] The object's meaning for us extends only as far as our senses can reach, and these sense perceptions are constructed socially in the same way that different music produces different ears.

Marx further contends that "the forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present."[28] Since senses are shaped socially, since different aesthetics produce different bodies, they reveal that the basis and legitimization of all private property—the individual's body—can never truly be one's own.

John Locke famously defended private property based on the idea that one's body is one's property, declaring, "Though the Earth and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself."[29] It is this very idea, crafted in the fervor of the Enlightenment, that continues to legitimize the ongoing logic of occupier and occupied. Mine body, mine death, mine hand, mine land, mineness everywhere that multiples in the likeness of a never-ending real estate empire—from ghost empires to digital platforms, always built upon the ruins of an occupied that this mineness destroys.

Yet as Marx elucidates, senses, and therefore the body they reveal, exist within a metamorphic and historical web, a space in which they are both formed and form. They are always simultaneously mine and other, caught in the liminal space of yes and no. Even when one remains unaware, the music is there, expanding and ordering the beginning and ending of oneself in entrancement.

Trance is no mere sleight of hand, no illusion conjured by the smoke and mirrors of superstructures; its séance is merely an attunement to what has been held dissonant. It reveals and brings back the same polyphonic fabric where guinea fowl, galaxies, and humans lose and find themselves in gazes and movements, in an absolute movement of divergence and confluence. A spiral of barzakhs and daimons, liminal forms and figures whereupon the magma of unity cools in confusing and confounding waves rushing to the shore.

To discover a guinea fowl in the South Atlantic is to trace its silhouette against the cosmos, where light and shadow entwine, shimmering in the Yoruba myth that survived so many displacements by holding to its own metamorphosis in which the paint of the white dots changed, but the capacity to invent a blackbird adorned by demiurgic human hands was not lost. The capacity to share time in a body-mosaic of collective invention that death cannot touch.[30]

The guinea fowl opens across all times, traveling through infinite spaces, emptying and filling itself with many nows of tomorrow and yesterday. It is a vessel and a chart in the unfathomable darkness of the present. On its wings are the stars of galaxies, the lights of UFOs, pores of a shared body stripped of death. Its wings hold what was lost and shattered, resisting the line or the closure in a curve. In this curve, time doesn't arrive solely as doom; it can take the form of a spiraled prayer, a music-mosaic, a dispersed fragment reaching for the wind, the waves, the prompt ears that still don't exist to hear—trance, trance, trance.

Feather of a guineafowl. Photo: Theo Crazzolara. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

X

Thotti is an artist from Rio de Janeiro. He works at the frontier between trance and nothingness, the image and its oblivion, motion and remembrance, cinema and its expansion.

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Boris Groys, *Under Suspicion: A Phenomenology of Media* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 13.

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Jünger, *Le Mur Du Temps*, 20. All English translations from this source are my own.

4
Jünger, *Le Mur Du Temps*, 18.

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Jünger, *Le Mur Du Temps*, 22.

6
Jünger, *Le Mur Du Temps*, 22.

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8
Leda Maria Martins, *Performances Do Tempo Espiralar Poeticas Do Corpo-Tela* (Cobogó, 2021), 42.

9
Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford University Press, 2004), 26.

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11
Agamben, *The Open*, 59.

12
Agamben, *The Open*, 60.

13
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14
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16
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Laurel Kendall, Jongsung Yang, and Yul Soo Yoon, *God Pictures in Korean Contexts: The Ownership and Meaning of Shaman Paintings* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 22, 92.

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26
Karl Marx quoted in *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* , ed. Maynard Solomon (Wayne State University Press, 1979), 58–59.

27
Marx quoted in *Marxism and Art*, 60.

28
Marx quoted in *Marxism and Art*, 60.

29
John Locke, *Second Treatise .*

30
Oxalá, a key deity in the African Brazilian religion of Candomblé, is believed to have created the guinea fowl to drive Death away from a city plagued by it. The ritual involved humans painting a blackbird with a sacred white powder and releasing it, symbolizing Oxalá's wisdom and compassion, which are honored by the initiated (*iaôs)* through body painting in remembrance of this myth.

Ou Ning

The Ideal World

The place where the New Village at Kijo was located is called Ishikawauchi, which is the site of a stone castle from the Sengoku period. To its rear is the green Mount Osuzu. It is a three-tiered area, called upper castle, middle castle, and lower castle by locals. The second level extends down to the Omaru River, at the mountain's foot. The water of the Omaru wraps around three sides in the shape of a horseshoe, making it appear as a peninsula and isolating it from the outside world. When entering the village, you need to cross the river by boat. In the rainy season, the river is as wide as fifteen meters. The depth of the river during this time is unknown and travel across it is extremely inconvenient. Even in today's satellite images, the surrounding area is still green, and human traces are rare—an area even more remote over a century ago. The Ishikawauchi Dam, built in 1938, is located upstream of Omaru, north of the New Village of Kijo. There is also a small dam in the river section where the village is located. The submerged "lower castle" stills show an outline in the dry season. There is a natural boulder in middle of the Omaru, named Rodin Rock—the symbol of New Village at that time—but it is now submerged. After New Village moved from Kijo to Moroyama in 1938, there were still two members, Sugiyama and Takahashi, who remained. Until 2018, three people still lived there.[1] Now the "upper castle" features the restored house where Mushakoji lived, a relatively simple Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum. Although the New Village at Kijo is listed as a protected cultural heritage site, due to its remote location the number of visitors is less than that of New Village at Moroyama.

Zhou Zuoren was the first Chinese to visit the New Village at Kijo. He became interested in Mushakoji through reading *Shirakaba* and became a subscriber. He was the first to write an article about Mushakoji's New Village Movement in China, and also established the New Village branch in Beijing in 1920. In his "Visit to Japan's New Village," published in the October 1919 issue of *The Renaissance,* he described his difficult journey from Beijing to Tanggu, Tianjin, on July 2 of that year. He traveled by steamboat to Mojiko Station, then by train to Yoshimatsu in Kagoshima, and then on to Fukushima in Miyazaki. From there, he went by coach to Takanabe, then to Takajo, where he was picked up by Mushakoji, and crossed mountain after mountain in the rain, before finally arriving at the New Village of Kijo on the evening of July 7.[2] Today's transportation may be much more convenient and faster than at that time, but because it is so far away from Tokyo (it took three days to travel from Tokyo when the New Village was founded), I backed off and gave up on my plan of visiting.

Mushakoji originally wanted to locate New Village near Tokyo, but he could not find a suitably rural setting. In order to implement Tolstoy's pan-laborism, he had to go to the countryside. Although the road to Kijo was long, he was nevertheless very excited when he arrived:

The founding members of New Village at Kijo, 1919. From the left in the back row, the fourth is novelist Shigeho Mera, the sixth is Mushakoji Saneatsu.

> One morning in December 1918, I walked to the river. The clear water rushed against the rocks, overflowing with foam. I stood on a rock by the bank, washed my face, gargled, and prayed to the land called the castle on the other bank … Heavens! I bowed to the heavens with my heart, and my eyes lled with tears. The clear water ran ceaselessly, taking in its partners to the sea. I salute you![3]

The New Village at Kijo covered an area of 2.5 hectares.[4] The population in 1918 was eighteen; twenty-nine in 1919; thirty-four in 1920; nineteen in 1921; seventeen in 1922; and eleven in 1923.[5] At its rst establishment, the Village required all members to participate in manual labor during an eight-hour workday. It had very loose acceptance criteria for its members. As long as they recognized the spirit of New Village, they could join regardless of origin, wealth, or status—so it quickly became a refuge for the marginalized: Koreans, leprosy patients, and other outcasts of society. In 1920, Mushakoji published an article sympathetic to the Korean independence movement in *The Dong-a Ilbo,* a Korean publication. He apologized for the "arrogance" of the Japanese and hoped that the Koreans would respond to the "barbaric Japanese" not with violence but with "peace, love, and justice," just as the Nazarenes responded to the oppression of the Romans by saving the Romans. Under the influence of this article, New Village accepted two Koreans as members in 1921.[6] The concept and organization of the New Village were reflected in two documents proposed in its beginning:

The Spirit of New Village

1. Our ideal is that all the world's peoples can ful ll their destinies, and each person can also grow fully.

2. Do not harm others just so you can exist.

3. You must set your life on the right path. Do not harm others' destinies and legitimate needs because of your own pleasures, joys, and freedom.

4. We must try our best that humankind across the world can share in the same spirit and the same way of life as us, so that all humankind can fulfill its obligations, enjoy freedom, and have decent lives that accomplish their destinies (including individuality).

5. Whoever wants to live in this way, and believes that it is possible to live in this way, and hopes that people

Mushakoji Saneatsu harvesting wheat, 1919. © The Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum, Chofu.

all over the world can live in this way—these people are members of New Village and are our brothers and sisters.

6. We do not want conflict between countries and between classes. Those who enter New Village lead decent lives, work together, and believe that the world we hope for will emerge, and we work hard for this.[7]

New Village Rules

1. The New Village was established in order to live in accordance with the spirit mentioned above. Where there is a proper method, it should be followed. We hope to abolish the rules in the future.

2. Those who are in agreement with the Spirit of New Village and participate are our members.

3. There are two kinds of members: first, those who practice according to the Spirit; second, those who agree with the Spirit but aren't in a position where they practice.

4. There are limitations on the first type of member; as for the second type, anyone can join.

5. The first type of member should complete voluntary labor at will. However, an exception shall be made for those who are ill, or where there are unavoidable events, and this must be agreed to by all.

6. Member comrades shall not order each other around.

7. Property owned by members of the first category is unconditionally given to New Village. However, within the first year after joining, they can still choose what to do with their assets. Afterwards, all assets will be donated unconditionally to New Village.

8. Each member shall be responsible for their own words and deeds.

9. Any person who is not in accordance with the Spirit, or unenthusiastic, may be ordered to leave. However, the decision shall be made after discussion with all members.

10. Volunteer labor and other village matters shall be decided by all. However, within the limits of not violating the Spirit, you need not agree.

> 11. The second type of member shall try their best to promote the Spirit of New Village to the masses, assist the village in its work, and complete that work. Those who have the ability to pay membership dues shall donate over half-yen per month at will.[8]

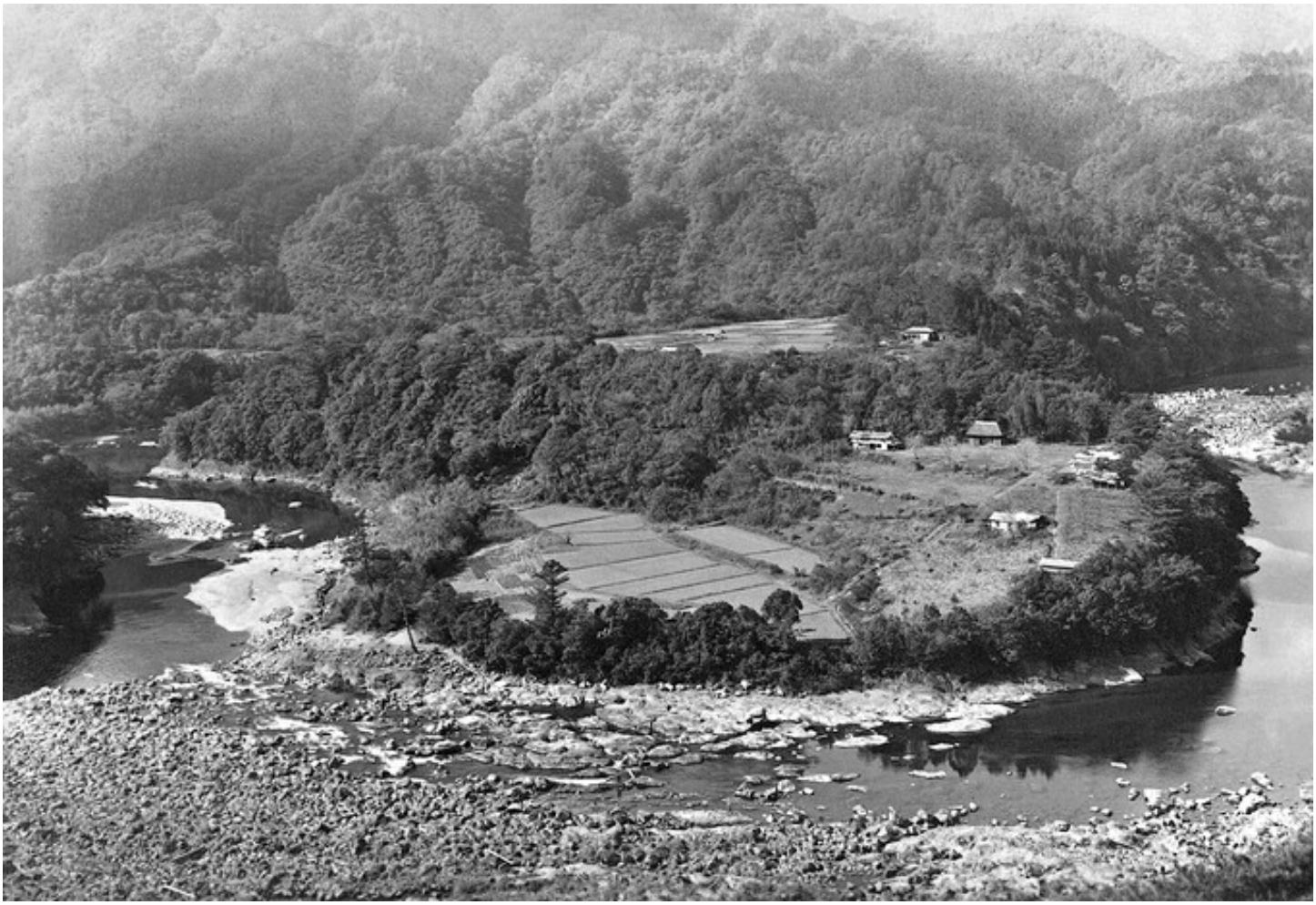
These two documents can be said to be the crystallization of Mushakoji's and his comrades' thought in founding New Village, the exploration of personal and social paths through the fog of the First World War. Although he was born an aristocrat, his conscience was captured by the inequality brought about by class differences. His sympathy for the masses who "worked for bread" led him to reflect on the deformation of labor caused by the rapid capitalist development in Japan from the Meiji to the Taisho era. His criticism of belligerent Japan proved that he could not accept the killings of the World War—and he even opposed socialist revolution in Russia because of its violence. In order to reconcile social contradictions and avoid violent revolution, he walked a third road beyond capitalism and socialism. He supported collective ownership of property, but opposed class struggle; believed in freedom, but did not accept competition; he advocated for necessary labor, but paid attention to people's leisure; he pursued anarchist egalitarianism, mutual aid, and cooperation, but abandoned any associated violence. He emphasized personal will and opposed oppression; with the ideal of humans across the world following their destinies, he resisted nationalism and ethnocentrism.

These ideals were reflected in the two-level membership system, a far-sighted design for a progressive social experiment, which not only ensured the integrity of New Village's experimental base in the wilderness, but also gathered the strength of outside aid at the broader social level by lowering the threshold of belonging. It not only mobilized members outside the village to promote it, but also alleviated their moral anxieties for not being able to leave the "old world." Later evidence also proved that the life-sustaining nourishment in the form of financial and other resources provided by members outside the village was crucial to New Village.

The bedrock ideals of New Village can be found in its holidays. According to a letter Mushakoji wrote in the journal *New Village*, New Village has five rest days each month, and there are five festivals in the year—New Year's Day (January 1), Shakyamuni's birthday (April 8), Tolstoy's birthday (August 28), Rodin's birthday (November 14, also the founding day of New Village), and Jesus's birthday (December 25, Christmas).[9] Shakyamuni's compassion for all living beings, Jesus's salvation for all, Tolstoy's pan-laborism, and Rodin's belief in beauty were the ideological resources that Mushakoji had always drawn from.[10] However, his admiration of Tolstoy had modulated long before he began the New Village experiment. After all, Tolstoy's "extreme altruism," excessive emphasis on physical labor, and excessive exclusion of mental labor seemed difficult to achieve in reality—so he introduced the "static theory of self," from the Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck, in order to find the most suitable position between "self-sacrifice" and "reasonable self-interest:" "He (Maeterlinck) taught me: we should focus on our own strengths, and improve our own strengths. The concept of 'ourselves' is profound, and difficult to comprehend."[11]

In July 1919, Zhou Zuoren visited Mushakoji, his wife Takeo Fusako, their adopted daughter Kikuko (the daughter of Kadenokoji Yasuko and her ex-husband, who later lived with Shiga Naoya and her mother), and three others who lived in the house across the river from the "lower castle." It, and the New Village main house and workshop in the "middle castle," were completed two months before. The main house was the dormitory for male members, including three ten-mat bedrooms, and was also the place where members gathered, with a library and canteen. The dormitories for female members were being built, so they were temporarily living on the upper level of the stables. The "upper castle" was where they worked: "It's all dry land, for planting some beans, wheat, corn, eggplant, sweet potato and so on."[12] New Village had a mare, three goats, two pigs, two dogs, and a variety of chickens. However, the production of eggs was not enough for their own use, and they needed to purchase eggs from other local producers. The Village struggled, but failed, to be self-sufficient. For monthly living expenses, they needed at least 250 yen, and still depended on the membership dues donated by the local branches. The large expenses such as land purchases, material transportation, housing construction, agricultural tools, water conservancy, and so on depended on Mushakoji's remuneration (he was preparing to sell his Abiko residence at that time). Zhou Zuoren, as a Chinese subscriber and advocate for the White Birch Society and *Shirakaba*, was treated with courtesy, but was also asked to work in the field—helping him experience the spirit of "cooperation through farming, sharing pain and joy" of the New Village. He felt "great joy and honor."[13] His article "A Visit to a New Village in Japan," records his experiences there in great detail, depicting an image of the Japanese "utopia" as making stumbling progress for a Chinese audience who was experiencing the process of the May 4 New Culture Movement.

