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Editorial

In this issue, Charles Mudede proposes that Octavia Butler brought us a viable theory of quantum movement. Who is capable of moving through time to haunt other people in other places and other times, and in which direction? Paradoxically—and there are many paradoxes—just as the hurt have been hurt, the dead can only be dead, and are for that reason no longer able to move forward in time to haunt us. We, however, are alive in our own time, and we feel pain on their behalf. It is we who reach out from the future—our present—to haunt them in the past. We are in fact the zombies of the already dead, mirrors of our own regrets, just as we are presently haunted by messengers from a future time warning us to not repeat what they know will not end well.

Amelia Groom looks at how the singer Mariah Carey's eccentric attitude toward time and temporality seems to demonstrate a unique physics of spectacle, or even a philosophy of chronology or history. Often expressed as a refusal of causality or time as measurement—who's to say what preceded what, or what made something else possible?—Carey's cheerful denial and insistent creativity in a metaphysical domain suggest an avant-garde sensibility thriving in the most unexpected of places.

Samer Frangie delves into the tense relationships between food, identity, and the social dynamics of crisis in Lebanon. The present political and economic crisis, argues Frangie, is not just a matter of material scarcity; it is a method through which those in power restructure society and exert control. Frangie's exploration is driven by the current famine, a poignant symbol of the nation-state's decay. The discourse around food, a once celebrated cornerstone of Lebanese identity, is transformed into a nostalgic relic in the face of contemporary collapse. But the breakdown of basic necessities like electricity also exposes the privileged place of the refrigerator as a fulcrum for modern family dynamics, relationships, and even the experience of life and death across class lines.

In Audre Lorde's 1974 poetry collection *New York Headshop and Museum*, the New York City of the 1970s is a necropolis rife with violence, racism, decay, and decrepitude—a site for the ongoing genocidal tendencies of capitalism. In Serubiri Moses's reading, Lorde's poetry—including her deep engagement with African diasporic wisdom and spirituality—invites a reevaluation of modernism by highlighting themes of violence, healing, and revolution.

South Indian artist Ratheesh T's practice of looking has evolved from his early experiences in Indian classical dance, where he encountered the complexities of caste-based politics in the performance world. Faced with overbearing whiteness, he transitioned to Western and cinematic dance, even embracing Michael Jackson's style before unexpectedly shifting to painting after spending time with artists from the leftist Radical Group. More recently, observations of family and landscapes in his

hometown of Kilimanoor have emerged as a central theme in his paintings, as have the "careless objects" Ratheesh finds in the disorderly arrangement of his studio.

Meanwhile, in the first installment of a two-part essay, Sven Lütticken envisions a complex landscape of divergent movements, critiquing dominant organizational structures while seeking ways to prefigure a transformative future. In exploring connections between Huey P. Newton's "intercommunalism" and the micropolitical turn of the 1970s and '80s that was associated with Deleuze and Guattari, Lütticken discusses the complexity of emergence, historical narratives, and the potential for creating alternative forms of life against capitalist forces.

One and a half years into Russia's attack on Ukraine, Keti Chukhrov examines the crisis of emancipation theories. In challenging Western leftist critiques of representative democracy and the enlargement of NATO, Chukhrov highlights the agency of former Soviet countries to voluntarily orient towards European democracy, NATO, and EU membership. The alternative, she stresses, would be continuing to live under autocratic rule. She argues that the war underscores the inadequacy of purely discursive critique by the cultural left, emphasizing the need for realistic strategies in the face of geopolitical crises.

X

Charles Tonderai Mudede

Who Haunts?

Our story begins in the small city of Dinant in southern Belgium, where in 1814 a boy named Adolphe Sax was born. It didn't take long for his life to take a tragic turn, for it began to seem as if the surrounding world wanted to kill him. As a toddler, he fell three stories from a window and somehow managed to survive. At three, he accidentally drank poisoned water and survived. Later he ate a pin. He banged his head. Fell again. Consumed poison again. Was scorched by a gunpowder explosion. The city of Dinant informs tourists that "Little Sax" was known as "the ghost."[1]

What to make of this? A nineteenth-century Belgian boy appears to have a lot of bad luck. We could leave it at that. But there's more. Adolphe Sax is also known for something else: inventing the saxophone. First appearing in the 1840s, the saxophone drew some interest from composers but never managed to enter European orchestral music in any major way before falling out of fashion by the end of the century. Sax's invention was not for its own time, but for the future—the next century, in another country and culture.

Let's imagine, in the manner of Huge Everett's multiverse hypothesis,[2] that the young Sax is killed by one of his many close calls (pin, poison, fall) and the saxophone is not invented. In this world, the center of Black American culture suddenly vanishes, turning Duke Ellington's band to ashes like the superheroes at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*. Nothing becomes of John Coltrane. Andrew "Mike" Terry's saxophone solo on the Supremes' "Where Did Our Love Go" echoes into a ghostly silence. Just as it's nearly impossible to imagine the twentieth century without Black American music, it's almost impossible to imagine Black American music without the saxophone—a European instrument treated as mere novelty until it reached a culture its creator had no direct contact with. Even more curious, young Adolphe Sax almost drowned in a river—an important detail if one recalls Octavia Butler's time-traveling novel *Kindred*.

Though primarily known as a science fiction writer—her books are full of aliens, spaceships, dystopian futures, and explorations of the possible direction of new technology—I see Octavia Butler primarily as a philosopher. Just as Donna Haraway's famous 1985 "A Cyborg Manifesto," blurs the line between what we perceive as us and not us, human and not human, in Butler's *Clay's Ark*, also published in the mid-eighties (as the penultimate novel in the Patternist series that launched Butler's career in 1976), humans are infected by an alien microorganism that exhibits, like all life on earth, what Spinoza described as *conatus*, the inner drive to stay alive and flourish .