At the Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum in Chofu, I watched a 16 mm black and white silent film that lasted seven minutes twenty-four seconds. It was filmed in 1922 by Mushakoji's junior classman at Peers School, Yukio Akimiti. It recorded the daily life of New Village at Kijo and the fourth anniversary celebration held on November 14. On the rapids of Omaru River, someone was ferrying in. The members on the shore stood by the rocks and waved. Some were playing in the water. Beyond the river were the farmlands owned by local people, and the ancient



The New Village at Kijo, 1935. © The Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum, Chofu.

mountains surrounding the secret world of New Village. When the bell rang in the morning, the members led into the canteen. After breakfast, they gathered around the canteen to see the work assignments for the day. Men ploughed, threshed, tended vegetables, built houses, loaded rewood, and read and wrote; women washed clothes in the river, and sewed inside their houses. Mushakoji weeded his vegetable patch and greeted guests at his door. The grass was verdant, and the distant mountain was silent. For rest, they could either take a walk in the woods or go boating on the river. On the anniversary, children played games and adults wore costumes and held parades. They dressed up as tribal chiefs and as Chaplin, and danced in circles ...[14]

Although the lm presented an idyllic image of rustic work and life—a free, unfettered paradise—all utopias face problems when they are practiced. New Village was no different, contending with both internal conflict and external difficulty. Kimura Syouta was one of the first people to criticize the New Village initiative. A writer and translator, he and his wife followed Mushakoji to Kijo as some of the rst members of the village. New Village stipulates that all members should hand over their personal property to the collective for overall distribution, and that the collective should be responsible for any expenses for living, eating, medical treatment, and travel during ordinary times. Each person would receive a monthly allowance of one yen (half-yen for children). Takeo Fusako was responsible for the nancial allocations, but her arrangements were often considered unfair—because she was perceived to give more money to those she was friendly with, or partial to. Kimura Syouta was not only dissatis ed with Takeo, but was also critical of Mushakoji. Although Mushakoji was a member of New Village, he had not put his other career aside. He often went back and forth to Tokyo, continuing to participate in the literary and artistic activities of the White Birch Society and spending less time doing labor in the village than the others; instead, he mainly sat writing at the desk. Kimura Syouta believed that, during this early period for New Village, everyone should become familiar with agricultural affairs as quickly as possible, promote production, and help achieve economic independence. For this reason, he even suggested suspending the distribution of allowances to invest as much money as possible into the construction

of New Village; thus, he belonged to what became known as the "labor faction." Mushakoji believed that his writing and activities in Tokyo could increase income from royalties in order to contribute to New Village. He insisted on the allowance system and advocated that there should be more leisure and artistic activity in the village; he belonged to the "art faction." The two factions argued bitterly. In the end, Kimura Syouta left New Village disappointed, in May 1919. The *Osaka Daily News*, which had paid attention to New Village since its beginning, reported that a "terrible internal collapse" had occurred.[15]

In addition, even if New Village was founded in the mountains and the wilderness, it could not escape the constraints of the wider society and government rule. Local farmers regarded these idealists from the big cities as rich, and raised the price of eggs and grain accordingly. When they intended to buy more land, the village head at Ishikawauchi quoted them a price that was several times higher than the market rate.[16] Plainclothes and military police also went to New Village once a month to monitor their movement and thought. In 1921, one member of New Village, Yokoi Kunisaburou, was conscripted. Subsequently, Miyazaki Prefecture built an army airport and also stationed troops near New Village. Another member of New Village, Sugiyama Masao, was conscripted as forced labor.[17] For New Village, which was short of people and a stable workforce, this made matters much worse. The nal relocation of New Village from Kijo was due to their inability to defy a Miyazaki reservoir plan that would use the Omaru River to generate hydroelectric power.

In terms of his personal life, the marriage between Mushakoji and Takeo changed in 1922. Takeo fell in love with Sugiyama Masao, who was ten years younger than she. Mushakoji divorced her and married Meshigawa Yasuko, who had entered the village the year before. Later on, Takeo was regarded as an early feminist in Japan. She had been married to Mushakoji for ten years, and "didn't understand true love until she entered the village."[18] Her extramarital affair with Sugiyama, though deeply painful to Mushakoji, also transformed his idea of womanhood. In an article from 1928, "Three Random Writings," he wrote: "Chastity cannot be used as a yardstick to judge women … Even many shortcomings do not mean that someone is rotten."[19] Takeo and Sugiyama did not formally marry until 1932. After New Village moved to Moroyama, the two continued living at Kijo until Sugiyama died in 1983, and Takeo died in 1989. They truly lived up to the pledge that "members should live permanently at New Village." Mushakoji, regardless of their past, agreed that Takeo could keep his family name, and voiced support for the couple's life together. When Takeo was interviewed in her old age, she recalled that she "was deeply pained, was disillusioned, and there was a residual pride formed by my early life of abundance. Fortunately, with the warm support of Sugiyama, I was able to survive this period of mental and physical suffering."[20] The marriage of Mushakoji and Meshigawa resulted in the birth of a daughter, Shinko, and then another, Taeko, in New Village. In December 1925, because of the gap between the ideal and the reality, and in order to take care of his sick mother, Mushakoji left New Village with his wife, daughters, and Kikuko. By that time, Shiga Naoya had moved to Nara, so Mushakoji also took his mother from Tokyo to Nara, where he set up a new household and became a close neighbor of Shiga's. Mushakoji's departure from the village did not mean that he gave up on New Village. In his later career, he continued to contribute to it as an outside member, and worked hard to support its future development.

According to statistics from the 1973 article "The Current Situation in New Village," if the money that Mushakoji devoted to the cause of New Village throughout his life was converted into yen of that year, it would reach a hundred million yen.[21] In the early days of the establishment of New Village at Kijo, his colleagues in the White Birch Society, Shiga Naoya, Yanagi Soetsu, and Kishida Ryusei, also donated generously. Yanagi Soetsu and Nagayo Yoshiro each visited, in 1920 and 1921. In order to prepare for the construction of the White Birch Art Museum, Mushakoji successfully persuaded the Osaka industrialist Yamamoto Koyata to buy Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, and brought it to Japan for exhibition in 1919. In 1920, he also asked Yamamoto to purchase a piece of land for him in Kayane, Kawaminami, near Kijo—for the second New Village.[22] In the same year he also established Aranosha in Tokyo as the publishing arm of New Village. The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake greatly reduced the assistance of outside members. By 1924, however, after years of promotional material, activities, speeches, and lobbying, in addition to the headquarters at Kijo, the second New Village at Kawaminami (land only; no members ever lived there), and the publishing wing in Tokyo, New Villages could be found in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Nagano, Hamamatsu, Hakodate, Aomori, Yokohama, Fukuoka, Kure, Gifu, Akita, Yamaguchi, Saiki, Otaru, Okayama, Niigata, Miyazaki, Hiroshima, Koromo, and Beijing and Dalian, in China.[23] There were now twenty-three branches, and, by 1929, eight hundred outside members.[24]

Mushakoji Saneatsu at the study in Kijo, 1924. © The Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum, Chofu.

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Excepted from Ou Ning, *The Agritopianists: Thinking and Practice in Rural Japan*, trans. Weng Haiying and Matt Turner (Center for Arts, Design and Social Research, 2025).

Ou Ning is an artist, curator, and writer. His practices in different periods encompass literature, music, film, art, design, architecture, urban research, utopian study, rural reconstruction, and geographical soundscape. He is the director of two documentaries, *San Yuan Li* (2003) and *Meishi Street* (2006); the Chief Curator of the Shenzhen and Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture (2009); the founding Editor-in-Chief of the literary bimonthly *Chutzpah!* (2010-2014); and the initiator and practitioner of the Bishan Project (2011-2016). He taught at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University in 2016-2017 and has been a senior researcher at the Center for Arts, Design, and Social Research (CAD+SR, Boston and Helsinki) since 2019. He moved to New York in 2022, and initiated the ISOGLOSS Collective in 2024, which will launch a multilingual online magazine, *ISOGLOSS Review*, in 2025.

1
"Saneatsu's Ideal World: Centenary Exhibition," *Yomiuri Shimbun* , Morning Edition, October 30, 2018.

2
Zhou Zuoren, "Visit to Japan's New Village," in *Art and Life* (October Literature and Art Press, 2011).

3
Mushakoji Saneatsu, *The Land* (Aranosha, 1921). This is a documentary work where Mushakoji records the search for and purchase of land in Kijo. Aranosha is a New Village publishing division established in 1920 in former Kitatoshima district in Tokyo prefecture.

4
The Complete Works of Mushakoji Saneatsu, vol. 4 (Shog akukan, 1988). Quoted in Liu Lishan, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society and Chinese Writers* (Liaoning University Press, 1995), 202. According to Japanese measurement, one *cho* is ten *tan*, one *tan* is ten *se*, one *se* is thirty *tsubo*, one *tsubo* is two *jo* , one *jo* is five *go*, one *go* is ten *shaku* , and one *shaku* is about 0.0331 square meters. Two *cho*, five *tan*, and three *se* total is 25,122.9 square meters, which translates into 2.51229 hectares.

5
Complete Works of Mushakoji Saneatsu , vol. 4. Quoted in Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 202.

6
Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Beyond Utopia: New Villages and Living Politics in Modern Japan and across Frontiers," *History Workshop Journal* , no. 85 (2018).

7
"The Spirit of the New Village" has remained unchanged since it was written. I reference Sun Baigang's translation here; see Sun Baigang, *The New Village* (Guanghua Book Company, 1933), 137–38.

8
This is the 1920 revision of the "New Village Rules." See Sun, *New Village* , 139–40. The membership fee mentioned in Article 11 was in Japanese yen at that time.

9
See correspondence of December 7, 1918, by Mushakoji Saneatsu, *New Village* 2, no. 1 (January 1919). Translated by Zhou Zuoren and included in his article "Japan's New Village," published in *New Youth* 6, no. 3 (April 1919). See Zhou, *Art and Life* , 233. However, the birth dates of Tolstoy and Rodin are incorrect; according to Wikipedia, Tolstoy was born on September 9, 1828, and Rodin on November 12, 1840.

10
He wrote *Biography of Jesus* (New Village Publishing, 1920), *Biography of Buddha* (Kodansha, 1934), and *Biography of Tolstoy* (Saikensha, 1959).

11
Mushakoji Saneatsu, "For Oneself and Others," *Shirakaba*, no. 2 (1912). Cited in Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 134.

12
Zhou Zuoren, "A Visit to a New Village in Japan," in *Art and Life*.

13
Zhou, "A Visit to a New Village in Japan."

14
Yukio Akimiti, *New Village at Hyuga* , 16 mm Im, original copy, Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum in Chofu, data number: V-5031. This Im has been digitized and is available on the of cial website http://www.saneatsu.org/ , but for copyright reasons can only be accessed at the museum.

15
See Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 210.

16
See Zhou, *Art and Life*, 251.

17
See Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 207.

18
"Mushakoji Fusako," in *Rediscovering Home: 101 People in Myazaki* , ed. Miyazaki Prefecture (Nichi Nichi Shimbun, 1999) https://www.pref.miyazaki.lg.jp/contents/org/chiiki/seikatu/miyazaki101/hito/062/062.html .

19
Published in the November 1928 issue of *The Great Harmony*. Translation in Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 236.

20
"Mushakoji Fusako."

21
Watanabe Kanji, "The Present State of New Village," in Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 212.

22
Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum, *100 Years of New Village: 1918–2018* (Mushakoji Saneatsu Memorial Museum, 2018), 18.

23
"The Location of New Village and its Branches," in Sun, *New Village* .

24
Complete Works of Mushakoji Saneatsu , vol. 4. Quoted in Liu, *Japanese Writers of the White Birch Society* , 214.

KJ Abudu

Disinheriting the Violence of Colonial Modernity: Art, Exhibition-Making, and Infra/Intra-structural Critique

A maelstrom of world-historical events emerging within the previous year and a half across various sites of imperial, neocolonial domination calls for a renewed material-discursive orientation to the unfinished project of decolonization and its vexed relationship to the structurally conservative, capital-dependent arena of "global" contemporary art. The eruptions of civil war in Haiti and Sudan, the popular struggles against repressive state apparatuses in Kenya and Palestine, the mass displacement in the Congo, and the ascendency of fascist regimes in Europe and the United States, when viewed as parts of a single constellatory image, evince the desperate, recursive consolidation of a colonial capitalist world order, which a subjected racialized "multitude" threatens to end at any moment.[1] For some working within the field of art and culture, a burning question inevitably materializes: What possible conjunctions of ethics and aesthetics, of poetics and politics, are artists, curators, and critics tasked with figuring during this heightened moment of accumulating imperial debris and accelerated mass mobilization?

Confronting similar questions at the turn of the twenty-first century with steely historical clarity and lyricized scholastic verve, the late Nigeria-born curator Okwui Enwezor penned one of his most influential texts, "The Black Box." Published in 2002 on the occasion of Documenta 11, one of his most widely celebrated exhibitions for which he was the artistic director, Enwezor sets out a series of philosophico-historical propositions to diagnose the rampant political violence of his time as well as account for "the insecurity, instability, and uncertainties" that such violence inspired, particularly in the wake of 9/11.[2] Incorporating Frantz Fanon's ever-relevant treatise on colonial violence in the *Wretched of the Earth*, Enwezor considers Ground Zero not merely as a melancholic negative space of unspeakable loss and destruction but as a generative metaphorical sign that "represents the clear ground from which the margin has moved to the center in order to reconceptualize the key ideological differences of the present global transition."[3] For Enwezor, the void of Ground Zero indexes the full manifestation of a Fanonian "tabula rasa" in which the entropic unleashing of excessive violence weakens and dissolves the "dead certainties" of the formerly stable Western liberal/imperial global order.[4] Such systemic crises present an unforeseen possibility for the global majority, a "founding moment," wherein subsequent structural reconfigurations allow for their demands to be more fully articulated.[5] These articulated demands necessarily include artistic and cultural responses, which, Enwezor observes, "posit a radical departure from the system of hegemony that fuels the present struggle."[6]

How might we name what constitutes such a "radical departure" in the present time—marked as it is with the same paranoiac, war-hungry imperial assemblages that haunt Enwezor's text, but which have reached an even further stage of technological brutishness twenty years

Guy Tillim, Colonial-era governor of Quelimane, Avenue Patrice Lumumba, Quelimane, Mozambique, 2008. © Guy Tillim. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town / Johannesburg / Amsterdam.

later? Where, as Enwezor also asked, might the symbolic space of Ground Zero be located today, amidst the multiplication of global catastrophes and their unmasking of the impotence of liberal democratic regimes and international juridical processes (failing institutions Enwezor presciently thematized in his series of transnational discursive platforms for Documenta 11)?

This text does not set out to answer these questions per se, nor does it seek to provide a historical overview of Enwezor's career. Rather, in taking seriously Enwezor's *theoretical* propositions, most especially his insistence on nurturing a historical consciousness of the present, this text seeks to recast some of his curatorial methodologies and hermeneutic tools with respect to the current landscape of contemporary art. Such a brief exercise, I hope, might clarify and reenergize the social stakes of artistic production within our present planetary predicament.

Introduction

A series of political uprisings against racial, colonial violence, from the Rhodes Must Fall to the Black Lives Matter movements, have come to the fore of global consciousness over the last decade, causing a notable shift in the signified social priorities of various art institutions, from museums and commercial galleries to biennials and art fairs. As a means of appeasing the conscience of the average liberal cultural consumer, terms such as "decolonization" and "racial reckoning" now litter the vocabularies of exhibition press releases and mission statements, and complement internal operational drives for "diversity, equity, and inclusion" in hiring practices. Despite recent backlash from far-right reactionaries—the Trump administration's attack on so-called "wokeism," for example—these tendencies have yielded a dramatic increase in the number of exhibitions and public programs dedicated to, featuring, and thematizing the aesthetics, discourses, and histories of the racialized global majority.

In one contingent sense, Enwezor and numerous other

cultural workers active in the 1990s and 2000s who innovated scholarly and curatorial frameworks to redress the gross geographical and epistemological imbalances in the Western contemporary art field appear to have succeeded in their historical mission. This mission was partly geared towards achieving greater visibility for artists from underrepresented regions of the world (and, in the best cases, was paired with a materialist account of the antagonistic conditions of possibility of such visibility, like in Enwezor's Documenta). Writing on the shortcomings of a provincialized, Euro-America-centric form of "internationalism" prevalent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, artist, theorist, curator, and Enwezor's frequent collaborator Olu Oguibe states that "a new internationalism can only be proposed as an alternative if its object of negation is western internationalism. Otherwise it becomes moribund and irrelevant."[7] Enwezor's thoughts follow in rhyming succession:

> Having abandoned the strictures of "internationalism," there is now the idea that globalization of artistic discourses opens the doors to greater understandings of the motivations that shape contemporary art across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and South America … Rather than a center, what is much in evidence today are networks and cross-hatched systems of production, distribution, transmission, reception, and institutionalization.[8]

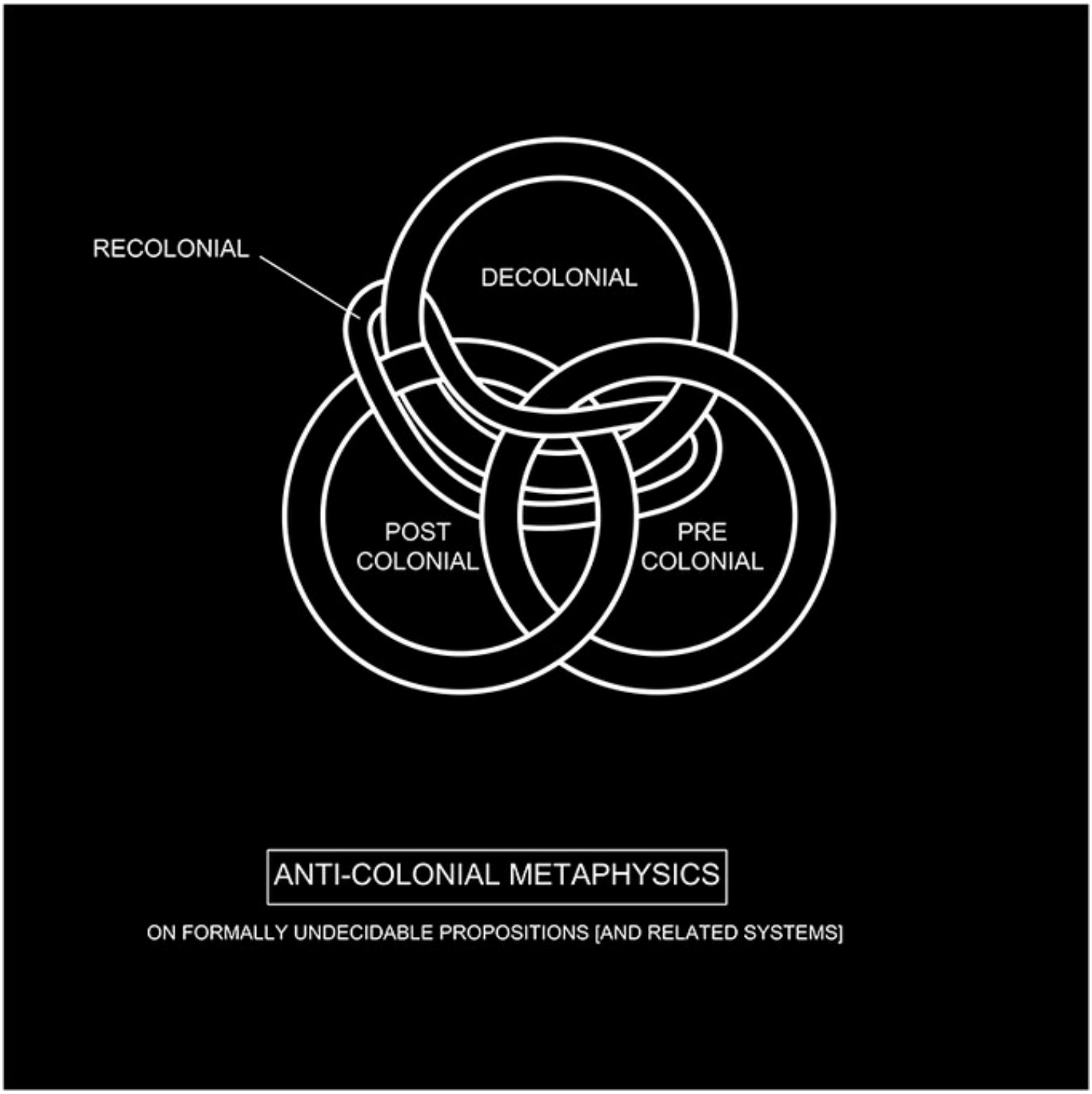
Oguibe and Enwezor echo the sentiments of a generation of curators and art historians who long expressed their frustrations with either the whole absenting of artistic and cultural knowledge from postcolonial geographies—or what the Argentinian curator Carlos Basualdo referred to as the "new geographies of culture"—in mainstream art historical canons, or the conditional, paternalistic, and often reductive terms of their inclusion in institutional exhibiting contexts.[9] Such dynamics of selective inclusion are still very much at play two decades on (hence my insistence on the contingency of their success) but what remains clear is that the methodologies developed by this generation of cultural workers—in their explicit socio-politicization of exhibition themes, their transdisciplinary introduction of discursivity, research, and liveness into curatorial considerations, and their consistent inclusion of artists from so-called global "peripheries," or what is often today referred to as the "Global South"—have now become instituted as normative procedures within the exhibition, public programming, publishing, and marketing complex of the contemporary art cultural industry.[10] For better or worse, these "postcolonial modalities" have most fully been integrated within a particular circuit of artistic production, distribution, and reception, namely the biennial mega-exhibition.

Here I identify two recent developments in this modified contemporary art landscape; closely aligned with the recent "decolonial turn," these developments seem to put pressure on, and therefore call for a critical revaluation of, the modalities previously identified. The first is the marked increase of institutional interest in the aesthetic interventions of indigenous artists. The second is the proliferation of exhibitions dedicated to unearthing histories of modernism from the non-Western world. Both developments *appear* to introduce paradigms for the "radical departure" Enwezor describes; however, I argue that such a possibility remains foreclosed by the drives and machinations of racial capital, its onto-epistemological corollaries, and their hegemonic capture of the contemporary art-institutional apparatus. Resisting such closure and charting creative pathways towards the distinctly postcolonial "founding moment" Enwezor theorizes will require a reinvigorated and recalibrated commitment to a set of institutionally reflexive strategies and tactics that sharpen the structural relationships between aesthetic practice and the horizons of liberatory politics.

Resisting the Art World's Primitivizing Impulse

Without a doubt, indigeneity forms a constituent component of the "postcolonial constellation" through which Enwezor famously schematizes the complexly entangled postimperial geopolitical arrangements of power that came into being after World War II, between "the so-called local and the global, center and margin, nation-state and the individual, transnational and diasporic communities, audiences and institutions."[11] A dialectical framework for thinking the post-1945 global order and its inextricable relation to the dynamism and heterogeneity of contemporary cultural production, the postcolonial constellation buzzes with the violent antinomies of globalization and the emergence of creolized, cosmopolitan modes of artistic and discursive articulation. Enwezor's formulation is influenced by Walter Benjamin's historical-materialist thinking on the constellation: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."[12]

In terms of Enwezor's spatiotemporal propositions about global modernity within this constellatory rubric, he admittedly privileges the historical experience of postcolonial *national* subjects (and their diasporas) emerging from the wake of colonial sovereign rule—what has been called the Third World—over the experiences of indigenous populations, world over, who are ongoingly subjected to settler-colonial modes of dispossession and provide, via land expropriation and genocidal processes, the means for the establishment of various (even so-called postcolonial) nation-states—what some have referred to as the Fourth World. We see Enwezor's Third Worldist commitments presented in a range of exhibitions such as "In/sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present"



Nolan Oswald Dennis, recurse 4 [3] worlds, 2023. Detail.

(1996), "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1954" (2001), and "Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography" (2006). Despite this, I want to insist that Enwezor's consistent problematization of the reproduction of dichotomizing logics of civilizational difference by Western epistemic matrices—what he sometimes referred to as "Westernism"—proves entirely relevant for assessing the situation of indigenous artists and their accelerated incorporation into the contemporary art-institutional apparatus.[13]

On the one hand, indigenous struggles, whether they are situated in Africa, Asia, the Americas, or the Pacific, sensitize us to the *material* registers of decolonization. By staking a concrete claim to dispossessed land,

indigenous political positions enflesh the dematerialization of symbolic appeals to decolonization (the preferred avenue of cultural institutions) by reminding us that this process of "total disorder" is not a metaphor.[14] However, in many recent cases within the realm of art and culture, indigenous aesthetics have been prized not for their transgenerational contributions to centuries of anticolonial, anti-capitalist, and anarchist struggles but rather because they appear to bear the exotic sign of absolute cultural difference.[15] Under the discursive guise of decoloniality, many recent biennial and museum exhibitions in New York, Paris, Berlin, Venice, and various other art-world nodes have presented, without sufficient political contextualization and rigorous metaphysical analysis, the ritualistic performances and craft techniques of artists racially marked as indigenous. These violent acts of decontextualization might then be excused, via convenient (mis)readings of postcolonial theorists such as Glissant, as defiant assertions of the "right to opacity."[16]

The reemergence of what one could call a primitivist impulse in contemporary art might be attributed, in part, to the severe alienating affects produced by neoliberal capitalism's surveillance and media technologies, which heighten contemporary Western society's libidinal desire to search for and consume, *without relational implication*, the Other's ways of life. This primitivist desire, as we have seen time and again in the modern history of the disenchanted West—from Romanticism's orientalism to European modernism's negrophilia to the much-analyzed "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibition in 1989—partakes in an affective economy of colonial instrumentalization and ethnographic titillation whereby predominantly white-run cultural institutions exhibit the art of the Other so that their majority-white, middle-class audiences can experience temporary cathartic releases from the ossified strictures of Western techno-scientific reason. Enwezor's polemical art criticism and politically antagonistic exhibitions, as well his founding of the contemporary African art journal *Nka* in 1994, were largely formed in response to a similarly insidious form of neo-primitivism that took hold in the late 1980s and 1990s in the wake of neoliberal globalization. During this period, the West's hunger for the cultural Other, triggered by so-called postmodernist transformations in networks of capitalist production that intensified proximities between the margin and the center, came with certain hang-ups—one of them being the dismissal of racialized and non-Euro-American artists, especially those academically trained in the West, whose works did not conform to colonial expectations of cultural authenticity or conceptual naivete. As Oguibe relevantly notes, "To primitivise is to make more tolerable, more containable, less competitive, less threatening. Its purpose, ultimately, is to freeze all those whose origins lie in the former colonies of Europe in the precise historical moment of their defeat."[17] (It is worth noting that even when attempts are made to ameliorate this chronopolitical desire to "freeze" the Other—for instance, through representational combinations of indigenous cosmologies with digital technologies or industrial robotics—such attempts typically remain superficial and do not offer fundamental critiques of "technology" as such but only serve to reify the linear temporal distance between a folkloric past and a digitized or industrialized present/future.)

On the other hand, indigenous critiques likewise foreground the equally important *metaphysical* conditions of decolonization. Before I proceed with this line of thought, it is important to mention that metaphysics was not a prioritized register of analysis in Enwezor's postcolonial dialectical-materialist thinking; the closest he might have come to this was in his essay "Where, What, Who, When: A Few Notes on African Conceptualism," where he (briefly) touches on an animist concept from Igbo thought. Speculatively posing African aesthetics as articulating, avant la lettre, conceptualism's dematerialization of the art object, Enwezor writes, "Where there is something standing which can be seen, there is something else standing next to it which cannot be seen but which accompa-nies the object. In its material basis, African art is object-bound, but in its meaning and intention it is paradoxically anti-object and anti-perceptual, bound by the many ways of conveying ideas whereby speech or oral com-munication are highly valued."[18] The lack of engagement with metaphysics in Enwezor's work might be attributed to four factors: his early training in political science and therefore his taking to the social-scientific registers of militarism, geopolitics, and economics; the influence on him of postcolonial and critical social theorists such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault, who focused more on cross-cultural formations, problems of translation, questions of the public sphere, and transhistorical ruptures over explicit metaphysical interrogations (which at the time may have been viewed as exercises in ideological obscuration); his effort to strategically bypass exoticist expectations by choosing *not* to directly engage indigenous systems of knowledge and instead foreground the realism of the documentary mode;[19] and, given the location, period, and orientation of his intellectual formation, his divergence from the politicized ontological and epistemological imperatives presented in Latin American decolonial theory and in the most recent wave of black (feminist) critical theory.

Revising the methodological limitations above, I argue that indigenous struggles for self-determination and land repatriation are not articulated merely on a reactive, or perhaps materialist, basis of mitigating colonial domination, but more critically, that these struggles are given their unruly substance through intergenerational transferences of dynamic, indeterminate structures of being and knowing. Such indigenous onto-epistemological structures—and I mean to evoke an incalculably entangled plurality here—exist in *contemporaneous* tension with the colonial present and put pressure on the modern/colonial secularist enclosures that inform a

majority of mainstream political science, Western critical theory, and even Anglophone postcolonial discourse. This is because, despite the radical aspirations of the aforementioned intellectual traditions, they have often reinscribed (through serially attempted negations) a set of sedimented ontological dualisms inaugurated by hegemonic post-Enlightenment thought—e.g., distinctions between spirit and matter, nature and culture, life and death. What is therefore proposed (and often overlooked) in a number of indigenous aesthetic practices is their *structural* capacity to illumine alternative metaphysical grammars, many of which, in *preceding* and *exceeding* the sense-making boundaries of Western onto-epistemological formations—that is, the constitutive exclusions that cohere colonial modernity's thresholds—are opportunely armed with a potent liberatory power to break through and scramble the dichotomizing conceptual pillars upholding the West's "cognitive empire."[20] Furthermore, these decolonial metaphysical critiques—for example, when fiercely unleashed and made to "toil" within the encircling racialized field of modern aesthetics[21]—might then, in turn, create the conditions of possibility for enacting material transformations of social, political, and economic realities.[22] Therefore, even though I have made "material" and "metaphysical" distinctions in this text for analytical purposes, indigenous struggles (as well as the black radical tradition) show us that these planes are, in truth, deeply enmeshed and mutually constitutive. As the anti-colonial Guinean delegation at the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival of Algiers argued, "Material cultural production and spiritual cultural production are dialectically linked and stimulate each other."[23] This delegation was involved at the time in a revolutionary armed struggle against the Portuguese—an important historical context for deciphering the political impulse behind Enwezor's exhibitions—and understood culture as an amorphous totality of material and immaterial aspects, further echoing Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who declared:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms.[24]

Yet, within art spaces, indigenous spiritual or metaphysical interventions often remain politically neutralized (divorced from their dialectical interaction with existing material conditions) either because they are framed as producing *wholly* untranslatable and transcendental categories of knowledge or, via diluted appeals to "epistemic disobedience" or the floating signifier of "the otherwise," tend to lack meticulously specified philosophical models and parameters.[25] A noteworthy counterexample here is the Mexican art group Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, whose experimental film works, informed by Meso-American myths as well as agitprop and local resistance movements—contrasting elements that define their guiding methodical framework of "shamanic materialism"—seek to enact a "political film-trance of agitation" that disarticulates the spectatorial regimes of corporate and state media.[26] While, of course, one must recognize the partially unmappable coordinates of particular onto-epistemologies in relation to hegemonic Western cognitive schemas, institutional framings that disarm spiritually inclined indigenous aesthetic practices in the manners specified above do a disservice to decolonizing struggles: first, by reifying colonial dichotomies of unbridgeable civilizational difference between the West and the rest; second, by reproducing the notion that non-Western knowledges are beyond our capacities for reasoning, as such[27]; and third, by absolving public audiences, curators, and critics from critically engaging these alternative systems of thought to produce what decolonial theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls an "ecology of knowledges."[28] Put differently, within spaces of contemporary art, subjugated indigenous metaphysical schemas are too often domesticated and ornamentalized rather than critically (or speculatively) elaborated and structurally "put to work."[29] This potentially dangerous slippage into indigenous romanticism and cultural essentialism is perhaps the reason why Enwezor, and other Global South curators and theorists of his generation, thought it more effective to prioritize materialist frames of analysis. Take, for example, Enwezor's artistic directorship of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennial (involving curators from around the world including Hou Hanru, Kellie Jones, Gerardo Mosquera, Yu Yeon Kim, Octavia Zaya, and Colin Richards), which focused on geopolitical and economic issues of nationalism, citizenship, border crossings, and globalizing trade routes. In my view, these framings, as necessary as they were and continue to be, cede too much ideological, spiritual, and cosmological ground to the colonial-capitalist opposition. As de Sousa Santos writes, "There is no social justice without cognitive justice," and furthermore, "we do not need alternatives; we need rather an alternative *thinking* of alternatives."[30] Challenging the impasses of classic postcolonial thought, Denise Ferreira da Silva similarly proposes that what is at stake in decolonization is not only a rethinking of the relationship between processes of colonial/racial differentiation and capital accumulation—entwined processes which power the political-economic infrastructures of global

contemporary art production and display—but a fundamental critique of what she calls coloniality's "intrastructures," that is, the "micro forms and pillars that compose modern thought, and those that enter into the constitution of concepts and categories and are presupposed (as the operative element) in its formulations."[31]

Generatively modifying Enwezor's postcolonial realism, da Silva's provocation helps clarify my proposition that the heterogenous anarchic grammars offered by contemporary indigenous art continue to be restrained by the subsumptive hydraulics of racial capital and its accompanying colonial metaphysics precisely because, if rigorously followed to their logical conclusions and *materially implemented in daily practice*, such grammars risk dissolving (as opposed to merely reforming) the very world instituted by "Man," and in turn, the counterrevolutionary institutional models, hierarchal value systems, and expropriative and exploitative economic mechanisms upholding the globalized contemporary art world as we know it.[32]

Global South Modernisms: Transgressing Formalist Enclosures

The art world's colonial capitalist engulfment of indigenous possibility (though never total) mirrors its institutional capture of Global South modernisms, which ironically, in many cases, were aesthetic byproducts of one of the most considerable threats to capitalism's world-systemic reproduction in recent history: the anti-colonial national liberation struggles of the mid-twentieth century in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Indexed by an archival density of tricontinental conferences, publications, posters, films, and songs (which regularly featured in Enwezor's exhibitions, most notably "The Short Century," and now even more so in a number of recent art exhibitions), this 1950–70s era of proliferating militant, anti-colonial activity evinced the global optimism of a certain generation tasked with challenging colonial sovereign rule and reconfiguring a Cold War geopolitical world order controlled by Soviet-communist and Western capitalist imperial interests. The so-called triumph of capitalism following the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall therefore leaves not only the failed realization of communism but also the incomplete project of decolonization as an unresolved specter that perpetually returns to haunt and destabilize the contemporary neocolonial world order.[33] Such ravenous specters have made their presence known through the twenty-first century unfolding of untenable imperialist-capitalist contradictions in Haiti, Sudan, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Kenya, the Congo, Bangladesh, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and numerous other embattled sites.

In contradistinction to modernisms emerging within the West and their privileging of individual artistic autonomy, modernisms in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have often been tied to historical processes of anti-colonial national liberation and the collective cultural articulation of novel postcolonial subjectivities. These artistic modernisms are given methodological coherence in Enwezor's thinking by his adoption of the multiple modernity thesis: wherein modernity is not seen as a monocultural and unifocal phenomenon emerging only in the West, but is constituted via the relational dynamics established by the capitalist world-system between overdeveloped imperial metropoles and underdeveloped colonial peripheries, engendering cultural and material negotiations in a plurality of locales that give rise to multiply situated " *petit* modernities." [34] Modernisms of the Global South can be viewed as aesthetic analogues of these world-historical processes, as they contain the antagonistic traces of unfinished, cross-cultural encounters and experiments ushered in by modernity and its animating racial and colonial dialectics. Here, we might consider artists including the Mozambican painter Malangatana Ngwenya and his association with the guerrilla wing of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in the 1960s; the Egyptian artist Inji Efflatoun and her Marxist-feminist anti-colonial activism in the 1940s and 1950s; the Sudanese drawer and painter Ibrahim El-Salahi and his role as a cultural attaché to the socialist Sudanese government in the late 1960s and 1970s; and the Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam and his development of a distinctly Afro-surrealist style stemming from his proximity to anti-fascist and anti-imperialist political groups between the 1930s and 1960s.[35]

In more recent times, however, these global modernisms have been mummified by the historicist, museological logics of the contemporary art-institutional complex, even despite the stated decolonial intentions of various curators. With few exceptions, many recent exhibitions exploring these subterranean histories of African, Arab, Asian, and Latin American modernisms in London, New York, Venice, and other geographical sites either disarm (through a methodological synthesis of regressive art-historical formalism and academized decolonial discourse) the radicality of artworks grounded in insurgent, anti-imperial imaginaries, or inappropriately radicalize (through a misapplication of the Manichean divide between colonizer and colonized that does not factor in class stratifications) the work of socioeconomically privileged artists of the "native bourgeoise" who were in truth more structurally proximate to the cosmopolitan flows of international monopoly finance than to the anti-colonial struggles of the subaltern masses.[36]

Given their convenient temporal location in a nostalgized past and their predominantly conservative materialization as painting and sculpture, many of these global modernist works are easily and violently assimilated into the art world's neutralizing symbolic agenda of canonical diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, in shifting now fashionable "decolonial" concerns towards the early and

Inji Efflatoun, Soldier (Fedayeen), 1970. Courtesy Safarkhan Art Gallery.

mid-twentieth century, these exhibitions do not in fact resist the pressures of the speculative art market (as was claimed by critics responding to the 60th Venice Biennial especially) but nourish new avenues for capital's valorization by strengthening and expanding the *secondary* art market. As records from regional sales departments in major auction houses will show, market valuations of numerous Global South modernists have only escalated in recent years and are predicted to increase further, with many of their works being prized, like in Western markets, as rarefied commodities by their respective ruling, collecting classes.[37] Therefore, in line with capital's affinity for spectacle and commodification—which function to flatten and conceal structural antagonisms as well as foreclose noncapitalist futures—many of these exhibitions' aloof historicism and object-centered formalism (infra)structurally work against their decolonizing aims.