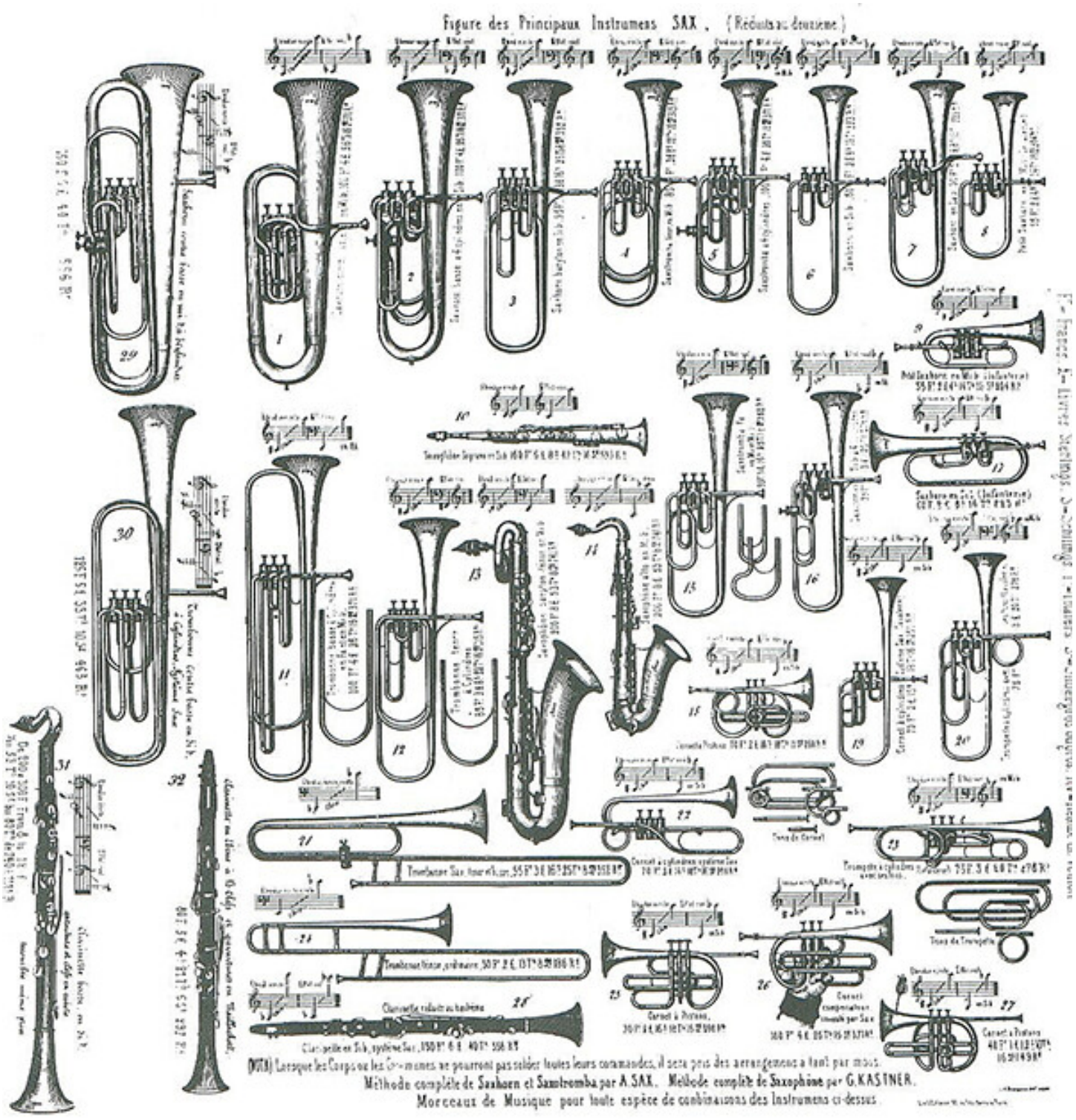
Haraway, however, is plainly a philosopher in the Foucauldian school of social theory; Butler, whose fiction also takes this philosophical form, is not. All of her novels are recognized as science fiction, which is why many can't stop pointing out that she was the first science fiction

Fernand Pierre, untitled, 1947. Courtesy of The Gallery of Everything.

writer to receive a MacArthur grant. But philosophers don't just write philosophical treatises: they write dialogues, aphorisms, novels, manifestos, and even science fiction. The question then is: What comes first, the mode or the function? For Deleuze and Guattari's last collaboration, *What Is Philosophy ?*, the answer is found in "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts." True, the "sciences, arts, and philosophies are all equally creative," but "only philosophy creates concepts in the strict sense."[3] To see Butler primarily as a philosopher, as a brilliant creator of concepts, is to appreciate her genius and contributions more deeply.

Butler's most famous novel, *Kindred*, cannot even be described as science fiction.[4] It has no aliens, no spaceships, and doesn't project the leading technology or culture of its time into the future. Instead, it goes into the past, with no explanation for how such time traveling works. It just happens. The novel's central character, Dana Franklin, a Black woman married to a white man, Kevin Franklin, departs from her present time (the mid-seventies) and place (Los Angeles) into a distant time (the early nineteenth century) and place (Maryland). The space-time transportation involves her periodically losing consciousness, then regaining it on a plantation owned by one of her ancestors, Tom Weylin. Without any explanation, the space-time travel appears to be triggered by the slave-owner's son, Rufus, a white boy who will later become, by the crime of rape, Dana's blood relative. Regardless, Dana always arrives in the past at the exact moment Rufus is in danger, about to be killed by a fire or a fall from a tree. The first time Dana rescues Rufus, he's about to drown in a river. By saving him, she saves her future self.

It is fair to argue that the concept for *Kindred* could only



A catalogue showing various Adolphe Sax instruments, including saxhorns, saxophones, and saxotrombas. License: Public Domain.

have been conceived in a culture that has, to some measure, absorbed and extended the conclusions of what is now known, for better or worse, as the Copenhagen interpretation of the behavior of fundamental stuff.[5] Dana jumps from the present to the past in a manner that recalls quantum tunneling, and her connection to Rufus recalls quantum entanglement. You will not find a match for this kind of space-time tunneling and entanglement in

Duke Ellington with his band in 1971. License CC BY-SA 3.0.

classical mechanics. *Kindred* was, after all, completed around the time that the last great discoveries were made in physics.[6] And Butler read widely: science, science fiction, literature, slave narratives. Her mind was a university.

Now let's go to the sun. How does the light of our nearest star come about? Proton-proton fusion. But there is a problem with this fusion, which transforms hydrogen into helium: a lot of energy is needed to make the protons, which have the same positive charge, and to overcome what is called Coulomb repulsion, which repels particles with the same charge. Let's skip the details and get right to it: for two protons to couple, they must be close enough for one of the four known forces, the strong force, to kick in and join them together. Keep in mind that the closer the protons, the stronger the repulsion. This is why such a huge amount of energy is needed for the strong force to overcome this barrier. Yet our sun, like many other stars, doesn't produce the energy required to conduct a conventional energy-releasing union—meaning that there really shouldn't be any light coming from the sun at all. In a Newtonian universe determined by classical mechanics (standard cause and effect), the sun should not even be radiating the energy that makes life, us, and all that is like us—Haraway's "queer messmates" and beyond—possible in the first place. How then does the sun burn if, like other stars, it lacks the energy needed to overwhelm Coulomb repulsion? The answer is found in the magic of quantum tunneling.

That great ball in the sky is driven by quantum mechanics. What happens is: there's so much hydrogen sloshing around in its core that the probability of a proton being here and then suddenly there, beyond the Coulomb barrier, is not only possible but happens often. This is quantum tunneling. In most cases the mechanics of particles collapse into classical mechanics; but sometimes (and rarely) it does not. From the very small comes the very large: flowers, birds, apes, whales, and so forth. We are directly entangled with what can only be described as quantum magic. The juncture between quantum events and an observer's information, knowledge, or conscious awareness, known as the Heisenberg cut, is indeterminable. And this indeterminacy can only lead us to John Wheeler's participatory universe, which follows from his famous (and proven) "delayed choice" thought experiment.[7] When we look at the stars, we don't just look into the past, but we participate, to a significant degree, in the way it looks. The observer and the observed cannot be separated. This is not just mystical nonsense. As with our memory, looking at the universe, which is also looking back in time, is a creative process.

I want to offer another, and possibly deeper, interpretation of *Kindred*'s key concept: time travel means haunting the

past.[8] Dana, as well as her husband (who travels back with her when Rufus falls from a tree), are really ghosts visiting what Burning Spear called "the days of slavery." The slave owner's wife, Margret Weylin, and her son, Rufus, see Dana and Kevin as ghosts. And it is here we must pause to note that this kind of haunting is very unusual. Ghosts usually come from the past, not the future. I can't recall any haunting from the future in the Western tradition, nor in the ancient Japanese ghost stories collected by Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904).[9] If we look at one of the most famous Black American ghost stories, August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson*, we find what is also in Robert Zemeckis's film *What Lies Beneath* (though with a twist concerning property rights). Both are about an unsolved past crime haunting the present. The future must pay for this crime.[10]

Lou Myers, Rocky Carroll, Samuel K. Jackson, and Carol Gordon in The Piano Lesson at Yale Repertory Theatre. Photo by Gerry Goodstein, 1987.

As the most dominant kind of haunting we have in our culture, what is the social function of this justice-determined ghost?[11] By "social function" I mean to say, What is the sociobiology of justice-determined haunting in this temporal form: from past to the present? For the answer we can look to the father of the capitalist science of economics (formerly, and correctly, known as political economy) Adam Smith, writing on ghosts in 1759:

> When we see one man oppressed or injured by another, the sympathy which we feel with the distress of the sufferer seems to serve only to animate our fellow-feeling with his resentment against the offender. We are rejoiced to see him attack his adversary in his turn, and are eager and ready to assist him whenever he exerts himself for defence, or even for vengeance within a certain degree. If the injured should perish in the quarrel, we not only sympathize with the real resentment of his friends and relations, but with the imaginary resentment which in fancy we lend to the dead, who is no longer capable of feeling that or any other human sentiment. But as we put ourselves in his situation, as we enter, as it were, into his body, and in our imaginations, in some measure, animate anew the deformed and mangled carcass of the slain, when we bring home in this manner his case to our own bosoms, we feel upon this, as upon many other occasions, an emotion which the person principally concerned is incapable of feeling, and

> which yet we feel by an illusive sympathy with him.[12]

For Adam Smith, the dead are really dead—done with the world of the living. They cannot haunt. It is only our own moral imagination—made powerful by our ultra-sociality (as the cetologist Hal Whitehead calls it)—that makes the nonliving and wronged appear in the present to demand justice. More from Smith:

> The sympathetic tears which we shed for that immense and irretrievable loss, which in our fancy he appears to have sustained, seem to be but a small part of the duty which we owe him. The injury which he has suffered demands, we think, a principal part of our attention. We feel that resentment which we imagine he ought to feel, and which he would feel, if in his cold and lifeless body there remained any consciousness of what passes upon earth. His blood, we think, calls aloud for vengeance. The very ashes of the dead seem to be disturbed at the thought that his injuries are to pass unrevenged. The horrors which are supposed to haunt the bed of the murderer, the ghosts which, superstition imagines, rise from their graves to demand vengeance upon those who brought them to an untimely end, all take their origin from this natural sympathy with the imaginary resentment of the slain. And with regard, at least, to this most dreadful of all crimes, Nature, antecedent to all reflections upon the utility of punishment, has in this manner stamped upon the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, an immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation.[13]

This is a vivid and accurate sociobiological account of the traditional ghost in the West (and Japan[14]). The violent crime or wrongdoing is not about the dead, but about the living. This is a profound insight. The ghost of the woman murdered by Harrison Ford's character in *What Lies Beneath* is not and could never be present. Her house-haunting is all about the people who survived her. Ghosts powerfully feel a necessity to settle otherworldly scores because they are ultra-social animals.[15] We demand justice not only for the living, but also for the dead. These are our ghosts in truth.[16]

The dead who suffered injustice are really dead. This is the point Max Horkheimer made to Walter Benjamin in a March 16, 1937 letter that appears in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*:

> The determination of incompleteness is idealistic if completeness is not comprised within it. Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain … If one takes total lack of closure entirely seriously, one must believe in the Last Judgment … Perhaps, with regard to incompleteness, there is a difference between the positive and the negative, so that only the injustice, the horror, the sufferings of the past are irreparable. The justice practiced, the joys, the works, have a different relation to time, for their positive character is largely negated by the transience of things. This holds first and foremost for individual existence, in which it is not the happiness but the unhappiness that is sealed by death.[17]

Benjamin's response:

> The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance. What science has "determined" remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts.[18]

Here we have Benjamin, soon to kill himself because the Nazis want to kill him, facing the horror: the slain are really slain. There is no future for them. These thoughts are crowding his mind as he writes the last of his "Theses on the Philosophy History" in 1940. As a Jew, he knows the Nazi catastrophe is right around the corner. As a Marxist, he looks back at the horrors of capitalism. The soul-destroying work, the attacks on strikers, the long working day, the imperial wars. None of this will be redeemed? He decides to reject Horkheimer and resuscitate the dead by bizarrely blending theology with historical materialism. The dead must rise and we must hear their call from where we are now, lest we repeat those past atrocities.

I part with Benjamin on this point and go with Horkheimer and Smith: the dead are nothing, are not with us, are gone forever.[19] But *Kindred*'s rethinking of haunting offers us a way to awaken the dead, not in our own time but, of all places, in their time. This is the philosophy of time at the core of *Kindred*. And this is where Octavia Butler makes a connection with the participatory universe. We can only look back in time—only we, the living, can haunt. And what we haunt is the past. When Rufus calls Dana a ghost, she replies that she isn't there to calm him (she's trying to save him, after all). But that's how his mother, Margret Weylin,

Resurrection Mary, taken at the Electric Theater night club at 4812 North Clark Street, Chicago, April 5, 1968. Source: Chicago Sun-Times Collection.

explains Dana's visits and vanishings—she must be a ghost. And Margret is right (though she doesn't know it): only the living can visit the dead, not the other way around. We're there when George Washington buys a slave. We're there when a tree bears strange fruit.[20] We're there in the gas chambers, or when Winston Churchill starves to death millions of Indians. And as we in the present are in the past, we are also haunted by those in the future, those not yet born.

In fact, our friends from the future are already among us. But what of Adolphe Sax, inventor of the saxophone? His encounter with black ghosts from the future appears to end not as catastrophically as Rufus Weylin's.[21] The Belgian village of Dinant writes that his near-death incidents were only the prelude to an eventful life: "In 1858, Adolphe Sax was miraculously saved from a cancer of the lip by a black doctor who knew the properties of certain Indian plants. What would the future have been but for this intervention?"[22]

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1
See http://www.dinant.be/en/inheritance/adolphe-sax .

2
The physicist Huge Everett, a student of John Wheeler, published in 1957 a paper that proposed the "Many-Worlds" hypothesis as a solution to the indeterminacy described by the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. What this means is that Leibnizian compossibles (or Staurt Kauffmann's adjacent possibles) are not concentrated in (or left with) one (best of all) world but are constantly splitting into other worlds. A possibility that does not make it into this world does not vanish but enters another one. This way of thinking also explains Delueze's claim that the virtual is as real as the actual.

3
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What Is Philosophy?, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (Columbia University Press, 1996), 2, 5.

4
FX's 2022 television adaptation of *Kindred* turned out to be barely mediocre, which is surprising when one considers the narrative power of Butler's novel, which begins with a cinematically vivid image and situation. From that point on, the pages just fly. Though the writer and showrunner of the series, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, preserved the main features of the novel's time traveling, he made significant changes to large sections of the original story, which made fans of the novel deeply unhappy.

5
Agnieszka Polska and Geo Wyeth's installation *The Happiest Thought* inspired the course of thinking in the first half of this essay.

6
This moment in physics was called the November Revolution. Fred Gilman writes: "As the name 'revolution' implies, the discoveries of November 1974 were not just additions to our knowledge of Nature. Instead they signaled a change in our understanding of the structure of matter: that the particles in the nucleus of the atom are themselves composite and are made of quarks. This new layer of structure, the quark level, was moreover one for which we have simple equations to describe the forces which act on the quarks. Thus there emerged what is called the Standard Model of the structure of matter and its forces." After this revolution, physics fell into silence until the discovery of the Higgs boson particle, first proposed in 1964, was confirmed by the Large Hadron Collider in 2012. Fred Gilman, "The November Revolution," *SLAC Beam Line* 16, no. 1 (1985): 3.

7
James Wheeler, "The 'Past' and the 'Delayed-Choice' Double-Slit Experiment," in *Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Theory* , ed. A. R. Marlow (Academic Press, 1978).

8
The core ideas in the remaining sections of this work were first presented in a lecture I delivered at the Swiss Institute in 2020 https://www.swissinstitute.net/event/lecture-charles-mudede-who-haunts/ .