Rather than being disciplined by art-historical orders of knowledge into stable objects of economic value and aesthetic appreciation—not unlike the thousands of objects looted from the non-Western world which found their way into the sanitized vitrines of Western museums—postcolonial modernist works, I suggest, ought to be politically reanimated and discursively refracted through an array of anti-disciplinary procedures. Consistent with and extending Enwezor's refusal of disciplinarity in his prioritization of postcolonial methods of "subversion, hybridization, creolization, displacement, and reassemblage," these procedures would be aimed at deciphering the historical struggles embodied by these modernist artworks and, more importantly, connecting said struggles to contemporary aesthetic investigations, economic conditions, social movements, and technological configurations.[38] Enwezor enacted these methods in 2002 as artistic director of Documenta 11 with the development of a series of transdisciplinary, discourse-led "platforms" in Lagos, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Vienna that preceded, horizontally paralleled, and therefore decentred the final exhibition platform in Kassel. He enacted them again in 2015 as artistic director of the 56th Venice Biennale with an integrated "Arena" section that involved a live, continuous reading of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* alongside an extensive program of socially inflected musical performances and film screenings. These performative reanimations, which, in my view, take seriously the animist insights mentioned earlier regarding Enwezor's thinking about African aesthetics and its "anti-object" meanings and intentions, could not be more critical than in our time where, akin to the tricontinental resistance models fostered by mid-twentieth century liberation struggles, we are tasked with the responsibility of building transnational solidarity networks capable of transcending hermetic provincialisms and dead-end identitarianisms.

Further reminding us that discursive and curatorial procedures proper to the history of art are inextricable from the development of the Western academy, and are therefore thrown into crisis by the postcolonial constellation, Enwezor writes that

> any critical interest displayed towards exhibition systems that takes as its field of study modern or contemporary art necessarily refers us to the foundational base of modern art history and its roots in imperial discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, the pressures that postcolonial discourse exerts

on its narratives today.[39]

By exposing and problematizing the imperial base, these postcolonial pressures (exerted by the aesthetic intelligence and historical accretions of these global modernist works) necessarily call for unruly, differentially articulated exhibition systems. Such systems, as alluded to above, would refuse the formalist erasures and historicist enclosures inflicted upon anti-colonial thought, and rather propose, in a performative, indeterminate modality, what Enwezor refers to as a "communicative, dialogic forum of conversations between heterogenous actors, publics, and objects."[40] This "forum," this "parliament of forms" as Enwezor alternatively put it, announces the choreographic terms of emergence of an improvised, mobile, always-incomplete ensemble, a comm(o/u)ning arena of anarchic sociality which, as Fred Moten notes, bursts with a "melodramatic irruption" that upsets any pretense to orderly, formalized relation.[41]

Tactics and Strategies Against Institutional Capture: Disinheriting Colonial Violence

The gross failure of most art and academic institutions to address the emergent global imperial crises exposes the illusory basis of their liberal claims to "progress" as well as their inextricable material complicity with a plutocratic ruling class. Indeed, what to make of these institutions' (selective) appeals to decolonial and racial justice when their individual, corporate, and state funders are the direct beneficiaries of neocolonial arrangements which perpetuate the subjugation of the very Global South societies that these institutions then seek to culturally represent?

Ushering in the "global transition" Enwezor speaks of will therefore require going beyond representational postcolonial gambits that simply aim to feature and include marginalized discursive traditions and artistic legacies—methods that may indeed have had radical material impacts at an earlier time when the contemporary art world's concern with global peripheries and exiled diasporas was far from normative. In the present context, where such symbolic modalities have largely been subsumed and domesticated by global capital, what might be required rather is the construction of a transnational, counter-hegemonic phalanx that is capable of sustaining palpable assaults on, and prefiguring structural alternatives to, the dominant institutional networks that comprise the global contemporary art world. In other words, I speak here of a renewed and collectively enunciated cultural militancy (unmoored from the nationalist and heteropatriarchal determinations of much anti-colonial thought) that is committed to, on the one hand, forcefully destabilizing, and on the other hand, thinking beyond, the material infrastructures and metaphysical intrastructures governing the institutional landscape of contemporary art and its built-in racial-capitalist asymmetries of power. (Though I have grounded these interventionist protocols within the field of art as a starting point, what is at stake, à la Enwezor, is art's dislocation from its rarefied spheres of concern and its reconstitution within an anti-disciplinary, sociopolitical field of broadened knowledge production and organized action.)

In the former "deconstructive" camp, we might locate tactics and strategies that have (within Western art-historical discourses) been retroactively placed under the (always insufficient) umbrella of "institutional critique." Enwezor was, rightly, skeptical of the revolutionary capacities projected onto practices within this art-historical genealogy, often expressing his impatience with the general lack of reflexivity around their Euro-America-centric enclosures.[42] (Despite his criticisms, Enwezor consistently worked with many artists from this amorphous canon, including Hans Haacke, Adrian Piper, Maria Eichhorn, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Renée Green, to name just a few.[43]) Still, Enwezor argues that the (neo-) avant-garde impulse presented by institutional critique could potentially meet the political exigencies engendered by twenty-first century imperial machinations so long as it undergoes a fundamental rethinking by way of expanding what he understands as its hitherto narrow cultural and geographic locus.

We can identify these generative expansions among a variety of artists working today, the practice of Cameron Rowland being just one example. Rowland's sculptures and contractual pieces legally and economically implicate art institutions in contemporary financialized circuits of racial capital—globalized circuits with city-specific nodes, which, as the artist's footnoted exhibition essays show, are always structurally wedded to the exorbitant material gains of the transatlantic slave trade and its transhistorically adaptive regimes of gratuitous violence. Extending the (extra-)aesthetic methods pioneered by the aforementioned genealogy of institutional critical artists, some of Rowland's works push beyond mere implication and articulate, with poetic understatement and counter-juridical precision, the abolitionist horizons of the black radical tradition, for instance: by making a nonprofit art institution a legal custodian of a tax-exempt trust whose value-accruing corporate shares must be liquidated and distributed in the future event that US reparations are ever officially made (*Disgorgement*, 2016); by decelerating the rate of capital growth of the Crown Estate through the creation of a financial entity that retains a security interest in an art institution's mortgaged assets of royal provenance (*Encumbrance*, 2020); or by legally burdening a German art institution, and by extension the city government of which it is a sub-department, with the financial responsibility of repaying an infinitely increasing debt (*Bankrott*, 2023). Working more in the immediate register of direct action, we might also consider the

Cameron Rowland Encumbrance, 2020Mortgage; mahogany double doors: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, front entrance Encumbrance, 2020Mortgage; mahogany door: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, reception to gallery Encumbrance, 2020Mortgage; mahogany door: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, reception to hallway Encumbrance, 2020Mortgage; mahogany door: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, hallway to gallery Encumbrance, 2020Mortgage; mahogany handrail: 12 Carlton House Terrace, stairwell, ground floor to first floor The property relation of the enslaved included and exceeded that of chattel and real estate. Plantation mortgages exemplify the ways in which the value of people who were enslaved, the land they were forced to labor on, and the houses they were forced to maintain were mutually constitutive. Richard Pares writes that "[mortgages] became commoner and commoner until, by 1800, almost every large plantation debt was a mortgage debt." Slaves simultaneously functioned as collateral for the debts of their masters, while laboring intergenerationally under the debt of the master. The taxation of plantation products imported to Britain, as well as the taxation of interest paid to plantation lenders, provided revenue for Parliament and income for the monarch. Mahogany became a valuable British import in the 18th century. It was used for a wide variety of architectural applications and furniture, characterizing Georgian and Regency styles. The timbers were felled and milled by slaves in Jamaica, Barbados, and Honduras among other British colonies. It is one of the few commodities of the triangular trade that continues to generate value for those who currently own it. After taking the throne in 1820, George IV dismantled his residence, Carlton House, and the house of his parents, Buckingham House, combining elements from each to create Buckingham Palace. He built Carlton House Terrace between 1827 and 1832 on the former site of Carlton House as a series of elite rental properties to generate revenue for the Crown. All addresses at Carlton House Terrace are still owned by the Crown Estate, manager of land owned by the Crown since 1760. 12 Carlton House Terrace is leased to the Institute of Contemporary Arts. The building includes four mahogany doors and one mahogany handrail. These five mahogany elements were mortgaged by the Institute of Contemporary Arts to Encumbrance Inc. on January 16th, 2020 for £1000 each. These loans will not be repaid by the ICA. As security for these outstanding debts, Encumbrance Inc. will retain a security interest in these mahogany elements. This interest will constitute an encumbrance on the future transaction of 12 Carlton House Terrace. An encumbrance is a right or interest in real property that does not prohibit its exchange but diminishes its value. The encumbrance will remain on 12 Carlton House Terrace as long as the mahogany elements are part of the building. As reparation, this encumbrance seeks to limit the property's continued accumulation of value for the Crown Estate. The Crown Estate provides 75% of its revenue to the Treasury and 25% directly to the monarch.Courtesy of Cameron Rowland.

Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.), a coalition of various groups of organized cultural workers whose disruptive, aesthetically attuned protests and cultural boycotts of strategically chosen cultural venues bring visceral awareness to the exploitative laboring conditions of migrant workers, most especially those involved with the construction of the Guggenheim museum in Abu Dhabi.[44] The point of these temporary performative actions, the group states, is not to incite charity, but rather to build robust internationalist networks of solidarity between workers, cultural or otherwise.[45] Taken together, these entwined artistic and political strategies introduce irreconcilable material antagonisms into "civilized" spaces of art in the West that disturb their normative systemic procedures and expose their historical and ongoing reliance on barbaric, racially dispossessive tomes of private and public capital.

In the latter "reconstructive" camp, we might look to certain biennial editions whose reflexive curatorial propositions facilitate structural reconfigurations of exhibition systems that, in turn, critique the conservative, power-affirming conditions of most presentations of global contemporary art while presenting workable alternative possibilities. Having curated multiple biennials over the course of his career on various continents, Enwezor was well aware of the implication of these mega-exhibitions in ever-expanding circuits of global capital and the logic of spectacle. Yet, he often argued that these exhibition sites could be strategically reappropriated to introduce "new relations of spectatorship whose program of social differentiation, political expression, and cultural specificity reworks the notion of spectacle and constructs it as the site of new relations of power and cultural translation."[46] Holding these contradictory potentials together, I will speak of two exhibitions here for purposes of brevity—Documenta 15 and the fourth edition of the Lagos Biennial.

Much has been written about Documenta 15, especially in relation to several controversies (which I will not engage here), but what should not be overlooked is its concrete implementation of alternative, non-Western "resource building" and "equitable distribution" practices.[47] Organized by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa, Documenta 15 constitutes one of the most formidable curatorial attempts within the last decade to wrest Western art institutions from their conventionally exploitative, opportunistic, and non-implicated relation to the aesthetic and discursive productions of Global South cultural workers. The exhibition, an institutionally reflexive rejoinder to Enwezor's representation-focused postcolonial edition, was animated by ruangrupa's central concept of "lumbung," which literally means "rice barn" but more importantly indexes collectivist social practices in Indonesian rural communities where "the surplus harvest is stored in communal rice barns and distributed for the benefit of the community according to jointly defined criteria."[48] Directly opposed to the private appropriation of surplus value encountered in capitalist modes of production, lumbung materially enacted a redirection of the European institution's resources towards decentrally selected networks of predominantly black, brown, and indigenous cultural workers working in globally dispersed zones that have been violently underdeveloped by the colonial-capitalist world system. This communal, resource-sharing ethos yielded considerable autonomy on the part of the exhibition's global-majority individual and collective collaborators, allowing them to circulate resources within their localized spheres of concern. Additionally, the exhibition element in Kassel largely challenged the spectacle-driven logics of many neo-multicultural large-scale biennials: the de-prioritization of displaying aesthetically pleasing objects from far-flung corners of the earth for mostly white, European, middle-class viewers was balanced with involving said viewers as active group participants in ongoingly produced discursive and sensorial social fields.

Documenta 15, unlike most other polished biennials in the well-funded West, introduced a frugal, precarious, unpredictable, makeshift spirit that complemented what biennials operating in postcolonial contexts, especially on the African continent, have long embodied and practiced. Clarifying the vastly heterogeneous conditions of cultural production that biennials in different regions of the world face, Enwezor states that "not all biennales function along the logic of spectacle," and depending on where they arise, "those working in and addressing specific artistic contexts, often work as low budget, modest projects."[49] This is especially the case with the Lagos Biennial, which was founded in 2017 and produced its most recent fourth edition in 2024.[50] The Lagos Biennial differs from Documenta in many crucial respects: it has been around for less than a decade; it has not yet established itself as a mandatory destination for the jet-setting art establishment; and it does not receive substantial funding from the state (or a singular private foundation). Paradoxically, these very structural constraints generated the imperfect conditions for elaborating a series of trans-local, experimental, and improvisational artistic and architectural propositions. Responding to this edition's overarching theme of "refuge" and its aims to "reassess the promises, disappointments, and ongoing ramifications of the nation-state model," such independently organized individual and collective aesthetic propositions—the project I curated, *Traces of Ecstasy*, being among them[51] —took the form of makeshift installations and prototypical pavilions. These structures-in-process, dissonantly juxtaposed, were all presented in the historically significant outdoor location of Tafawa Balewa Square—a site, named after Nigeria's first and only prime minister, which bore spatial witness to the country's independence celebrations in 1960 and now hosts a distinctly postcolonial amalgam of extemporaneous functions, ranging from state ceremonies and commercial fairs to Pentecostal church services and musical concerts. Actualizing such transnational cultural assemblies in

these zones of historical underdevelopment, ephemeral as they might be, revitalizes and specifies the material stakes of decolonizing processes in the uneven globalized landscape of contemporary art.[52] By occurring outside the constrained epistemological parameters of the Western imperial metropole, these precariously assembled "forums," to borrow Enwezor's term, catalyze potentially liberatory pathways towards the production, reception, and distribution of experimental cultures which, over time, could mobilize and buttress transnational political networks of anti-imperialist struggle.[53]

To return to the question I posed at the beginning of this text, on how cultural workers might reorient themselves within the latest episode of modernity's prolonged state of emergency, we might turn to the words of the political revolutionary, agronomist, and philosopher-historian Amílcar Cabral. In his 1970 essay "National Liberation and Culture," Cabral soberingly notes that "to take up arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize, to paralyze, its cultural life."[54] Cabral understood the indisputable role of artistic and cultural production in the material and ideological advancement and establishment of particular *visions* of planetary existence—not unlike the worrisome, rapidly mobilizing global far right.[55] And so as Enwezor also observes, the inevitable task, which confronts the majority of the world's population (whether they like it or not), is precisely one of "disinheriting the violence of colonial modernity."[56] This unfinished task of "delinking" from colonial, imperial power, though nourished and sustained by the oblique, imaginative mediations of art, cannot, and should not, be contained by the Janus-faced liberal/imperial dimensions of global contemporary art institutionality.[57] We must instead look to develop a dynamic multitude of historically attuned, liberation-led, structurally antagonistic tactics and strategies, bound neither to paralyzing fantasies of aesthetic autonomy nor sociological reducibility, that can enervate existing institutional infra/intra-structures so as to usher in a "possible tabula rasa for a future recomposition."[58]

X

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1
The multitude, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's analysis, is distinguished from common notions of "the people," "the masses," or "the working class" and is rather "composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires." As a social multiplicity, this multitude politically and economically challenges the "network power" of a global imperial system that they define as "Empire." See Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin, 2004), xi–xvi.

2
Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," *Documenta 11* (Hatje Cantz, 2002), 47.

3
Enwezor, "The Black Box," 48.

4
Enwezor, "The Black Box," 47.

5
Enwezor, "The Black Box," 47.

6
Enwezor, "The Black Box," 47.

7
Olu Oguibe, "A Brief Note on Internationalism," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (iniva and Kala Press, 1994), 54.

8
Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 73.

9
Basualdo cited in Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," 70.

10
We might also note here the wide adoption of the multiscreen video-installation and the essay-film as the privileged media formats of global contemporary cultural mediation in museum and biennial exhibition settings especially.

11
Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," 58.

12
Walter Benjamin, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," in *Walter Benjamin: The Arcades Project* , trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap Press, 1999), 462. Benjamin's conception of the constellation is, in turn, elaborated and refracted with postcolonial theory through Arjun Appadurai and Édouard Glissant's ruminations on planetary entanglement and the politics of difference. I have in mind Édouard Glissant's notion of *tout-monde* (all-world), first evoked in his novel *Mahogany* (1987) and Arjun Appadurai's thinking on globalization in "Disjuncture and Difference in the Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7, no. 2–3 (1990).

13
Enwezor defines Westernism as "that sphere of global totality that manifests itself through the political, social, economic, cultural, juridical, and spiritual integration achieved via institutions devised and maintained solely to perpetuate the influence of European and North American modes of being." See "The Black Box," 46.

14
See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012). Frantz Fanon defines decolonization as "an agenda for total disorder." See *Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963), 2.