9
See Lafcadio Hearn's *In Ghostly Japan* (1899) and *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904). In 1964, Masaki Kobayashi made *Kwaidan* into one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century Japanese cinema. The past, again, haunts the present in Kaneto Shindo's 1968 *Kuroneko* (Black Cat), which is the greatest film about ghosts in the history of cinema. A mother and daughter are raped and killed by a troop of samurai. The horror of this crime is so extreme that it enables the mother and daughter to break the order of time—the fixed past, the dynamic present, the open future. Their ghosts can now visit the present for the purpose of exacting revenge against any samurai who enters the bamboo grove. The mother and daughter lure them to their home, then turn into demonic cats that eat the doomed samurai. In this common reading of ghosts, an event of extreme evil (or injustice) has the emotional force to propel the present into the past.

10
In the Japanese ghost stories collected by Lafcadio Hearn, ghosts often have no vendetta. They just want to be loved and spend time with those in the present.

11
I must point out that ghosts in Southern Africa are very difficult to figure out. They certainly come from the past, but their motives are not always clear. And you get into trouble with them precisely because you have failed to read their often-complicated motives. Southern African ghosts also hate those who do not believe in them. This arrogance is, of course, a great injustice. For more on this, read Charles Mungoshi's collection of short stories *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972).

12
Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82–83.

13
Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* 83.

14
Some ghosts in the Japanese tradition are not all vengeful. They simply miss the company of the living, and go to great lengths to fool the living into thinking they are not dead. One can see this kind of ghost in Kenji Mizoguchi's masterpiece *Ugetsu*.

15
The ghost as a figure certainly needs the emergence of hyper-culturality from ultra-sociality. Ants are also ultra-social, but not hyper-cultural. There are no ghost ants.

16
A whole scientific field is devoted to mirror neurons of the mind. They enable us to imagine what's in another person's head. And though neuroscience was almost nonexistent in Adam Smith's time, he got the psychology of the theory of mind correct. The dead person is not there. But the living feel for them. This connection, I think, is the ground of much revolutionary politics. We imagine the wrong done to, for example, Black African slaves in America, and we imagine how they would demand from the present that justice be done. This is how their ghosts haunt the present. It is by means of surplus human sociality—our profound fellow feeling.

17
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* , trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard University Press, 1999), 471.

18
Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 471.

19
The Black slaves that saw nothing but a life of misery and pain on plantations (gone), the Indians starved to death by Winston Churchill (gone), the European Jews in the gas chambers (gone).

20
One of the ghost stories in Lafcadio Hearn's *Kwaidan*, "The Story of Aoyagi," is about a young man who encounters "a comely maiden" who turns out to be not only a ghost but the ghost of a tree. Southern African stories also do not limit ghosts to humans. Indeed, I recall that even a mushroom can haunt humans. However, I have yet to read or hear a ghost story that does not involve any humans whatsoever, e.g., a mushroom haunting future mushrooms or a tree haunting future trees.

21
In the end, Dana Franklin kills Rufus.

22
See http://www.dinant.be/en/inheritance/adolphe-sax .

Amelia Groom

There's No Beginning and There Is No End: Mariah Carey and the Refusal of Time

"I refuse to acknowledge time." With these outlandish words, Mariah Carey begins her memoir, *The Meaning of Mariah Carey*, published in 2020. "It is a waste of time to be fixated on time," declares the elusive chanteuse. "Life has made me find my own way to be in this world. Why ruin the journey by watching the clock and the ticking away of years?"[1] Instead of counting the minutes and years, Mariah Mike – Amelia asked to use Mariah and MC throughout rather than Carey. Not using last name seems fine to me but I'd go with consistency – I leave it to your discretion! wants to live life "moment to moment." Indeed, moments are one of her favorite things. See "Mariah Carey Needs a Moment" on YouTube; it's a much-loved ninety-second supercut from her 2010–11 infomercials on the Home Shopping Network, in which she sells fashion, perfume, and jewelry items while enthusing about having a "diamond moment," a "retro moment," a "bandana moment," a "genius moment," a "dual moment," a "fragrant moment," a "skin-tight moment," a "transitional summer moment," a "full-on evening moment," a "fun cute remix moment," and so on.[2]

Mariah's espousal of *moments* has inspired many, including Adam Farah-Saad (aka free.yard), a London-born and -based artist and dedicated Lamb whose work is often infused with MC's language, lyrics, and iconography. ("Lambs" are what Mariah's most devoted fans call themselves; collectively we are the "Lambily.") Working across video, installation, and performance formats, Farah-Saad makes art with various things including poppers, friends, obsolete technologies like iPods and CDs, microdosing, wind chimes, personal memories and heartbreaks, fisheye lenses, cruising, lipsynching, and gourmet condiments. They have said that Mariah inspires them as an artist, "in terms of wanting to be really sincere and poetic in what I do and kind of not being afraid to even go a bit overboard with that."[3] Their solo exhibition at Camden Art Centre in 2021 was framed as a presentation of "peak momentations" from their life. The term "momentation," they explain, refers to "a pronounced dwelling on the ephemeral—influenced by Mariah Carey's queer disidentificatory theorisations of THE MOMENT."[4]

The word "moment" comes from the Latin " *momentum*," meaning "movement, motion, alteration, change." It's a shifty word: "in a moment" means very soon, to be "of the moment" is to be very current, to "live for the moment" is to act without concern for the future or the past. Moments are often temporal intensities that stand apart from the time that surrounds them; when we say "I need a moment" or "I'm having a moment," it's about puncturing the flow of things by carving out a pocket of time outside of regulated time. Moments are very different from minutes; they are decidedly transient, unquantifiable, indivisible, and non-accumulative. They're brief but capacious; you can't section them out or add them up in any normative way. For Mariah, living a life of moments means living "Christmas to Christmas, celebration to celebration, festive moment to

Mariah Carey in drag as her own stalker, surrounded by images of herself, in the music video for "Obsessed," 2009. [ID: A figure in white track pants and a black sweater, turned away from the camera, on a bed in the corner of a room with walls lined with Mariah Carey posters.]

festive moment," while simply ignoring the rest, and always refusing to acknowledge the banality and brutality of standardized, accumulative, linear time. As she writes, "Often time can be bleak, *dahling*, so why choose to live in it?"[5]

A Fun Cute Remix Moment

Mariah's refusal to acknowledge time has become a running joke in her online persona. When she tweeted about releasing an expanded edition of her 1997 *Butterfly* album to commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary, she wrote, "Celebrating 25 ... minutes ... since the release of my favorite and probably most personal album."[6] Years, minutes; what's the difference, really? In 2019, there was the social media trend #tenyearchallenge, which saw participants share two side-by-side photographs of themselves, ten years apart, for comparison. When MC joined, she tweeted the exact same photograph of herself—bikini-clad, smiling for the camera, and holding one of her cute Jack Russells—twice, side-by-side. Identifying the picture as one that had been "taken at some point prior to today," she wrote, "I don't get this 10 year challenge, time is not something I acknowledge [shrug emoji]."[7]

There are, of course, a number of other things that Mariah refuses to acknowledge. Jennifer Lopez, for one. It's been more than twenty years since J-Lo's career was launched with a track featuring a sample that was supposed to be on Mariah's forthcoming single (in an intentional act of sabotage by Mariah's vindictive ex-husband, the record executive Tommy Mottola). When people ask Mariah about J-Lo, she still says, "I don't know her." Similarly, when Eminem claimed publicly that he had hooked up with MC, she responded with her amazing dis track "Obsessed" (2009), in which she sings, "I don't even know who you are." When she was asked about her beef with Nicki Minaj, and whether or not Minaj was referencing Mariah in her lyrics, MC said, "I don't know, I didn't even know that she sang."[8] And while her memoir offers extensive detail on aspects of her personal life, there are several notable omissions, including her ex-fiancé James Packer (whom she reportedly sued for millions as an "inconvenience fee" when their engagement was called off). The refusal of acknowledgement is the ultimate shade, and she does the same thing with time. *Time?* she says, *I don't know her*.

Mariah has never been particularly interested in short-term fashion trends, and, unlike other major pop stars with long careers, she hasn't been through a series of era-defining chameleonic transformations. Watch her legendary MTV Cribs episode from 2002 and notice, when she gives us a tour of her closet (which is a whole wing of her palatial Manhattan penthouse), that the garments could belong to any time in her career, from the nineties up until today. When she shows us her shoe room, she

explains, "The style that I favor would be a high stiletto, and the brand that I favor would be whoever's gonna stick to that motif."[9] MC sticks to her motif. There have been a few looks that are tied to particular historical moments—like the emphatically early-2000s jeans with the cut-off waistband in the "Heartbreaker" (1999) video—but overall, her image has been remarkably consistent: high stilettos; that long, flowing hair all full of air; lots of leg; lots of cleavage; lots of sparkles and glitter.

She recounts in her memoir that a childhood inspiration for her particular brand of high-femme glamour came from her gay uncles—her "guncles," as she calls them—Burt and Myron. "Burt was a schoolteacher and photographer, and Myron was, as he put it, a 'stay-at-home wife,'" she writes. "Myron was a *vision*. He wore a perfectly coiffed beard and his hair was always blown out in cascading layers, which he would finish off with a shimmering frosting spray." Sound like anyone? The guncles had a dog named Sparkle, and Burt would do photo shoots with the young Mariah, who loved to show off with exaggerated poses for the camera. "He fully supported and understood my propensity for extraness," she recalls.[10]

This "propensity for extraness" situates Mariah in a lineage of high camp: a queer aesthetic sensibility that relishes exaggeration and fabulous detachment. Over the years, Mariah has leaned increasingly into her gay icon status. In her appearance as the headline act for LA Pride in the summer of 2023, she went all out: she had her muscle boys dance troupe (always), rainbows (of course), glitter (obviously), a giant, inflatable winged horse (gay Pegasus), a Grindr chat video as part of her visuals on the big screen (with "why you so obsessed with me?" showing up as her response on the gay dating app), and a huge, sparkling crown (she couldn't keep it on her head and at one point she expressed a desire to break it apart and throw the pieces into the crowd, like Lindsay Lohan in *Mean Girls*, but "for all the queens of the land"). I was there (*dying!*), near a group of queens who were all wearing homemade "I don't know her" tanks. I guess there is something very queer in refusing to acknowledge the hold of the blatantly obvious. (All-consuming cis-hetero-patriarchy? Never heard of it.) The world says, "This is what reality looks like, this is what desire looks like, this is what a life looks like," and queers, against all odds, have said, "Actually, there's more."

Writing in the 1960s, before MC was born, Susan Sontag pointed out that "many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, démodé."[11] (Sontag, who was described by Terry Castle as an "intellectual diva," had her own iconic "I don't know her" moment back in 1993, when she claimed to have never heard of Camille Paglia.[12]) It's true that there is often something temporally "off" in camp aesthetics. A reason for this, according to Sontag, is that "the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment."[13] Think of the importance of Old Hollywood glamour in voguing and Black and Latinx ballroom culture, where the imagery and gestures of a bygone age can cross race, gender, and class boundaries, as well as temporal boundaries, to be reclaimed in the present through the timeless spirit of camp extravagance and glamour. Remember that the word "glamour" comes from the Scottish " *gramarye*," relating to illusion, enchantment, sorcery, and spells. In Mariah's case, the *refusal to acknowledge time* becomes the ultimate diva move, one that allows her image to travel across and away from chronological order, so that she is enduringly incandescent but never fully on the zeitgeist pulse—appearing always a little anachronistic.

Just as her image travels across time, refusing to sit within proper historical progression, MC's songs also behave as time-traveling entities that can defy linearity. In 2018, her Lambs started the #justiceforglitter campaign on social media, to try to resuscitate and find "justice" for the album that had, seventeen years earlier, marked the biggest flop moment of her career. They succeeded, and managed to get *Glitter* to reach number one—for the first time—by streaming it incessantly on iTunes. Not long after *Glitter*'s belated arrival at number one, Mariah became the first artist in history to top the Billboard Hot 100 chart across four separate decades, thanks to "All I Want for Christmas Is You," which seems to get more and more popular with every holiday season. In her memoir, she writes about how the 1994 track became the last number-one song of 2019 and the first number-one song of 2020, bringing her into her fourth decade at the top of the charts. (But really, she asks, "What *is* a decade again?")[14]

Speaking of Christmas, MC's signature embrace of the Christian holiday is also connected to her refusal to acknowledge the standardized advancement of time. When she appeared on her friend Naomi Campbell's YouTube channel to celebrate the publication of *The Meaning of Mariah Carey*, Campbell began the conversation, as she usually does, by asking, "Where were you born and where did you grow up?" Mariah responds to the generic question by explaining, through giggles, "In the tradition of the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus, I was never born—and here I am!"[15] Rather than saying anything about her upbringing, she then starts talking about her love of Christmas and "festive moments." While birthdays are cumulative and mark the passage of time, Christmas, for Mariah Carey at least, is *outside of time*: it doesn't acknowledge the passing of years.

How old is Mariah Carey, actually? That's a controversial question. One Lambily podcast has dedicated an entire episode to it.[16] She recalls in her memoir that she cried on her eighteenth birthday because she still didn't have a record deal, and she felt like her life would not begin until she had one. Appropriately, one Reddit user has commented in a forum on the age controversy: "She was born June 12th 1990."[17] That's the date of the release of

Mariah Carey photographed by David Lachapelle on the back side of the album Rainbow, 1999. [ID: A photograph of Mariah Carey with blonde hair, in white briefs and a white tank, holding a red heart-shaped lollipop and standing against a white wall. She's in the middle of a rainbow that has been spraypainted onto the wall and across her briefs.]

Mariah Carey, the debut album that delivered her into global stardom. When she did Carpool Karaoke in 2015, she said, "We'll celebrate my eighteenth birthday with the fact that I've had eighteen number ones."[18] ("All I Want for Christmas" has gone number one since then, so that would make her nineteen now.) She also famously identifies as "eternally twelve" and has celebrated her "anniversary" (never say "birthday") with a cake decorated with twelve candles.[19]

MC's refusal to acknowledge her age is, in part, a refusal to acknowledge the reality of aging. This obviously feeds into the patriarchal pressures of gendered ageism, but that doesn't have to be the whole story. When Frida Kahlo changed her date of birth from 1907 to 1910, she made herself three years younger—but at the same time, she also made her origin coincide with the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, in a deliberate rewiring of time that affirmed her commitment to anti-imperialist and anti-colonial politics. In Mariah's case, the fact that she looks much younger than she is (in a way that is only possible for the uber-wealthy) can be understood as both a product and a perpetuation of a youth-obsessed culture that equates older women with undesirability, monstrosity, irrelevance, and invisibility. Concurrently, though, there are also much more peculiar things going on in this woman's estranged relationship with time. Really, she should have been included in the artist William Kentridge's project *The Refusal of Time* (2012), which looked at how the imposition of normative, dominant time has been refused and resisted in multiple historical contexts.