15
For some materialist-inflected accounts of indigenous resistance, see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition ; Kyle Mays, An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States (Beacon Press, 2021); and* Quito Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World* (NYU Press, 2022).

16
Rizvana Bradley also observes the "fetishistic circulation" of Glissant's term in the art world, noting that his concept is usually figured as a "strategic evasion of the violence of the racial gaze or the racial regime of representation." Bradley, however, ascribes an alternative, and arguably more generative, understanding to Glissantian opacity, framing it as "the terrifying and ruinous expression of irreducibility." For Bradley, this opacity, which is "irreducibly material" and "exorbitant," unsettles the constitutive

delineations of visibility and invisibility, and the material and the semiotic. Bradley's framing arms opacity with a blackened irruptive potency that forcefully unsettles the racial, colonial metaphysics of modern aesthetic regimes. See Bradley, *Anteaesthetics: Black Aesthesis and the Critique of Form* (Stanford University Press, 2023), 245.

17
Oguibe, "A Brief Note on Internationalism," 57–58.

18
Okwui Enwezor, "Where, What, Who, When: A Few Notes on African Conceptualism," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

19
Throughout his curatorial career, Enwezor remained a proponent of the possibilities of the (critical) documentary genre. These concerns with the ethical and political dimensions of the documentary mode were not only addressed in his Documenta edition in 2002 but also in exhibitions such as "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art" at the International Center of Photography, New York, 2008. See also Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 1 (2004).

20
Boaventura de Sousa Santos importantly foregrounds the cognitive dimensions of Western imperial domination and makes an argument for the epistemological advancement of "cognitive justice." See de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Duke University Press, 2018), 6. For a treatment on how globally diverse indigenous aesthetics might enact such palpable metaphysical decolonial critiques, see KJ Abudu, "Ciné-chronotones: Decolonial Temporal Critique in Contemporary Moving Image Practice," *Clocking Out: Time Beyond Management* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2023). For more critical analyses on raciality, modernity, and the (im)possibility of decolonial poiesis, see David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetic,* (Fordham University Press, 2019); Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg Press, 2022); Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World* , unpublished manuscript, 1970; and Sylvia Wynter, "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice," *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (Africa World Press, 1992).

21
Rizvana Bradley and Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Four Theses on Aesthetics," *e-flux journal*, no. 120 (2021) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/120/416146/four-theses-on-aesthetics/ .

22
To offer one brief example of what such transformative possibilities might look like, we could turn to the work of philosopher Mogobe B. Ramose and his critical interrogation of the Bantu concept of Ubuntu and scholar Panashe Chigumadzi's elaboration on the radical implications of Ramose's Afri-Indigenous insights. See Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Mond Book Publishers, 1999), 36–40; Panashe Chigumadzi, "Ubuntu: A Black Radical Demand for Reparations," *The Funambulist*, no. 50 (2023).

23
Guinean Delegation, "The African Culture," *Souffles*, no. 16–17 (1969–70).

24
Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* , vol. 5, *Marx and Engels 1845–47* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 36.

25
"Philosophical" here need not imply rationalism nor logocentrism but expansively refers to a multisensorial array of thinking/feeling analytical devices.

26
Colectivo los Ingrávidos, "Thesis on the Audiovisual," in *Temporal Territories: An Anthology of Indigenous Experimental Cinema* , ed. Sky Hopinka et al. (Light Industry, 2024).

27
For a sustained engagement with reason and its diverse conditions of emergence, see Emmanuel Eze, *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (Duke University Press, 2008); and Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism: Africacentric Essays* (Routledge, 2019).

28
Boaventura de Sousa Santos writes that "the ecologies of knowledges are collective cognitive constructions led by the principles of horizontality (different knowledges recognize the differences between themselves in a nonhierarchical way) and reciprocity (differently incomplete knowledges strengthen themselves by developing relations of complementarity among one another). De Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* , 78. For more on the philosophical nuances and problematics of intercultural translation, see de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Routledge, 2016); and Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indiana University Press, 1996).

29
Nkiru Nzegwu, "African Aesthetics: Disrobing Modernism, Becoming Visible in History," *Traces of Ecstasy Symposium* , Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, March 29, 2024.

30
De Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* , 6, emphasis added.

31
Da Silva's term is inspired by Karen Barad's notion of "intra-action." See da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg Press, 2022), 28.

32
My use of "Man" is borrowed from Sylvia Wynter and is meant to refer to a dominant Western bourgeois heteropatriarchal "genre" of the human, coming into being from the fifteenth century onwards, that "overrepresents" itself as if it were the only existent human genre. See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003).

33
In previous writings, I have modelled theoretical frameworks to consider the junctures of the hauntological and the historical conditions of contemporary African postcoloniality. See *Living with Ghosts* , ed. KJ Abudu (Pace Publishing, 2022). See also Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Routledge, 1994); and Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

34
Enwezor notes that "in comparing different types of modernity and in our attempts to describe their different characteristics, we are constantly confronted with the persistent tension between *grand* and *petit* modernity." Here, grand modernity broadly refers to the Western Enlightenment's master narrative of "individual liberty, political sovereignty, democratic forms of governance, capitalism, and so on." See Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 596–97.

35
Enwezor, along with frequent collaborators such as the art historians Salah M. Hassan and Chika Okeke-Agulu, often spotlighted non-Western modernists in their editorial collaborations, providing in-depth studies and contextualizing frameworks in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* as well as the landmark publication *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (Damiani, 2009). These postcolonial modernist artists also featured regularly in Enwezor's exhibitions. Ngwenya and El-Salahi were included in "The Short Century"; Efflatoun's works were exhibited in Enwezor's Venice Biennale edition, "All the World's Futures"; and Lam's works were shown in Enwezor's La Triennale edition, "Intense Proximity," at the Palais de Tokyo in 2012.

36
Some recent exhibitions worth noting that buck these tendencies include "Sarah Maldoror: Cinéma Tricontinental" at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; and "Avant-Garde and Liberation: Contemporary Art and Decolonial Modernism" at mumok, Vienna.

37
See "The State of the African Art Market 2024," ArtTactic, 2024 htt

ps://arttactic.com/editorials/the-state-of-the-african-art-market-2024 .

38
Enwezor, "The Black Box," 55.

39
Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 59.

40
Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 59.

41
Enwezor, "Statement of Okwui Enwezor: Curator of the 56th International Art Exhibition," Venice Biennale, 2015; Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Duke University Press 2018), 110.

42
See "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum*, November 2003, 158. See also Enwezor, "The Black Box," 45. For a related study on genealogies of institutional critique and their convergences and divergences with decolonial praxis, see MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation: A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," *October* , no. 165 (Summer 2018).

43
These artists, unlike some other Western-situated figures associated with the genealogy of institutional critique, exceeded provincialized, self-referential Eurocentric parameters by examining postcolonial global entanglements of commerce, culture, and politics, as well as their often violent and uneven conditions of possibility.

44
G.U.L.F is an autonomous offshoot of the Gulf Labor Artist Coalition that was featured in the 56th edition of the Venice Biennale in 2015, which Enwezor curated.

45
Global Ultra Luxury Faction, "On Direct Action: An Address to Cultural Workers," in *Supercommunity* : *e-flux journal 56th Venice Biennale* , 2015.

46
Okwui Enwezor, "Mega Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *Manifesta Journal* , no. 2 (Winter 2003–Spring 2004), 119.

47
See https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/about/ .

48
See https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/about/ .

49
Enwezor, "Mega Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," 107.

50
The fourth edition of the Lagos Biennial was organized by artistic directors Folakunle Oshun (the biennial's founder) and Kathryn Weir.

51
Traces of Ecstasy is an ongoing curatorial project that was developed concurrently at two sites separated by the historically weighted distance of the Atlantic Ocean. Featuring Nolan Oswald Dennis, Evan Ifekoya, Raymond Pinto, Temitayo Shonibare, and Adeju Thompson/Lagos Space Programme, the project premiered as a site-responsive architectural pavilion and exhibition at the Lagos Biennial (February 3–10, 2024) and soon afterwards, as an expanded, recursive adaptation at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (February 16–July 14, 2024). Bridging African indigenous frontiers, queer methodologies, and decentralized digital technologies, the exhibition project seeks to reimagine alternative forms of African collectivity for the twenty-first century that exceed the nation-state model.

52
T. J. Demos raises an important question about how the insurgent energies and prefigurative politics produced by these alternative exhibition models might be transformed into enduring organizational forms. For Demos, the challenge remains as to how the "radical futurisms" embodied in such artistic and curatorial experiments might be sustained through "organizing long-lasting and multi-scalar bonds" while also not ossifying into hierarchical, power-affirming institutionalized structures. See Demos, *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Collapse, Chronopolitics, and Justice-to-Come* (Sternberg Press, 2019), 168.

53
Exhibitions and cultural festivals on the African continent and its diasporas have long been animated by the liberatory intersections of cultural experimentation and anti-imperialist political struggle. The First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 1966, the Pan-African Festival in Algiers in 1969, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos in 1977, the Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (1969–present), the Havana Biennial (1984–present), the Carthage Film Festival (1966–present), and numerous other exhibiting institutions were founded on the counter-hegemonic (often Pan-Africanist) premise of challenging Western (neo)colonial cultural and economic dominance.

54
Amílcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture," *Transitions* , no. 45 (1974).

55
See Jonas Staal, "Propaganda (Art) Struggle," *e-flux journal*, no. 94 (2018) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/94/219986/propaganda-art-struggle/ .

56
Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 615.

57
Given Enwezor's persistent concern with world-systems theory and globalization studies, I interpret his call to "disinherit" the violence of modernity as resonating with the economist Samir Amir's framework on how Third World economies might "delink" from the tentacles of the capitalist world-system. See Samir Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (Zed Books, 1990). Delinking, however, might also be conceptually expanded to refer to the realms of epistemology (see Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* , Duke University Press, 2018) and psychology (as in Frantz Fanon's notion of "disalienation"; see *Black Skin, White Masks* , Pluto Press, 1986).

58
Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 616.

Evan Calder Williams

On Paralysis, Part 4

Continued from "On Paralysis, Part 3"

1. The Crooked Sign

There's an echo between the Gilbreths' sign for "unavoidable delay" and one that comes nearly a century later in a 2006 photograph by the American artist Shannon Ebner. For Ebner, the sign is not an icon or symbol but an actual street sign on a pole that has been badly bent, double-kinked and crumpled into a sharp angle at its middle, just like the abstracted and seemingly exhausted body of the "unavoidable delay" on the assembly line. The similarities continue beyond that angular bend. In place of the blocky feet of the Gilbreths' therblig, a lump of cement still clings to the lower half of the pole, a remnant of the paved ground it was set in and eventually wrenched free from.[1] And instead of a circle suggesting a head, here is the rectangular metal sign itself, with the side closest to us further bent, as though caught in a half-turn to look behind itself. It's a fair assumption that this sign displays information, most likely about parking, speed, or other regulations for cars, pedestrians, and the spaces they unevenly share. But we can't say for certain, because the sign faces away from Ebner's camera and down towards the ground. We also can't say exactly *what* wrecked this thing. Nothing in the frame of the photograph betrays the location of that absent site where the sign had stood before it was wrenched loose. Even the work's title— *The Crooked Sign*—pointedly refuses to offer further information. Yet the damaged sign nevertheless signifies by indexing a tremendous violence in excess of any symbolic order. No matter the when or where or why, we know it was involved in a collision or torsion with a force and velocity beyond human hands, even if those hands may have steered a machine that weighed several thousand pounds, and that did not stop where it was supposed to.

Signs and collisions have run throughout Ebner's conceptually rigorous practice over the past two decades, yet are knotted together even more tightly in this photograph. Two types of signs recur across her work: minimal units of single letters and advertising signs displaying written language. These are sometimes physically constructed by her, but are more often photographed where they are found, on visual materials (such as ads) with particular emphasis on what gets discarded or forgotten, pulled from circulation *because* of collisions, like the wrecked parts of cars involved in crashes. In one regard, the core questions of paralysis appear here in the stoppage of expected routes of circulation for commodities and information, resulting in signs and things that are decoupled from their usual relays, often after brutally colliding in ways that may themselves be corporally or psychologically paralyzing. But to this, Ebner's work adds an acute proximity to an accompanying threat and promise: a paralysis of meaning itself. This is because her photographs articulate the

Train wreck in Leavick, Colorado in 1897. License: Public Domain.

reliance of processes of signification and transmission on often unseen, deep links between symbol, surface, and support, indexing how suddenly fragile these links can be, and at other times, how durable. As a result, Ebner's photographs center on, and worry at, how expected circuits of information, material, and reaction can alternately get severed or established anew—when material damage or wear and tear might cause a billboard to be junked or pulled from use, yet its painted or printed letters still keep signifying regardless.

However, in *The Crooked Sign*, itself so emblematic of the tensions of paralysis, a different avenue of thinking opens that we can call the paralysis of the inanimate. There is a distinct and unmistakable pathos in this ruined sign, as strange currents of sympathy and melancholy emerge from the difficulty of *not* analogizing it to a human form, even without the therblig as intermediary to make that link more explicit. The sign is abject and broken, "crippled," hunched low and crawling. It is bent beyond recognition, and cannot be bent back. Though neither human nor living, and instead something designed, fabricated, and perhaps destroyed *by* humans, the sense remains of it as a body, living and wounded, or wounded and dead, and in a way that can't be reduced to the particular phenomenon of pareidolia.[2]

We can find a similar paradox—the wounding of what has no body—across the fiction of Andrei Platonov, the Russian writer whose life and work spanned the first half of the twentieth century. Platonov is tremendously attentive and attuned to debilitation, exhaustion, and what Oxana Timofeeva sharply identifies as a commitment to thinking "poor life," as well as the "diligence" and "generosity" it takes to persist.[3] In Platonov's writing this often occurs through a profound flattening of divides between humans, nonhumans, plants, and things. Rather than through any philosophical pronouncement, such flattenings are acts of contact and collusion that bridge different existences, however briefly, and are felt in the most fundamental terms. In the aptly titled 1936 short story "Among Animals and Plants," for instance, a hare is

Shannon Ebner, The Crooked Sign, 2006, C-print. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

cold, then warmed inside the jacket of a man who brings it inside his small cabin. Later, his wife takes out her frustration at their ongoing poverty by beating the hare and throwing it back outside, where the "hare hid in the grass, lamented a little in his own way, then tidied his fur, crept through a gap in the fence, and disappeared into the forest, putting aside his recent grief for the sake of future life."[4] So it is that bodies, things, and earth collide, at greater or lesser speed, with more or less tenderness and violence, before going their separate ways and trying, each in their own way, to keep going in spite of everything. However, as Aaron Schuster points out in his reading of Platonov's novel *Happy Moscow*, one of the elements of Platonov's writing is how this effort to keep going is not some organic, autochthonous vitality emanating from the core of a living being facing scarcity and hazard. Rather, for Schuster,

> there is a kind of suspension of the immediate necessity of life, of the inner thrust of the organism to preserve itself and to persevere in its existence. The subject and its life—although one already hesitates here with the "its"—do not form an organic unity. Instead this innermost drive is felt as an external compulsion, as a foreign element in which one has become "entangled."[5]

Indeed, counter to a more familiar vision of a vitalist animism, which might locate that "inner thrust" widely across entities (including those commonly understood to lack the capacity to be a "subject" or to have "life"), with Platonov we are in the terrain of animation and the problem of the animated—a liveliness always out of place and out of proportion, even when bound to the living. To speak of someone's behavior as "animated," for instance, already suggests some excess of energy that misfits, remaining somehow off and alien. Because just as the actual process of making animated moving images involves tremendous investments of time, labor, and technique that vanish into an uncanny mimesis of the spontaneously living, to speak of animation is to grapple with what is supposed to remain off the screen, yet without which nothing would happen on it.[6]

Beyond the narrower analogy of cinema, what are these "off-screen" processes of animation and the animate? They are the supposedly unseen networks, flows, and infrastructures on which I've focused throughout this series, those that fundamentally drive and enable the visible and audible—and which, when paralyzed, bring that imitation of life to a halt. These kinds of networks are at the heart of Platonov's "Among Animals and Plants": radio transmissions from afar, inscrutable bureaucratic arrangements of one's days and fate, and, most explicitly, railway networks themselves, organizing human and animal life around their paths while also threatening those lives as trains surge past on their way to anywhere but here. But this story is also fascinating for how far it expands this logic of threat, even beyond Platonov's usual attention to the frayed means of subsistence and support that constitute the milieu of the living. Much like in Ebner's photograph, this extends to what never lived, to incapacitation and wounding beyond repair, even to a degree that the connection between intent and action dissolves. In other words, to paralysis.

> When he first began to work on the railway, [the railway engineer] Fyodorov had treated metal and machines as he treated animals and plants—with caution and foresight, trying not only to get to know them but also to outwit them. Then he had realized that such a relationship was insufficient. Being with metal and machines required a great deal more sensitivity than being with wild animals or with plants and trees. You can outwit something living and it will yield to you; you can wound it and, being alive, it will heal. But machines and rails don't yield to cunning—they can be won over only by pure goodness—and you can't afford to wound them, because they don't heal. A break is mortal. And so Fyodorov behaved sensitively and carefully at work; he even avoided slamming the door of his little cabin, closing it silently and delicately, so as not to disturb the iron hinges or loosen their screws.[7]

But the network he tends won't extend the same delicacy to Fyodorov himself in return. By the end of the story, he'll be paralyzed in one arm for trying to stop a runaway train. The accident is both a radically unlucky chain of circumstances and something that could have been avoided had his same slowness and care for the inanimate been dissipated throughout the entire infrastructure of transport. Yet even without his literally paralyzing accident, here we gain the same minute attention and knowledge that we see in sabotage's paralyses, traversing registers, from human to metal to rabbit and back again. Never in the abstract alone, and always in the key of collisions that wear us down, threatening to break the links without which we can't hold together.

2. Hurl Out of Your Belfries

However, despite the deep links to acts of inhuman damage, stasis, and breakdown, what is at stake here appears to be the obverse of paralysis: an unexpected vitality and animatedness within objects that are assumed to lack any such mobility or response in the first place. In both Ebner's photograph and Platonov's story, this occurs in the negative, in a sign that has been debilitated or a fragile rail, causing both to retroactively, if illogically, appear to have been living, at least enough to be damaged or wounded. I wouldn't suggest this to be a total ontology

or animist organization of the world, however. It is instead a sort of stammer, a brief but generative category error that emerges when transposing back and forth between binaries (living and nonliving, animal and inanimate, functioning and paralyzed). So in what remains of this essay, I want to open towards another line of thinking, one we could place under the sign of *de-paralysis*. What would it mean to de-paralyze, to move on from the kind of halting and lost connections I've traced throughout the four parts of this series? And how could this be more than a mere restoration of prior function, motility, and agency?