Another mark of Mariah's temporal estrangement can be found in her apparent hatred of the daytime. In her MTV Cribs episode, she says jokingly (or is she for real?), about the fish in her aquarium, "I had to get them changed to be nocturnal because they were on the opposite schedule as me."[20] She has struggled with sleep for most of her life, and has often lived out of sync with the waking world. Over time, she came to appreciate the night aesthetically (it is, after all, the time of dreams and glamour). In a video she recorded for *Vogue* magazine's "Life in Looks" series, she responds to photos of herself from different moments

Adam Farah-Saad, EMOTIONS (1991), 2022, DVD tower rack, C-Type print, DVD case. [ID: A photograph of a DVD tower with red panels at the top and bottom, standing on a grey concrete floor, with the word EMOTIONS spelt out in caps across the spines of the DVD cases.]

of her long career, hating on the ones in which she appears in daylight. "It's daytime, I should be sleeping, I don't have time for this daytime shit," she says. "Everything should be an evening event."[21]

The thing about the evening event is that the lighting can be controlled. Daylight is light from an external source, one whose schedule and intensity is beyond anyone's control. Mariah wants "victory over the sun" (to borrow from the outlandish title of a 1913 Russian futurist opera); she wants to control her own lighting and thereby create her own system of time. None of this externally dictated, default reality! MC proposes a life of reparative denialism; rather than being touched by the tedium of reality, she floats above it—like a butterfly, that airborne creature of metamorphosis, transience, and flight that has accompanied her image for decades.

I'm Ventilation

Mariah, in my mind, is related in strange ways to the air and the wind. She was named after the song "They Call the Wind Maria," from the 1951 Broadway musical *Paint Your Wagon.* (Another jewel in her gay icon crown: being named after a show tune.) In the song, the wind is personified as an entity called Maria (pronounced as Mariah) who "blows the stars around and sends the clouds a-flying." Maria Creek in Antarctica was also named after the song, because of the area's strong winds. Mariah's jazz number "The Wind" (1991) is about lost dreams and loved ones who "only fade into the wind," where the wind is a painful reminder of irredeemable loss. But the wind is also connected to the ideal of nonattachment in MC's cultivated persona, with her "I don't know her" attitude of high-camp breeziness.

Literal breeziness has also been a defining feature of Mariah's aesthetic; she even had a wind machine installed at home when she did a virtual appearance on *The Daily Show* during the 2020 Covid lockdowns, so that her hair would gently flutter throughout the interview. She writes in her memoir about her enduring obsession with wind-blown hair, "as evidenced by the wind machines employed in almost every photo shoot of me ever." She recalls being enchanted, as a kid, by shampoo commercials on TV with "the magnificent, sunshine-filled, slow-motion-blowing-in-the-wind-while-running-barefoot-through-fields-of-flowers hair." She once believed that the shampoo on the television could give her "the heavenly hair, blown by gusts of angels' wings." But while completing five hundred hours of beauty school training (which she did after graduating from high school), she came to understand that shampoo would never be enough. "It requires a lot of effort to achieve effortless hair," she writes. "It takes professionals, products, and production, *dahling*—conditioners galore, diffusers, precision cuts, special combs, clip-ins, cameras, and, of course, wind machines."[22]

The German art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg would have been interested in MC's wind machines. In his 1891 dissertation, he wrote about Sando Botticelli's paintings *Primavera* (c. 1477–82) and *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–86), paying particular attention to the "imaginary breeze" that makes the wind-swept hair and billowing fabrics "flutter freely without apparent cause."[23] The philosopher and art historian George Didi-Huberman has described how Warburg shifted his focus "from the still beauty of Venus to the turbulent edges of her body—to hair, draperies, and breaths of air," while developing his theory of the *Nachleben* or "afterlives" of images.[24] Against the prevailing art-historical methodologies of his time, Warburg's idea of *Nachleben* allowed him to look at images as manifestations of energies that move, irrationally, *across time*, defying sequential arrangements of causality.

Left: Sandro Botticelli, The Birth of Venus (detail), c. 1484–1486. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. License: Public Domain; Right: Mariah Carey, Butterfly album cover, international version, detail, 1997. [ID: The image on the left is a detail from a fifteenth-century painting showing a female figure with the sky behind her. The image on the right is a photograph of Mariah Carey, with an orange and black butterfly to the right of her head, against a beige background. In both images, the figures are shown with bare shoulders and a lot of hair billowing in the wind.]

As Didi-Huberman puts it, the wind "causes all that it touches to quiver or stir, to be moved or convulsed," and "the passage of air also sends a quiver through *time*."[25] This is why Warburg was so attentive to the zones of instability and flight in Botticelli's paintings; he wanted to see images released from the strict linearity of post-Enlightenment historicism. Wreaking havoc on proper periodization, he looked at Boticelli's Venus as an illogically exuberant eruption of pagan antiquity into quattrocento Christianity, and beyond. According to Didi-Huberman, the figure in the wind "escapes gravity and the earthly condition; she becomes a semblance of the ancient gods, an airy creature of dreams and after-life, a revenant: an embodiment of *Nachleben*."[26] With these

Left: Sandro Botticelli, The Birth of Venus (detail), c. 1484–1486. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. License: Public Domain; Right: Mariah Carey, Butterfly album cover, international version, detail, 1997. [ID: The image on the left is a detail from a fifteenth-century painting showing a female figure with the sky behind her. The image on the right is a photograph of Mariah Carey, with an orange and black butterfly to the right of her head, against a beige background. In both images, the figures are shown with bare shoulders and a lot of hair billowing in the wind.]

words, he could also be describing Mariah Carey, that decidedly detached "airy creature" who "escapes gravity and the earthly condition" while moving across historical eras and refusing to acknowledge time.

Intoxicated; Flying High

The breeziness surrounding MC's image might also be understood as an incarnation of the most remarkable, otherworldly thing about her: that voice. When she appears amongst all that floating hair and rippling fabric, it's like she's also the source of the wind that she's in (as she sings in "Obsessed," while taunting Eminem, whom she also dresses up as in the video: "I'm ventilation"). Like her hair, her voice is soaring, multidirectional, and full of air. And just as her songs can reach across time (achieving a Warburgian *Nachleben* effect by becoming number ones outside of their historical contexts, decades after they were released), her voice is known for its impossible longevity, agility, and range. She jumps from silky whispers to deep belts and smokey growls to the highest notes of the whistle register, moving easily between the different parts of her massive five-octave vocal range—sometimes within what is ostensibly a single syllable.

I think I learned the word "incessantly" from Mariah's "Heartbreaker" when I was fourteen, in 1999. Her lyrics are littered with words that you don't usually hear in pop songs—words like "enmity," "acquiescent," "omnipresent," "trepidation," "incandescent," "nonchalant," "enraptured," "emblazoned," "denominator," and many others. Mariah loves words, but she also loves to mess with them. When she sings, words begin to operate in excess of themselves. We hear the materiality of the sounds beyond their representational function. Language here is not simply a means to a communicative or productive end; it is also an embodied experience of sonic intensities—indivisible *moments*—where words forget their separateness and exceed their signifying attachments. This is what one writer has referred to as Mariah's "evasive relationship to indexicality."[27] She turns words into dreamy, indulgent, asignifying hums. She stretches her syllables out into luscious, languishing occasions—pulsating the language away from its semantic designations.

The technical term for this kind of singing is "melisma." While syllabic singing is tied to the regular tempo of the syllable, where each syllable gets one note, the melismatic voice says, *I refuse to acknowledge the time that is set by the syllables*—and instead moves successively through multiple notes within a single syllable. MC's melismatic singing style developed through her influences from Black gospel traditions as well as her opera lineage. (Her mother is a retired opera singer.) Her breakout single "Vision of Love" (1990) is often credited with bringing elaborate melisma into mainstream pop music. There are some earlier instances of melismatic singing in pop, but it really went big in the nineties with Mariah and Whitney Houston, and it has been a defining feature of Mariah's sound over the decades since.