I've already drawn out at length one of the most striking forms of de-paralysis: the logic of sabotage itself, which activates non-sentient elements, materials, or circuits to bring them into an extension of a person's capacity to negate, disrupt, or paralyze. But the political imaginary of making comrades out of conveyor belts also extends into more speculative ascriptions of agency to those objects themselves. Consider, for example, Alfred Hayes's poem "Into the Streets May First," which was published in 1934 in *New Masses* (where it won a contest to be set to music by Aaron Copland). I'll include it here in full, especially because it deserves to be better known:

> Into the streets May First!
> Into the roaring Square!
> Shake the midtown towers!
> Shatter the downtown air!
> Come with a storm of banners,
> Come with an earthquake tread,
> Bells, hurl out of your belfries,
> Red flag, leap out your red!
> Out of the shops and factories,
> Up with the sickle and hammer,
> Comrades, these are our tools,
> A song and a banner!
> Roll song, from the sea of our hearts,
> Banner, leap and be free;
> Song and banner together,
> Down with the bourgeoisie!
> Sweep the big city, march forward,
> The day is a barricade;
> We hurl the bright bomb of the sun,
> The moon like a hand grenade.
> Pour forth like a second flood!
> Thunder the alps of the air!
> Subways are roaring our millions—
> Comrades, into the square![8]

This stunning poem—about the process of stunning itself, of being halted and then returning to motion—makes a distinct conceptual move. It starts in the terrain of both a call to action and a potentially more familiar description of what will come if that call is answered, in the gathering and expanding of working-class power that will shake the city and its objects. Yet if the appeals are at first to demonstrators (to bring banners, to march loud and proud with "earthquake tread"), it pivots to a much more direct appeal to things themselves to join the cause and revolt. The first traces of that are again more familiar, inheriting longer tropes of poetic apostrophe. "Bells, hurl out your belfries" and "Red flag, leap out your red" are descriptions of objects as well as appeals to objects, specifically to ones that transmit information, whether Ebner's sign, the peal of the bell, or the red flag signifying communism and workers' power. In addition, they remain in the control of the marchers, things to be used: "Comrades, these are our tools / A song and a banner." The line that fascinates me, however, is "Banner, leap and be free." While it obviously functions here as part of the duo (along with the song) of forms that transmit a message, it also starts to move into another register by appealing to the *support structure* of that message itself, to the banner in its fabric tangibility, enjoining it to also become part of the rebellion and to "leap and be free." This then recodes the bells from before, so that "hurl out your belfries" starts to read less as a joyous pealing and more like a sneak attack on cops down below, as the bell stops keeping time and marking occasions to instead take direct action. And at least in its speculative register, why not? All these objects are themselves the product of the exploited human labor at stake in the politics of May Day, and they are in this way, like all commodities, crystallized records of the hostility, boredom, and coercion that goes into making them.

As with so much else I've raised with regard to how paralysis moves across registers and blurs boundaries, here too the call to the built world doesn't remain at the level of what can be controlled. Like Mickey Mouse's sorcerer's apprentice commanding a broom to come to pseudo-life and start laboring, animacy is contagious, expansive, and, as he learns, hard to rein in once it starts.[9] In Hayes's poem, the confusion between an acting subject and a static object, between message and medium, starts to extend radically outwards to a cosmic register (the sun itself becomes a bomb to be thrown, and the moon a grenade) and into the units of time themselves, with the startling line, "The day is the barricade." We should note that it is pointedly not "this is the day for barricades," but an impossible wielding of the day itself, a temporal wedge of not-working that might well expand into that longer paralysis of the general strike that John Spargo disdained.[10] Because rather than a day meaning just "another day," like *the working day* or *day in, day out*, it is the work of barricading—of collectively bringing together all the city's objects of circulation into a mass that blocks circulation and paralyzes the city—that makes the day into something that doesn't just pass by but is instead itself an interval of and for revolt.

Police used tear gas to disperse protesters gathering outside the Legislative Council Complex on 12 June 2019, Hong Kong. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

3. Deodand

Alfred Hayes's poem is a speculative call to arms. It's an invocation for the things of the earth to join in struggle against the system that conditioned their making, and perhaps their shoddiness and adulteration too. But if his bell signifies the animation of the inanimate towards a revolutionary process in excess of law and order, we should set it against another set of bells, like the one put on trial in 1664 for the death of a man accidentally hanged by its rope, or one in Russia that was banished to Siberia in 1591 for pealing out a signal of insurrection when a prince was assassinated. Because the wider history to which these belong opens onto the other side of Hayes's appeal, of objects that, rather than join in the barricade, enter into a complex matrix of blame, liability, and state accumulation, especially when they are seen to kill or maim a person without having been expressly wielded as a weapon.

This is, in short, the question of the deodand, in which we can find one of the most extensive cultural and legal negotiations of the trope of paralysis, especially through its seeming negation, in the presence of something that shows itself able to act, and to form connections and points of violent contact in excess of what it was thought capable. "Deodand" is a designation within medieval and early modern English common law that formally persisted until its abolition in 1846, yet informally still undergirds American civil asset forfeiture law, invoked in majority opinions when the state seizes what it does not own from those whom it cannot expressly prove as having criminal intent. Most broadly, the deodand specifies a legal judgment pronounced on chattel property[11]—primarily an inanimate[12] moveable object or a nonhuman animal, though with crucial exceptions—because of having contributed to the death of a person, potentially the owner themself, without any express volition of the owner (or any other) to carry out the lethal act.[13] We can see immediately one of the legal frictions that comes to mark deodand and its futures: the cost—or profit, from the perspective of the king who received the forfeited object, creature, or an "equivalent" monetary sum—of a death will be equated not with any assumed value of the living being, as with life insurance policies, but with the instrument of death itself. That is, it will cost the owner more to own a deadly diamond than a sharp lump of coal.[14]

P. Mathews, Trial of Bill Burns, 1838. License: Public Domain.

The little attention given to the deodand outside of legal studies has read it primarily in terms of a bleak, surreal whimsy—particularly in the medieval trials in which accused beehives, cats, bushels of grain, and shovels were put on the stand and asked to explain themselves. When picked up in passing by New Materialist theorists like Jane Bennett, the deodand can also be seen in philosophical terms as evidence of "thing-power" and an opportunity to "begin to experience the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, [which] is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility."[15] I don't think either of these directions are wrong per se.[16] And as my focus on sabotage and paralysis has shown, there is a set of genuinely radical, and often disarming, potentials that come from a kind of tactical flattening that disperses agency outwards through a network of things. However, as with sabotage, what the negotiation of the deodand potently shows is not a glimpse into the fundamental connectedness of things and beings, but a structure of blame, property, and liability that is thoroughly historical and specifically political, especially insofar as it cannot be separated from legal structures and fictions.

We can see this on two distinct fronts, starting first with the problem of mobility, especially the mobility of what is thought to be inanimate. In his excellent study of the formal abolition of the deodand, William Pietz offers this useful definition: "any moveable material object—more specifically, any piece of personal chattel property—that directly caused the death of an adult human being became deodand and, as an accursed thing, was held to be forfeit to God (whose earthly representative in such cases was the royal sovereign)."[17] Along with the absence of intentional malice on the part of the owner, it is this first qualification of mobility that will form the other major legal requirement for deciding on deodand. Indeed, a significant portion of cases across this history hinge precisely on determining what is "moveable" as opposed to fixed or static, to such a degree that Henry de Bracton's dictum

places movement before intent (or even property status): *omnia quae movent ad mortem sunt Deodanda* ("all that moves and kills will be given over to God").[18] Of course, we might read this requirement of the moveable as a way of asserting negligence, as with a runaway train carriage. But this is hard to maintain given that the owners were frequently themselves the victims of these mobile forces, and, more importantly, would miss the point that the deodand is not pointedly punitive but rather a means of divorcing property from its owner, placing it into a sphere of rogue non-ownership declared escheat and forfeit.

This qualification of mobility also serves to delimit what can and cannot be included in the deodand's range, largely excluding landed property or buildings themselves, which might otherwise open a corrosive reading of the entire environment as inhuman assassin—and hence open to the king's claim. Yet even a cursory glance at what did qualify for seizure makes clear that such an expanded sense of deodand was often operative, and that the division between mobile and static has no set pivot point when it comes to death by furniture/tool/abode. The London Eyre of 1244, for instance, includes no less than four instances where a set of stairs was declared deodand after someone tripped and tumbled to their death, even while the stairs remained stolid.[19] It's a fair bet that Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland's snarky 1895 footnote—"the large number of deodands collected in every eyre suggests that many horses and boats bore the guilt which should have been ascribed to beer"[20] —would apply here too, given that any functional divide between movement and stability gets blurry when alcohol enters the picture.

But lurking beyond Pollock and Maitland's joke—nothing like a little British common law humor!—there's a serious point. As far as the deodand is concerned, there has been a tendency to focus excessively on the seeming animacy, unlucky mobility, or apparent volition of single pieces of property, in an inheritance of the idea of the accursed object, such as the killing stone that must be cast beyond the border of the city or the Biblical trope of the "ox that gored" that many scholars link to the prehistory of the deodand.[21] Yet this longer-term focus in legal studies, as well as the kind of readings from recent object-oriented philosophies and their wider reception, misses what is at stake here. Namely, the issue is not one of the surprising recognition of a hidden vitality or sentience, as if that liveliness had been paralyzed and occluded by insistence on an anthropocentric subject/object dualism, but rather of a process that serves to *maintain* regimes of property and law. More specifically, the deodand involves the construction of complicated, often arcane exceptions, tracing contours of culpability and what by the nineteenth century would be understood as risk through chains of accidents and roof shingles that suddenly fall and kill. Yet these are not exceptions to the logic of private property that threaten law's coherence. Instead, they prop it up, and what we see in these histories, especially once the deodand enters common law, is far less a matter of punishing an object cathartically so much as negotiating the boundary where the bonds of property end. When can the state seize it, and how responsible is someone for what they own? What does it mean for a community to be harmed by the actions of corporate property, and who is to blame when pipelines leak? Who's at fault when bodies stray in the path of a train that never used to run across a greenway that's been walked for thousands of years?

Second, we can see the stakes of this negotiation of property even more starkly when we recall that the full range of deodand is not covered by the many instances of inanimate objects that came loose from their fittings or failed at their designed purpose. It also could include living beings, both nonhuman animals and enslaved humans who were legally constructed as nonhuman or less than fully human. We can quickly detect the logical and legal paradox this might involve for those who claimed the right to own other beings, especially humans. On one hand, the kind of deferred responsibility that the deodand enacted—i.e., declaring an owner not guilty of intending the crime by placing the blame on the object—served to protect slaveholders and animal owners from the harm that their living property might inflict. For instance, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. notes in *The Common Law* how this could turn on the question of the "supposed nature" of the possessed creature, and particularly its innate "wildness": "If the animal was of a wild nature, that is, in the very case of the most ferocious animals, the owner ceased to be liable the moment it escaped, because at that moment he ceased to be owner."[22] On the other hand, if one suggests that the living property, such as a slave, acted on its own volition, and hence did not obey the dictates of its owner who cannot be blamed for what it did, it follows that the slave is entirely capable of free will, autonomous choice, and agency—and hence must be understood as a human being deserving of the same freedoms and rights accorded to the ones claiming to "own" it.

How is this paradox solved, in a way that defended not those rights but only the right to own and to terrorize? Colin Dayan, one of the few contemporary theorists to grapple with the long afterlives of earlier conceptions of the deodand, offers a vital way into this. In her work, she considers the way the deodand both gave a "direct bridge to the legal theory of *mens rea*, a 'guilty mind'" and played an especially vital role in the context of colonial domination and the plantation system.[23] The concept contributed particularly to what she frames as a "fitful valuation of persons and things," one that was propped up by the "legal terror" that served to actively construct and enforce the sense of the enslaved as "nonhuman." This therefore involved the "invention of the slave who has liability but no rights, who remains vulnerable to legal prosecution though deprived of personality."[24] In this history, and the way that the logic of the deodand teeters on the edge of admitting a freedom that should be, yet also gives the legal mechanisms to utterly negate that, we see

a crucial sense of the deodand that is far from the unexpected animacy of ladders, or the placing of beehives on trial, and instead concerns the moments where the kind of ongoing legal and physically terrorizing paralysis of subjectivity and collectivity that the plantation system relied on is briefly disrupted, and its heinous categories come into stark view.

This kind of paralysis was, of course, never complete for two reasons. First, it sought only a partial paralysis, preserving and demanding an unending capacity for action one is forced under threat of violence to enact, while paralyzing a person's ability to bring the action they intend into the world. Second, even with the relentless regime of terror, lethality, and denigration, it was never able to bring about that legal fantasy of the one who is blamable but has no personality or ability to choose. Instead, that was constantly undermined by the kinds of refusal, sabotage, and fugitivity enacted by those who were enslaved as a truly radical, and necessarily often covert, de-paralysis of subjectivity, one that restored the bonds between intention and action that were never truly severed, even as dreams of mastery and domination tried to terrorize into paralysis. I think here of the remarkable tactics of marronage detailed by Sylviane Diouf in her study of fugitive slaves in the American plantation system, and particularly of what she writes of as "borderland maroons," who escaped and yet stayed hidden on the outskirts and buildings of farms and plantations.[25] Those sites especially included the very plantations from which they just escaped, as they paradoxically fled to where they already were. There they lived in its hidden spots, stole from those who stole their freedom, and made use of the intimate knowledge gained of a place they never wanted to be, surviving in its infinitely dangerous interstices.

4. De-Paralyzing

"How will we feed ourselves once everything is paralyzed?" This question I raised earlier, from *The Coming Insurrection*, directs us towards de-paralyzing, or what might come in the wake of paralysis.[26] In other words, what to do with the new kinds of relations that an interval of paralysis can help bring about? As vital as paralysis is as trope, as tactic, even as challenge to dominant models of mobility, activity, and vitality itself, it may be too easy to keep within a circuit of clean reversal. It may be too easy to just shuttle back and forth between, on one side, living bodies that are treated as nonliving objects and, on the other, inanimate things, such as those bells, that reveal what seems to be an alarming animation. But as both the co-history of slavery and deodands and the mutual determinations of labor and disability show, these categories are always historical and under tension; they obey their own rules only insofar as they allow for violent exceptions, or for the denigrating subsumption of only certain persons under their frame. Moreover, as I've drawn out, the epistemic challenges that the trope of paralysis mounts are also what disrupt the clarity of expected circuits of meaning and matter, function and intention.

In this regard, trying to think de-paralysis in full requires moving away from two forms of thought. First, we must continue to reject the unquestioned use of that breakdown/insight model detailed previously, in which halting is taken to generate an automatic critical knowledge. Second, we must refuse the idea of *restoration*: of restoring the movement, connection, or flow that had been temporarily interrupted so that regular function is reestablished within the terms and expectations already set in advance, allowing things to go on as they had before the break. We can see the persistence of that idea across all the registers of paralysis itself, from the promise of rehabilitating those with paralyzing impairments to the restoration of disrupted shipping channels to moving beyond congressional gridlock. Instead, de-paralysis points towards a dynamic already active in paralysis: the establishment of novel conduits and links *in excess* of those already in place. If paralysis is generated by the temporary severing or decoupling of linkages, it also paradoxically keeps producing a proliferation of unexpected ones, especially through those contagious chains that shift scale and leap across vectors, moving from the failure of a single wire to the blackout of a network to the person who stands in the new dark, frozen with indecision.

We can find a brilliant account of this move—of going beyond the mere restoration of expected flow—from the aforementioned theorist and historian Spyros Papapetros. While many of the examples he details mark a specific tension between animation (especially of the inorganic or the inanimate) and paralysis (particularly under the sign of petrification or devitalization), his reading of the apparent death of the titular vampire in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922) suggests exactly this turn away from restabilized function and towards something stranger and more porous. In the scene in question, Nosferatu gets done in by the rising sun, like so many cinematic vampires who later follow his inauspicious lead. But when Papapetros attends to just how this is staged by the film, he notes a highly specific relation of gesture and surrounding:

> Just before he slips out of the frame, Nosferatu is immobilized by the sunlight. Reflexively, the vampire's right arm starts moving upward, and then his whole body starts rotating toward the opposite side of the window frame. When the 180-degree turn is complete, Nosferatu extends his right arm forward until it is parallel with and above one of the slanting house-roofs visible through the window. Holding the same gesture, the vampire vanishes, leaving the window frame unobstructed.[27]

Much of the subsequent argument that builds on this close reading rightly seizes on the kind of vital transfer and "covert exchanges between living subjects and inanimate objects" that are at stake, with "the transference of energy from a semidepleted animate subject to its surrounding architecture, which becomes menacingly reinvigorated."[28] Moreover, this moment exemplifies a concern central to Parapetros's own thinking and that of the early twentieth-century art historians he engages with, especially Wilhelm Worringer: the way a "circuit"—such as the one accidentally completed by Nosferatu—is both a conduit for animation in excess of the organic and a trap of potentially lethal mimicry, here strong enough to drain the infamous drainer of life himself.

doesn't matter, as the precise timing of the sun's rise generates a tiny interval that proves terminal. Yet this moment also generates unforeseen connections and points of contact, through the opening of a flow from vampire to house that wasn't present or active before. It also doesn't end there, as I would add another crucial layer that isn't mentioned in Papapetros's bravura reading of the shot. This is the way that the mimicry and energetic transfer only works for, and is generated by, the viewer of the film itself, as it is our exact vantage point that completes the circuit by making the gestures match the architecture exactly so that "arm and roof communicate. Parallel to one another, they are in correspondence."[29] Such correspondences are always possible. You can angle your arm in a way that mirrors a nearby bridge, and

F. W. Murnau, Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror, 1922.

When Nosferatu is held in this snare of imitation and evacuation, it is quite literally paralyzing, neutralizing his ability to escape or move. Any desire to go on un-living

even without such a willed act, the world is full of innumerable unwilled echoes between bodies and things, buildings and the forest behind them.

But a full overlay of uncanny mimicry and apparent contiguity requires a point of view that lines up arm and bridge, snapping them into mirrored lockstep only when seen from highly specific positions. In this case, that alignment requires the flattening of a filmed space by the lens and a subsequent registration of that space as a two-dimensional image in which only a single perspective is preserved, in order to fix Nosferatu within the cage of imitation that finishes him off. So once again, paralysis doesn't remain a single instance or a discrete event. It unfurls outwards, forging novel connections and crossing between registers: figures and landscapes, foreground and background, a vampire and his city, and a screen and its watcher. These links are not natural or ahistorical; instead, all are mediated through a *technical* form that articulates the conditions of the passages that move back and forth. The unliving gaze of the camera provides the paralytic fixity that freezes Nosferatu, the unliving being who too could hypnotize and petrify with a gaze. And then his own paralysis, snared in the angles of a city like a bird in a net of rooflines, generates another halted moment, a shot so still it may as well be a freeze-frame, which paralyzes us too as we watch him fade from view with our breath held.

This scene allows us start to feel the contours of a de-paralyzing that is not just paralysis rewound, that doesn't restore previous function or flow but instead enacts a process that is multiple and messy, inhuman and transindividual. Paralysis itself, as both an idea and an experience, undermines the stability and sanctity of a sovereign subject by ruining its fantasy of self-mastery and cogent management of the surrounding world. De-paralysis further erodes that, but from the other direction, generating new possible links, circuits, and relations where none existed before. Yet none of this is automatic, given, or stable. If moments of technical, social, and circulatory paralysis can make it possible to detect the structuring relations already at work but often hidden through familiarity, then the instances from art, literature, and film I've raised are all fiercely attuned to how utterly tenuous that can be, and how open that moment is to getting closed off into a mere restoration of function. The lights come back on, the strikes are broken, the port opens again, and the Senate goes back to its usual business of achieving nothing. As Ricardo Piglia describes in Part 1 of this essay, the cops are often the first to break the spell and charge.

In this regard, while Shannon Ebner's *The Crooked Sign* and its inhuman pathos is itself an emblem for my whole inquiry, it is ultimately the rest of her practice that I find so exemplary of thinking within and beyond paralysis. Again, what we see in many of her other works is a kind of scavenging for signs amidst the broken, and the creation of a thick passage between symbol, surface, and support. This happens through a process of either selection or provisional construction, both of which remain intimately tuned to the minute, material particularity of what she and the camera find: the slashes of paint on the door of a junked car, the fade of the ink of an "A" from a disused sign, the rough edge of the cinderblocks hung on a grid of nails. However, this dense specificity also flickers, in the way that the paint on that door also forms an "X," and the cinderblocks make one too, coarsely, as if you're standing too close to a pixelated image. She photographs things and symbols, but above all, she photographs the slippage between the two, the way that something is both just a letter *and* a highly particular iteration of texture that must be ignored for it to become that letter—and therefore to belong to a slew of words that start to stream unbidden through the head of whoever sees it. In sum, both Ebner's practice and the process of looking at it makes us traverse this passage between matter and meaning again and again, starting from what has been pulled from circulation and left immobile. It then makes these distillate points of the junked and refound readable in terms of another language, available for a process of new syntax and writing that takes tentative form, spelling out phrases to be read, above all remaining open to we who roam through them and might use them to articulate something, or to being a conduit through which these articulations and connections pass.[30]

5. Bending the Rails

I will end with one final image that starts to bleed out onto where the track of this inquiry ends, in a moment of de-paralysis that means far more than returning to normal. It comes in *Our Hospitality*, a 1923 Buster Keaton film from the years between when Flynn called for the paralysis of work and Hayes called for the bell and banner to join in revolt. Like so many of the slapstick-derived comedies of the 1910s and 1920s, it is absolutely suffused with these same questions of hostility, hellish work, adulteration, and a built world that never responds the way you expect, and that may very well be out to get you. In one scene, the protagonist, Keaton himself, and a few others are aboard a train, its four cars pulled behind a small engine through a pine forest. The rails seem fresh, raised on supports not yet sufficiently sunken into the earth, and they bend slightly under the weight of the train. This sense of recent construction is amplified further by a sight gag, as the rails run directly up and over a large fallen tree, the carriages humping their way over it and bouncing the passengers inside. The tree itself carries hints of a paralysis intended or adeptly avoided, as though someone sought to sabotage the new route by felling a tree in its place, or, conversely, as though workers too rushed or too badly paid couldn't be bothered to drag it out of the way.

A closer shot of the conductor shows him looking ahead and then bringing the train to a halt before a cut reveals a donkey standing just by the side of the track ahead, quietly eating grass. The conductor approaches the animal, puts his arms around its neck, and pulls, trying to get it to move backwards. No luck. Another man descends from the train and appears to verbally demand the donkey to move,

Shannon Ebner, EKSIZ, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

Buster Keaton, Our Hospitality, 1923, film still.

before he crouches low and tries to move its leg. Still, it won't budge. The conductor taps the other man, gesturing to join him on the other side of the line, facing the donkey, where they bend low and grab the rails with both hands and pull. Unlike the donkey, the rails comply in a moment of disarming flexibility, as the metal and wood slide towards the men, shifting the entire path of the rails around the donkey in a serpentine wiggle. A cut to a close-up of the animal shows it standing still, just watching and swatting its tail. Then we're watching at a distance as the train chugs along its new path, missing the donkey and leaving it entirely unscathed. Once the train has passed, the donkey walks away.

The stakes are deceptively high in this little moment, which goes far beyond an easy riff on the storied stubbornness of donkeys. Light as it is, it touches on a history with profound effects, especially in the American context that Keaton's films thoroughly processed. This is the history of the maiming, killing, and paralyzing of both animals and humans by passing trains during the decades of rapid railway expansion in the nineteenth century, particularly following the Civil War. It's hard to overstate how widespread and consequential this reckoning with new forms of mechanized death was, both in rural contexts where trains slaughtered grazing cattle and other livestock, and in urban ones where bloody collisions inevitably followed from prioritizing the paths of railway lines over the lives of humans and animals in the streets. One of the first large-scale "terrorist" plots in the United States was planned in 1850 by farmers in Michigan, who were, in the words of Ann Larabee,

enraged at the new fifteen-mile-per-hour rail run by the Michigan Central Railroad, because trains were slamming into their wandering sheep and cows. Resenting the railroad company because it refused to compensate them for their losses, the farmers, led by Abel Fitch, plotted to blow up tracks with powder kegs and percussion caps and carry out other acts of sabotage, including train

derailments.[31]

Burning of Union Depot, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 21–22, 1877, engraving from Harper's Weekly by M.B. Leiser. License: Public Domain.

Frequent collisions also formed a substantial part of the animus against the railway companies that fed into explosive strikes, like the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, which went far beyond workers in the industry.[32] To complete the circuit, it was precisely this tendency towards mechanized death that brought about the formal end of the deodand within English common law in 1846 with the signing of the new Fatal Accidents Act. A number of factors led to this, especially "a new model of the debt liability arising from accidental death," as William Pietz details.[33] Yet a more simple and abhorrent motivation also led that model to replace and abolish the deodand: more people were now being slaughtered and maimed by something—trains—that cost a tremendous amount of money. And though the ones who had to pay easily could, they also happened to be part of the same ruling class that could bend the law to their will.

Here I want to draw out this question and logic of bending, because we glimpse in this scene a radically different image of flexibility and what it means to enact it. Yes, there is the surreal pliability that runs counter to the property that Platonov's character Fyodorov was so attuned to, that inability of metal to heal itself. But further, this is a flexibility that asks: What would it mean to build a world designed to bend around a life rather than barrel straight through it? What would it mean to design a flexibility that never burdens single beings with the demand to bear it up, be rehabilitated, be able-bodied and able-minded, keep bending, leap out of the way, or twist to match the contours of a system indifferent to singularities? This would be a flexibility that is articulated, collective, and inorganic, rather than internalized, individual, and supposedly natural. It happens only *between* entities, in the junctures that bring together the donkey, the rails, the humans, and the forest. And crucially, it takes getting off the train and laying multiple hands to a structure that is supposed to be beyond question.

Paralyses of all sorts, from bodily and psychological debilitation to infrastructural disasters to the failure of political process to war itself, can never be separated from

the structures that relentlessly generate what is wrongly seen as exceptional accident or error. Yet they so often end in a privacy and privation of experience, set firmly within the frame of the individual who cannot flexibly adapt enough to bring about a response, a change, a motion, a solution—even when the blackout is felt by an entire city all at once. De-paralysis, by contrast, names the inversion of that flow. It moves away from the unit of the solitary and into a kind of collectivity that is not automatically or suddenly generated by breakdown, but that rests on the articulated flexibility and training that "knows how to feed ourselves once everything is paralyzed." In this way, to de-paralyze might mean something close to what we mean by *de-arrest,* when a crowd intervenes to force the police to release someone who has just been captured. Because de-arresting isn't a simple rewind or return to previous freedom, as if let go without contest. It's constitutively different in that many are required to free even just one. So too is the promise of de-paralyzing, which doesn't go back to what was before, but instead spreads outwards. It happens inhumanly, in our links between and in the open circuits of collectivity. If this process is any kind of restoration, existing in the space after the interval of paralysis, it does not restore me to who I was, but rather restores us to who we were not yet able to become.

X

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1
See the previous installment of this essay series for an extended reading of that therblig's form.

2
In this way, it forms an inversion of Gilbreths' symbol, which signifies the threat—for the accumulation of capital—of a body brought to rest, no longer animated or working but still and immobile when set against the backdrop of the motions judged to be productive.

3
Oxana Timofeeva, *The History of Animals: A Philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2018), 156.

4
Andrei Platonov, "Among Animals and Plants" (1936), *The New Yorker* , October 15, 2007 https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/10/22/among-animals-and-plants .

5
Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis* (MIT Press, 2016), 39.

6
I've argued this in my book *Shard Cinema* (Repeater Books, 2017).

7
Platonov, "Among Animals and Plants."

8
Alfred Hayes, "Into the Streets May First," *New Masses*, May 1934 https://www.marxists.org/subject/mayday/poetry/hayes.html .

9
Once Mickey Mouse loses control and tries to murder the broom when it does its job too well and refuses to quit, its splinters reform into a multitude, a raw display of animated inanimate proletarian power marching in lockstep, as if on parade themselves.

10
See Part 2 of this essay series https://www.e-flux.com/journal/143/594256/on-paralysis-part-2/ .

11
That is, as opposed to real property (land) or establishments associated with it (such as buildings).

12
This sense of the "inanimate" plays a key role in the history of the deodand: first, insofar as it allows the law to grant the specificity of a vessel that is "animated" by labor, and second, when the deodand runs into a material world increasingly full of decidedly animated nonanimal property (i.e., engines, trains, factory machinery) that sits uncomfortably in its nexus of blame and agency.

13
The victim must equally be cleared from express fault of having brought it upon themself, whether through willful action or undue carelessness, as seen in Edward Coke's definition, paraphrased in William Nelson's 1725 *An Abridgment of the Common Law* : the deodand "causeth the untimely death of a reasonable Creature, without the Will and Default of himself." If so judged, the property in question must then be *Deo dandum*, or given over to God, as the term itself prescribes. And as God is notoriously difficult to locate, the king steps in as His earthly proxy to receive the forfeited object or creature. The owner, who cannot be proven to have intentionally authored the fatal chain of events, is still not considered guilty or personally liable for the death. Still, they are nevertheless required to "give over" the unruly property, whether physically surrendering the rogue item itself or, more commonly, paying to the crown the monetary value assessed in court.

14
In this way, even though exculpated of guilt or formal retribution, the owner nevertheless exits the situation socially worse than he entered it, no longer an owner, out the equivalent in cash, or newly indebted for a sum that cannot be paid to stand in for a tool that ruined itself in the process of its murderous accident.

15
Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ontology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 10.

16
The history of judgement against objects is fascinating, especially given that it should not be read purely as the evidence of an enchanted world now lost, as the 1976 case of *United States v. Article Consisting of 50,000 Cardboard Boxes More or Less, Each Containing One Pair of Clacker Balls* indicates.

17
William Pietz, "Death of the Deodand: Accursed Objects and the Money Value of Human Life," *Res* , no. 31 (1997): 97.

18
E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (William H einemann, 1906), 186.

19
J. J. Finkelstein, "The Ox that Gored," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 71, no. 2 (1981): 76.

20
Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* , vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1898), 474.

21
See Finkelstein, who uses this phrase for the title of his extensive 1981 study, "The Ox That Gored."

22
Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., *The Co mmon Law* (Macmillan, 1882), 9.

23
Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 181.

24
Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog*, 147.

25
Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York University Press, 2014), 72–96.

26
The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Semiotext(e), 2009).

27
Spyros Papapetros, "Malicious Houses," *Grey Room*, no. 20 (2005): 8.

28
Papapetros, "Malicious Houses," 8. I would note here also that this sort of transfer and lethal mimicry isn't unique to this moment: Papapetros identifies its precedence in moments of "parallels" earlier in the film, and, more generally, as one of the preoccupations of an entire orbit of thinking about forms of animacy.

29
Papapetros, "Malicious Houses," 8.

30
My use of the word "articulation" here is guided by Stuart Hall's conception of the term, which describes what can historically be bound together but is neither a natural unity nor a coherent whole. So in the framework I've sketched throughout, we might read the real epistemic promise of what can be detected during moments of paralysis as a slow recognition of just such "articulation," and of the ability to detect the joints that reveal it to be a composite. It is in those intervals that one might detect how parts are, in Hall's words, "connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken" (Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall by Larry Grossberg and Others," in *Essential Essays* , vol. 1, *Foundations of Cultural Studies* , Duke University, 2019, 235). It is here that the promise of de-paralysis begins, asking how to develop, foster, and defend what moments of paralysis generate: new circumstances and arrangements that prevent the parts from simply being restored into an articulated arrangement that always ends up hiding its links and treating the assemblage as normal and natural, as given and beyond the reach of intervention, as just the way things are.

31
Ann Larabee, "A Brief History of Terrorism in the United States," *Knowledge, Technology, & Policy* 16, no. 1 (2003): 24.

32
For a study of this, see David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

33
Pietz writes, "One was the civilization of such debt, in the original sense of the word 'civilization' the transfer of social controversies that became justiciable cases from the criminal law of the state to the civil law of private individuals. The other was the institutional production of a new kind of (legally) immortal person: the modern limited liability corporation." Pietz, "Death of the Deodand," 106.

Rodrigo Nunes

From the Organizational Point of View: Bogdanov and the Augustinian Left, Part 1

For Dri

"Progress and Entropy," the first chapter of Norbert Wiener's 1950 *The Human Use of Human Beings*, is also a short treatise on demonology. After starting, as one might expect, with Maxwell's famous demon, the text turns to comparing two versions of the devil, which Wiener defines as Manichean and Augustinian. In the first, proposed by the heresy that Saint Augustine first embraced and then devoted himself to fighting, the devil would be an active force opposed to order, an infinitely creative adversary capable of any trick in his quest to disorganize creation. In the second, which the Father of the Church would defend after breaking with the Manichaeans, the devil would not be the opposite of order, but its absence, and "not a power in itself, but the measure of our own weakness … the passive resistance of nature and [not] the active resistance of an opponent."[1]

The scientific name for this resistance is "entropy." Wiener's conviction that the second of the two versions is the right one stems from the idea that "we are immersed in a life in which the world as a whole obeys the second law of thermodynamics: confusion increases and order decreases."[2]

This precept, the mathematician hastens to explain, does not require abandoning all hope of success in the fight against the silent enemy:

> The second law of thermodynamics, while it may be a valid statement about the whole of a closed system, is definitely not valid concerning a non-isolated part of it. There are local and temporary islands of decreasing entropy in a world in which the entropy as a whole tends to increase, and the existence of these islands enables some of us to assert the existence of progress.[3]

Thus, if in an ultimate sense "progress itself and our fight against the increase of entropy intrinsically must end in the downhill path from which we are trying to escape,"[4] this does not imply the impossibility of "local and temporary" victories, nor the absence of reasons to fight for them.

Aleksander Aleksandrovitch Malinovsky, known by the pseudonym Aleksander Bogdanov, was born on August 22, 1873 in Sokólka, now Polish territory, and died in Moscow fifty-four years later as an apostate from Russian Marxism. (A text he wrote at roughly the same time as the *Essays on Tektology* was titled "A Decade of Excommunication from Marxism (1904–1914)," and would

Fra Angelico, Conversion of Saint Augustine, between circa 1430 and circa 1435. License: Public Domain.

only come to light in 1995, more than eighty years too late.) Although the theoretical polemics levelled against him were often smokescreens to disguise disputes over control of the Bolshevik fraction of the future Russian Communist Party, it could be said that the fundamental reason he ended his life as a pariah and heretic was his attempt to incorporate into Marx's doctrine the implications of a scientific revolution that began in the nineteenth century, and which Wiener attributes to figures such as James Clerk Maxwell, Josiah Willard Gibbs, and Ludwig Boltzmann: the introduction of the statistical method into physics. This revolution, according to the author of *Cybernetics and Society*, turned physics away from thinking about what *will* necessarily happen to what *can* happen with sufficient probability, and brought about the transition from the rigidly deterministic universe of Newtonian mechanics to the contingent universe of contemporary science––the incompleteness of which, "almost an irrationality in the midst of the world," resembles Freud's admission of "a deep irrational component in human behaviour and thought."[5]

What did this imply for Marxism, to which Bogdanov would adhere in Tula, the town to which he was banished at the end of 1894 after taking part in a protest as a chemistry student at Moscow University? An important consequence touches on a central point in the scientific pretensions of the orthodoxy elaborated by followers who were less informed about the science of their time than Marx was himself, and who had therefore overlooked the transformations taking place at the time: historical determinism. When natural science was abandoning necessity in favor of contingency, the "scientificity" of Marxism could no longer be measured by its ability to enunciate laws capable of establishing the course that history would necessarily take. Hence another consequence of a practical and political nature: if there was no absolute historical necessity, revolution and a classless society were not inevitable outcomes, which stripped Marxism of its prophetic force while elevating the problem of organizing these outcomes to the position of a fundamental question.