As words are pulled away from their syllabic structures, melisma marks a *propensity for extraness* that opens up distended comprehension. There may be a loss of indexical meaning, but as we hear the words differently, they might also start to accrue other possible meanings. In an essay about dependency, food, and Theodor Adorno's warnings against "culinary listening," the artist and theorist of disability aesthetics Amalle Dublon writes about Mariah's "Honey" (1997) (a song in which MC declares, seductively, "Oh baby I've got a dependency") and the ways in which her vocals might help us to understand *need* through its entanglements with pleasure, invention, and enjoyment. Dublon:

> At the end of "Honey," the word *honey*, ornamented by Carey's vocal runs, devolves, via agonizingly horny turns, into the phrase *I need*. At least, that's what it sounds like. We've all made up pop lyrics from blurry phonemes where "culinary" singing distorts and distends meaning, necessitating equally hungry listening. Just as with eating, here, enjoyment and need become inseparably entangled.[28]

While exceeding the semantic, melismatic singing also turns time into a highly elastic material. Just listen to "Fantasy (Sweet Dub Mix)," a sublime "Fantasy" remix featuring re-recorded vocals, which Mariah made with David Morales in 1995. Over eight minutes and fourteen

seconds, her voice floats above and away from regimented, earthly time. Halfway through the track, things suddenly sllllloowww rrrriiiightt ddoooown with an extended instrumental that plunges us into disorienting temporal dilation, until the vocals kick back in and time begins to speed towards a climactic release. Mariah sings like a drunken angel, and language becomes para-linguistic: words fly off into ethereal whistles and moans, lyrics become orgasmic murmurations that defy transcription, and syllables are stretched out into amorphous abstractions, unhinged from regulated time.

Losing my mind listening to this track through headphones while riding my bike around Berlin's Tempelhofer Feld, I was reminded of a moment in Mariah's MTV Cribs episode when she's showing us around her apartment and she suddenly wants to lie down on the chaise lounge that she has permanently installed in the middle of her kitchen, just because. "I have a rule against sitting up straight," she says, luxuriously. "I prefer to lounge."[29] Sometimes in live concerts, she will have her muscle boy dancers carry her around on a chaise lounge (she's an iconically bad dancer)—and she applies the same principle to her voice: she stretches it out, reclines, elongates-----, takes and makes her own time, disregarding the reality that has been dictated by the surrounding conditions. There is a lesson here: lie down in the park, in the middle of the apartment tour, in the middle of the kitchen, in the middle of the performance, elongate the syllable in the middle of a word, stretch out the middle of the song, practice slowness and horizontality, extend the Moment, luxuriate in "queer extensities," refuse the endless forward march, "cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright," as Virginia Woolf put it.[30]

The artist, musician, and proud stutterer JJJJJerome Ellis has theorized melisma as "sonic investigation into what lies beyond, within, beside the syllable."[31] Studying the relationships between dysfluent speech, Blackness, and the nonnormative temporalities of melismatic song (especially in gospel music), Ellis writes about the way that melisma can split the syllable open and make a clearing, a space for Black gathering, by stealing time away from the dominant orders of extractive white universalism—and by interrupting the brutally ableist temporalities of hyperproductivity, efficiency, and rationalization. In his 2021 artist book *The Clearing* and his 2021 album of the same name, Ellis meditates on Aretha Franklin's elaborately melismatic rendering of "Amazing Grace" as recorded at the New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles in 1972.[32] "She takes a hymn she knows most people in the church will know and makes clearings all through it," writes Ellis. "She dehisces the hymn, makes it porous, that all may gather therein. She reminds us that a syllable is an opportunity for tarrying, for dilation, for divergence, for abundance."[33]

One Is Not Born, But Rather Becomes, a Butterfly

In a chapter of her memoir that is lovingly titled "Divas," Mariah writes about Aretha Franklin as "my idol," "the one who I thought was *the* one," and "my high bar and North Star." She recalls proudly that she was the only singer Franklin did a duet with on *Divas Live* in 1998, and that Franklin later sang some of Mariah's songs, including "Touch My Body" when she was on tour ("she ad-libbed all the frisky bits"). One of the ways that Franklin inspired her, Mariah writes, was that she "wouldn't let one genre confine or define her."[34] The Queen of Soul moved across and between gospel, jazz, R&B, and pop, at a time when this was no easy feat—and Mariah also had to fight hard against music industry dictates in order not to be confined by the "pop ballad" and "adult contemporary" genres that her record label wanted her to stick to in the early years of her career.

While she won't acknowledge her age or count her birthdays ("I was never born—and here I am"), MC will acknowledge her sun sign: she's an Aries—just like Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, Chaka Khan, and Billie Holiday, as she notes in her memoir. And it was in true Aries style that she first burst into fame—like a charging ram, with no patience or boundaries—with her debut album *Mariah Carey* in 1990. Featuring the songs that she had written for the demo album she made when she was eighteen, *Mariah Carey* went platinum nine times in the US and sold fifteen million copies worldwide. Her first five singles became number ones—no other artist has ever achieved this—and she had number ones in every single year of the nineties.

During this first decade, Mariah was married to Tommy Mottola, who was the head of her record label, Sony. She was eighteen when they met; he was forty-nine. In *The Meaning of Mariah Carey*, she describes her relationship with him in meteorological terms: he was "like a fog," "dense and oppressive," "an entire atmosphere," and "like humidity—inescapable."[35] He kept her under surveillance in her own home and prevented her from leaving without his permission. She recalls hiding in her shoe collection with her friend and collaborator Da Brat (a nineteen-year-old rapper and fellow Aries) to get away from the motion-sensitive security cameras that Mottola had installed throughout the rest of the property, monitoring her every move.

MC had spoken publicly in the past about how obsessively controlling Mottola was as a husband and manager. In the memoir, she addresses the extent to which his abusiveness was bound up with anti-Black racism. "The Black part of myself caused him confusion," she writes. "From the moment Tommy signed me, he tried to wash the 'urban' (translation: Black) off of me … Just as he did with my appearance, Tommy smoothed out the songs for Sony, trying to make them more general, more 'universal,' more ambiguous. I always felt like he wanted to convert me into what he understood—a 'mainstream' (meaning

Mariah Carey meme. [ID: On the left side of the image there is an enormous storm with a dog's face. On the right side, there is an aerial view of a suburban sprawl, with text in white that identifies it as "Society in 1990." Within the storm that is fast approaching this unsuspecting society is the cover of Mariah Carey's self-titled debut album from 1990.]

white) artist."[36]

One realm in which Mariah was able to claim a more autonomous space to experiment musically—and reinvent herself on her own terms—was in the remixes. Rather than simply recycling from the original track, her remixes were often complete rerecordings. She writes about doing dance remixes—"for the club kids (who have always given me life)"—with DJ/producer David Morales, who came out of New York's queer Black and Latinx club scenes in the 1980s. When she worked with Morales on a mix, they would usually record new vocals, with MC singing the "same" song in a new key, with a redefined tempo, a different melody, and altered lyrics. "We often worked late at night, when I could steal a moment for myself," she recalls. "David would come to the studio, and I'd tell him he could do whatever he wanted with the song. I'd have a couple splashes of wine, and we would just go wherever the spirit took us—which were almost always high-energy dance tracks with big, brand-new vocals."[37]