It is true that Bogdanov was not ready to fully relinquish the promise of a coming society in which the "spontaneous motion" of life would be made "coherent and holistic", it would find "the graceful regulation and harmonious adjustment of all its manifestations", and "the forces of development [would] become infinite."[6] Yet we can also find a different strand in his thought. More

somber in that it was also perhaps more sincere, Bogdanov was quietly aware of the fact that at the cosmic scale in which the new scientific discoveries unfolded, a consequence imposed itself on the very expectation of human progress nurtured by the revolutionary project. Finally, on the cosmic scale on which the new discoveries were unfolding, a consequence was imposed on the very expectation of human progress nurtured by the revolutionary project. In the end, as the Martians discovered in the communist science fiction novel *Red Star*, published by Bogdanov in 1908, winning the class struggle was no more than overcoming a historical fetish that stood in the way of recognizing the real struggle: that of the species against the passive (and active) resistance imposed by its environment––a struggle that even communism could never bring to an end and which, ultimately, could never be fully won.

and indifference grow over time statistically tends. "If it turns out to be true that the universal process tends to a stable equilibrium through a continuous growth in entropy, then the entire life of the universe in our phase of it would also turn out to be" a "crisis" of the kind Bogdanov characterizes as "fading," in which the final equilibrium differs imperceptibly from the initial one and any changes that have occurred are progressively erased.[7] Thus, even the "universal *irreversibility* of natural processes" exemplified by the cumulative gains in organization produced by natural selection would finally find itself, if not strictly speaking reversed, at least extinguished by the relentless advance of ultimate disorganization.[8]

This singularity of Bogdanov's Marxism stems from an encounter that probably preceded his discovery of the


Bolsheviks on Mars

Illustrations for the 1923 edition of the 1908 utopian novel by the Russian Alexander Bogdanov, "Red Star," set in a Socialist society on Mars.

Article in New York Times in 1984.

The suspicion that the second law of thermodynamics had smuggled into the heart of the century of science and progress is that, if there is any final equilibrium, it is not that of the plenitude of human fulfilment, but rather the state towards which a system in which disorganization

master from Trier: the one he had in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the empirio-criticism of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius and the energeticism of Wilhelm Ostwald. Bogdanov took at least three central

ideas from these authors, by association with whom he would be obstinately flagellated by Lenin in 1909's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. One of them is monism, that is, the imperative to find a single framework from which to think about terms usually treated as separate, indeed opposed: the physical and the mental, the human and the nonhuman, the organic and the inorganic, nature and culture, action and knowledge. The other two are the conservation of energy and natural selection, as the scientific principles capable of providing the key to such a unifying endeavor. As Bogdanov already put it in his 1899 *Basic Elements of the Historical View of Nature*, what all things absolutely have in common is the search for the most economical expenditure of energy possible and the need to adapt in order to remain viable in their environment. In this way, both principles can be combined to say that the most viable adaptation will always tend to be the one that is the most energy efficient.[9]

But the Bogdanovian heresy went even further, going so far as to criticize "dialectical materialism" itself, a term coined not by Marx but by the "father of Russian Marxism," Georgi Plekhanov. Since his first work of philosophy, *Basic Elements of the Historical View of Nature*, Bogdanov saw Hegel as a limited precursor to himself, and dialectics as an insufficiently universal method, since "development through contradictions" was only one of the possible cases of development, and its applicability was restricted to phenomena of organic nature, leaving out the nonliving. Furthermore, by employing the linguistic model of argumentation as a metaphor to make sense of all that happens (affirmation-negation-negation of the negation), dialectics curtailed its own powers of analysis. It became unable to think anything that did not adequately conform to the model, which in turn made the use of concepts such as "negation" and "synthesis" arbitrary and approximate. ("It stands to reason that Hegel's dialectic could not be other than the model of an argument, since he substitutes thought for real processes."[10]) Thus, it was able to offer only low-resolution images of things that were best described as a dynamic equilibrium of opposing forces or tendencies present in the same environment, which went through moments of crisis in the search for new equilibria. This did not stop Bogdanov from recognizing "the truth of its day" in Hegel's system because "cognition is the *organization of* experience," and Hegel's had been the greatest effort in this direction up to that point.[11] But if "processes in nature come about not only through a struggle of opposites but also by other means," dialectics must be "a special case, and its model cannot become a universal method"––hence the "need to move forward to a broader and more universal point of view."[12] This point of view would become "tektology" (from the Greek *tekton*, "builder"), a name borrowed from the German naturalist Ernst Haeckel, who had used it, however, to speak only of human activities.[13] It was to tektology, simultaneously constituted as the "universal science of organization," that fell the cognitive endeavor of organizing the experience of its time.

This project began to come to light in 1913, had its second part published in 1917, and finally appeared in a condensed version in 1921, which is the *Essays on Tektology* as it has appeared in English and, now, in Portuguese. It develops ideas that had been with Bogdanov for some time, starting with the very conclusion, which had first been aired in 1901's *Perception from a Historical Point of View*, that a universal science of organization had become imperative because of the fragmentation of knowledge and society produced by the division of labor.[14] The centrality of organizational work, in turn, already figured in *A Short Course in Economic Science*, from 1897, and in *Basic Elements*, from 1899, in the form of the opposition between "organizers" and "executors," the original foundation of the class struggle, whose history extended from primitive to modern societies. Equally present in those works was the suggestion that industrial society contained within itself the conditions for overcoming this separation, insofar as, as machines took on the role of specialized executors, workers who supervised them increasingly became organizers endowed with a vision of the whole. This is, in fact, one of the most (and perhaps unjustifiably) optimistic aspects of Bogdanov's thinking: contrary to the association between the advance of industry and the deskilling of labor, or a notion of technical alienation such as that later developed by Gilbert Simondon, Bogdanov saw in modern machinery liberation in the making.[15] For him, it anticipated a form of nonauthoritarian cooperation, which from 1901 onwards he would call "synthetic" or "comradely," that had to be organized and expanded so as to become the basis of the society of the future.

While his relationship with the science of his time may ultimately have never fully upended his conviction in the inevitability of communism, it did temper it with a belief in the need for what Maoism would come to know as "cultural revolution"––a term that Bogdanov was in all likelihood the first to use. For him, the liberatory opportunity brought by the industrial revolution required the development of a proletarian culture independent from the dominant bourgeois culture, a task that the proletariat should begin to undertake before the seizure of power so as to combat its own contamination by the individualistic and authoritarian habits of the bourgeoisie, as well as to prepare itself for its future task as organizer of society. This idea would be one of the bases for the creation of the Vpered (Forward) group during the disputes with Lenin over control of Bolshevism (1909–12), and, after the 1917 Revolution, of the "proletkult" movement, which operated as an independent organ of the new Soviet power until 1921, when Bogdanov was forced to resign from the organization's central committee due to the renewed persecution of his ideas—an episode that would seal his definitive farewell to politics, seven years before his death. Tektology, the synthesis of all of humanity's organizational experience up to that point, was the scientific pillar of this

project.

The Organizational Point of View

While the context, motivations, and objectives of this "universal science of organization" had already been familiar to Bogdanov for more than a decade, perhaps the first great novelty of the work of the 1910s was the discovery of the "organizational point of view," announced for the first time in the 1913 text "The Secret of Science." This, "the only monistic understanding of the universe," is the perspective from which organization and its mechanisms appear as the most universal reality.[16]

Everything is organized, from the inorganic to living matter, which is tantamount to saying that *everything organizes*—every event that occurs can be thought of as an act that produces organization—and, finally, that *everything organizes itself*, or in other words, that the universe as a whole is a self-organized phenomenon that consists of the constant organization, disorganization, and reorganization of its parts: "An infinitely unfolding fabric of all types of forms and levels of organization, from the unknown elements of ether to human collectives and star systems" which, "in their interlacement and mutual struggle, in their constant changes, create the universal organizational process, infinitely split in its parts, but continuous and unbroken in its whole."[17]

What is, then, organization? The book offers two distinct and complementary definitions, one indirect, the other explicit. If human labor discovers that "any product is a system organized from material elements by means of joining them with the elements of energy of human labor," then it is possible to generalize from this that organization consists of the joining of elements through the expenditure of energy.[18] "No conjunction whatsoever—not only this, biological, but none whatsoever, in the most general tektological sense of the word—can occur without an expenditure of activities," hence also energy.[19] But this also means that, from the point of view of a system composed in this way, organization corresponds to a combination of activities that overcome resistance; it is when the sum of the activities of a complex is greater than the sum of the resistances that it encounters, whether internally or externally, that we can say it is *organized*," that is, "*practically greater* than the simple sum of its parts."[20] From this one can conclude that to adopt the organizational point of view is to observe any complex or system "from the point of view of the internal relationships among all of its parts and also the relationship between it as a whole and its environment; i.e., all external systems"[21] ––a principle that clearly places Bogdanov as a precursor of what would become known, after the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1950s, as "systems theory."

Several consequences follow from this. The first is the (co)relativity of organization and disorganization: if every creation is an organization of existing elements, elements which in turn were already involved in other arrangements, what appears to one system as a gain in organization will inevitably appear to others as a loss, and vice versa. Of course, this does not prevent the organizational gain of one system from also representing a gain for another, for instance in a situation where two systems are in collaboration or one is a subsystem of the other. What is clear, in any case, is that *the organizational point of view supposes a form of perspectivism*. This is even more evident in that which is the central conceptual pair of tektology, the notion of "activity-resistance." As Bogdanov observes, if "two armies or two classes are engaged in a struggle, then the activities of each side represent resistances for the other; the whole matter is but a question of the point of view taken."[22] Bringing both sides of the coin together in a single concept, as Bogdanov does, implies a great universal equalization of agency––everything that is, is simultaneously active and passive, subject and object––and a perfectly nonmoral way of conceiving it. If organizing oneself and the world implies disorganizing other things, there is no good or bad action in an absolute sense; as Deleuze taught with regard to Spinoza, in a world where no perspective is privileged, there are always relations that compose with one another, even if they imply the decomposition of others, and therefore nothing can be said to be "good" or "bad" without it being at the same time specified "for whom."[23] To put it another way, and against another kind of moralizing effort, there is no *power for* which it is not immediately also *power over*. As a matter of fact, perhaps the best term of comparison for Bogdanov's resistance-activities is Michel Foucault's concept of power—which is profoundly distorted every time we try to distinguish between two different forms of power, one good and "from below," the other bad and "from above," when the point is precisely that we are always talking about one and the same thing. If resistance comes before power, as Foucault often said, it is not because it is something distinct from it, but precisely because all resistance is always already activity, that is, power—"a set of actions on possible actions."[24] Resisting is always already acting on something and, conversely, suffering an action is always already resisting it in some way, even if only "passively."

It is not just organization and disorganization, activity and resistance, that are relative realities and correlated terms; the same goes for the pair organization/self-organization. In fact, the difference between the two depends solely on the scale of analysis: the same process which, on the scale of the elements, can be described as the action of some systems upon others can be seen from a higher scale as a single system self-organizing. (This is how even discontinuity and "mutual struggle" can be perceived as parts of a single continuous "universal organizational process," in Bogdanov's words.) This follows from three other consequences of the organizational point of view: hierarchy, quasi-decomponibility, and scale relativity. By

Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, a Bolshevik propaganda poster by El Lissitzky that abstractly represents the defeat of the Whites by the Red Army, 1919 - 1920. License: Public Domain.

the first, taken here in the ecological sense of the term,[25] it is meant that complex systems are made up of elements that are themselves complex systems, forming a multilayered, nested structure of systems within systems at different levels of integration. By the second, we must understand the property of structures of this type whereby the rate of interaction between components within the same hierarchical level is much higher than the interaction between components at different hierarchical levels. This is what makes it possible to isolate one or more levels of analysis from the others, treating interactions of lower frequency (occurring at higher hierarchical levels) as constant and interactions of higher frequency (occurring at hierarchical levels lower than the scale of observation adopted) as too brief to be relevant.[26] Thus, according to the third consequence, terms such as "system," "subsystem," and "element" do not have concrete referents in any absolute sense, but rather depend on how an observer chooses to carve up a system's hierarchical structure.[27]

If the organization of a system is a function of the relationship between its activities and the resistances it encounters in its environment (or, to put it differently, "the relative activities-resistances of [this] complex and its environment"[28]), and if the environment "is connected with the current of world events, and with strict analysis, it spreads in the end, to the entire universe," and "consequently ... *inevitably* changes,"[29] then we must conclude that it is necessary to consider every system not as a finished entity, but as a *process*––the process, precisely, by which it maintains itself as the complex it is despite the disorganization with which it is threatened by its surroundings. As a matter of fact, "activity" refers first

and foremost to what Spinoza called *conatus*: the endeavor of each system to maintain itself in existence (hence why all activity is also automatically resistance).

In addition to natural selection and the conservation of energy, another scientific principle that Bogdanov intends to generalize is Henry Louis Le Chatelier's so-called "Law of Equilibrium," according to which "systems which are in a state of equilibrium tend to preserve it by producing internal opposition to forces changing it."[30] And given that disturbances are continuous and heterogeneous, and so is the effort to compensate for them, the preservation of a complex or form can only be understood as a *dynamic* equilibrium whereby emerging changes are balanced by other changes in the opposite direction. It follows that equilibrium can never be taken as "absolutely precise": if "there cannot be a complete, absolute balance of opposite changes," it is "always only approximate and practical."[31] We say that a thing is preserved if the difference between the loss and gain of organization is small enough that it can be seen as remaining sufficiently equal to itself within the scale of time and detail in which it is observed.

A corollary of this dynamic and processual approach is that "full, ideal organization is nonexistent in nature; disorganization is always admixed to it to some degree."[32] On the other hand, absolute disorganization cannot exist either: In what sense could an absolutely disorganized entity be said to be an entity, if it lacked the internal and external connections that would allow it to act and resist in its world? In fact, the constitutive perspectivity of the concept of activity-resistance, whereby every organization at one point presupposes disorganization at another, implies that organization and disorganization, "ingression," and "disingression," "assimilation" and "disassimilation," connection and disconnection, continuity and discontinuity are mutually limiting. "A full break-up of connections and absolute separateness of complexes does not and cannot exist in our experience, which is united by universal ingression," that is, the fact that all things are continuously connected even if each thing is not connected to every other thing. What varies is the "degrees of separateness" between them, hence another reason why reality is, so to speak, *objectively* relative to the action of the observer: "To solve a problem, it may be necessary to take into account separateness in some cases, in others it is also necessary to consider connections."[33] Finally, what *from the point of view of the totality or of the relationship between systems* appears as mutually limiting qualities imply, *from the point of view of a system taken in isolation*, qualities that appear to that system as *trade-offs* ("tektological contradictions"): complexity and instability, diversity and coherence, plasticity and robustness, diffusion and compactness, differentiation and counter-differentiation.

To be continued in the April 2025 issue of e-flux journal*.*

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This text is a version of the introductory essay to the Brazilian edition of Aleksander Bogadnov's *Essays on Tektology* (*Ensaios de Tectologia: A Ciência Universal da Organização*, Machado, 2025).

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1
Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Da Capo Press, 1988), 35, 36.

2
Wiener, *Human Use of Human Beings* , 36.

3
Wiener, *Human Use of Human Beings* , 36.

4
Wiener, *Human Use of Human Beings* , 46–47.

5
Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* , 11.

6
Aleksander Bogdanov, "Goals and Norms of Life," *Russian Cosmism*, ed. Boris Groys (e-flux/MIT Press, 2018), 180, 175, 201.

7
Aleksander Bogdanov, *Essays in Tektology: The General Science of Organization* (Intersystems Publications, 1984), 249.

8
Bogdanov, *Essays in Tektology*, 227, emphasis in original. It is true that Bogdanov also shows some skepticism towards the hypothesis of the heat death of the universe: according to him, as long as science did not know sufficiently well "how those differences were created which are now being equalized, how those atoms were formed which are now being decomposed, and what are the bases of differentiation of the universe itself," it would be arbitrary to project a future point of "maximum contra-differentiation." Bogdanov, *Essays in Tektology*, 152.

9
Bogdanov nonetheless warns that the best economy is not necessarily the absence of expenditure: "Victory over nature is achieved not by petty preservation of energy but by the fullest, most productive use of it." This statement, while not strictly false, ought to be qualified in the face of the present environmental crisis. Aleksander Bogdanov, *Philosophy of Living Experience: Popular Outlines* (Haymarket, 2016), 147.

10
Bogdanov, *Philosophy of Living Experience* , 174.

11
Bogdanov, *Philosophy of Living Experience* , 174, emphasis in original.

12
Bogdanov, *Philosophy of Living Experience* , 200.

13
James White, *Red Hamlet: The Life and Ideas of Alexander Bogdanov* (Haymarket, 2018), 290.

14
White, *Red Hamlet*, 287.

15
A critique of this optimism by Stanislav Volsky appeared as early as 1911 in the second issue of the newspaper published by the Vpered group, of which Bogdanov was the leading figure. See White, *Red Hamlet*, 282. Of course, it would always be possible to suggest that Bogdanov was, despite a fairly common interpretation of the German thinker, closer to Marx's true opinion. See Paul S. Adler, "Marx, Machines, and Skill," *Technology and Culture* 31, no. 4 (1990).

16
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 6.

17
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 6.

18
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 26.

19
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 148.

20
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 39, emphasis in original.

21
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 52.

22
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 42.

23
See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Philosophie Pratique* (Minuit, 1981), 147ff. As the famous passage on lymph and chyle from his correspondence with Oldenburg shows, Spinoza is a pioneer of both perspectivism and, as we will see below, the hierarchical conception of reality assumed by the organizational point of view. See Baruch Spinoza, "Letter 32," *Complete Works* (Hackett, 2002).

24
Michel Foucault, "Le Sujet et le Pouvoir," *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2 (Gallimard, 2001), 1056.

25
See for example T. F. H. Allen and Thomas B. Starr, *Hierarchy: Perspectives for Ecological Complexity* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

26
H. A. Simon, "The Organization of Complex Systems," in *Hierarchy Theory: The Challenge of Complex Systems* , ed. H. H. Pattee (George Braziller, 1973).

27
"The concept of 'elements' in the organizational science is completely relative and conditional: it is simply those parts into which, in conformity with a problem under investigation, it was necessary to decompose its object; they may be as large or small as needed, they may be subdivided further or not; no limits to analysis can be placed here." Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology* , 42–43.

28
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 93.

29
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 80, emphasis in original.

30
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 54.

31
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 79.

32
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 43.

33
Bogdanov, *Essays on Tektology*, 127.