In the mid-nineties, MC also approached Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs, head of Bad Boy Records, to be the producing partner on a "Fantasy" remix that she was fantasizing about. She told Puffy that her dream was to have Ol' Dirty Bastard from the Wu-Tang Clan rap on it. She recalls that her own record label executives—whom she refers to as "the suits at the 'corporate morgue'"—tried to stop her. "They didn't understand how diverse my fans were, nor did they understand the global impact of the Wu-Tang Clan," she writes. But she and Puffy managed to pull it off. Predictably, Mariah's racist husband (who, she recalls, had commented that "Puffy will be shining my shoes in two years") hated O.D.B.'s rap when he heard it: "'The fuck is that?' he blurted. 'I can do that. Get the fuck outta here with that.'" But Mariah

understood immediately that O.D.B.'s verses were magic ("all his crazy ad-libs sent me into euphoric giggles")—and the "Fantasy" remix went down in history as the song that ushered in a whole new era of cross-genre collaborations between mainstream pop and hip-hop artists.[38]

When Mariah released her first greatest-hits album, *#1's*, in 1998, she chose to include the Bad Boy Records "Fantasy" remix featuring O.D.B. instead of the original single. That's the thing about "Fantasy"; the remix is more iconic than the original. But of course, if you *refuse to acknowledge time*, the hierarchical distinction between the "primary" original and the "secondary" derivative doesn't have to hold up. "In order to make the label happy," Mariah writes of this time in her life, "I had to deliver several versions of a single, including one that was up-tempo and simple, scrubbed of all ad-libs and 'urban inflections.'"[39] This scrubbed-up "version" would be the one that was called the "original," but it might make more sense to say that the remixes constitute the primary form—because that's where MC could be herself and make the music she wanted to be making—while the originals were simply the "versions" that she had to get out of the way in order to appease her label/husband.

White-supremacist culture can try, perversely, to insist that there is a true, essential, clean, untainted, neutral, nonracialized, and universal original that comes first, while the remix is a secondary and derivative deviation with optional, added elaboration for a subcategory of listeners. But Mariah comes to hip-hop as an art form of nonlinear gathering and relational contamination that renders the value of the pure, fixed, and singular original defunct. The history of whiteness in the US is a history of violently repudiating the mix, with the "one-drop rule" and anti-miscegenation laws being based on the fear of contamination (Mariah recounts in her memoir that her white, southern mother was completely cut off from her family after she married Mariah's Black father). The history of hip-hop, meanwhile, is a *history of the mix* and all that can happen in the combining, scratching, and clashing of different sounds. Sampling and remixing practices mean that songs become expansive ecologies of references and relations, and sounds are always polyphonic and multi-temporal. Even the biggest solo stars will always be accompanied by other voices; in the words of poet, dancer, and jazz archivist Harmony Holiday, hip-hop is a "friendship-based art form."[40]

Take, for instance, "Genius of Love." Mariah's "Fantasy" sampled both melody and lyrics (including the line "There's no beginning and there is no end") from this 1981 dance hit by the Tom Tom Club, a new wave band formed by two members of Talking Heads. But the "original" track was already crowded with a plurality of genres, influences, and collaborations. It was produced by Jamaican audio engineer Steven Stanley at Compass Point Studios in The Bahamas; Uziah "Sticky" Thompson—who was working with Grace Jones in the studio next door—added percussion; Monte Brown—a guitarist with Bahamian funk band T-Connection—added a rhythm part; and reggae and dub producers Sly and Robbie came in with handclaps on the backbeats. The lyrics feature tributes to numerous soul, funk, and reggae artists including Sly and Robbie, Smokey Robinson, Bob Marley, and James Brown—and the line about "a hippie-the-hip and a hippie-the-hop" echoes the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (1979), one of the first rap singles to be played on the radio, with lyrics that brought the new term "hip-hop" to a wider audience.

A product of hybridized gathering at the outset, "Genius of Love" then proliferated through music history as one of the most popular samples in hip-hop throughout the 1980s and beyond. Dr. Jeckyll & Mr. Hyde's "Genius Rap" came out in 1981; Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's "It's Nasty (Genius of Love)" came out the following year, and the track was subsequently borrowed from or interpolated by Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Busta Rhymes and Erykah Badu, Warren G, 50 Cent, Snoop Dogg, and countless others, including, of course, Mariah Carey and Ol' Dirty Bastard. There is a tradition, throughout, to play with the song's opening lines: "Whatcha gonna do when you get out of jail? I'm gonna have some fun!" When 2Pac does it, he sings, "Whatcha gonna do when you get out of jail? I'm gonna buy me a gun." When Biz Markie sings it, the answer becomes: "I'm gonna have some sex!" In Mariah's iconic version, things get meta: "Whatcha gonna do when you get out of jail? *I'm gonna do a remix.*"

It's fitting, for an artist who declares a refusal to acknowledge time, that the remix has been such an important part of Mariah's approach to making music. To remix is to mess with linearity; to break it up and rearrange its parts; to layer, bend, and splinter off, reshuffling and redirecting the order of things. This is one of the ideas folded into the artist John Akomfrah's Afrofuturist film essay *The Last Angel of History* (which came out in 1995, the same year as Mariah's "Fantasy"). The film's "data thief" is a time-travelling scavenger who steals remnants from the histories and ruins of Black culture to forge new relations across time. Music critic Greg Tate speaks in the film about sampling as "a way of collapsing all eras of Black music" and "being able to freely reference and cross-reference, you know, all those areas of sound and all those previous generations of creators, kind of simultaneously." Drum and bass musician Goldie (whose debut studio album *Timeless* also came out in 1995) suggests something similar in *The Last Angel of History* when he remarks that "because of technology, being able to take from any of those eras, *time is irrelevant.*"

The Ensemble

> You know, with the right bug repellent, hair and make-up, and ensemble, I could be outdoorsy … In a photo.

—Mariah Carey

In 1997, MC released her sixth studio album, *Butterfly*. It was her most overtly hip-hop project to date (featuring collaborations with Puff Daddy, Q-Tip, Missy Elliott, Trackmasters, members of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Da Brat, and others), and the first album that she released following her long-overdue split from Mottola. She writes in her memoir that the lyrics from the titular track—"spread your wings and prepare to fly, for you have become a butterfly"—were based on what she fantasized Mottola would say to her as she freed herself from him.[41]

In the years since, Mariah has played recurringly with the idea of becoming/revealing her "true" self. She declared the theme of self-emancipation once again with her album *The Emancipation of Mimi* (2005), using one of her personal nicknames in the title. With *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel* (2009), she framed the album as a confessional memoir; for the title of her 2014 album *Me. I Am Mariah … The Elusive Chanteuse*, she combined the caption she had written on a childhood self-portrait (which was reproduced on the back cover of the album) with a new nickname that she had come to embrace, once again declaring *this is me*. When she named her memoir *The Meaning of Mariah Carey*, she continued to play with the promise of staging a grand reveal of her "real" self.

All these layers of unveiling—and yet, Mariah's appeal has never been about authenticity or relatability. I mean, let's be honest; she's the antithesis of down-to-earth. The cosmology of Mariah Carey is one of sweet, sweet fantasy: this is a world of rainbows and puppies; glitter and euphoric giggles; butterflies and candy bling; daydreaming and swimming in stilettos; honey and bubble baths; wearing a silk negligee while running free with a stampede of horses, hair blowing in the wind forever. There are *emotions* (as the title of, and first single from, her second album made explicit), but they are usually de-particularized and untethered from the real. "I don't know if it's real," she sings in "Emotions." "But I like the way I feel inside … You've got me feeling emotions." With her voice soaring "higher than the heavens above," this is not about feeling something in particular, it's about feeling *as such*.

Ultimately, there will be no final emancipation, no final emergence from the chrysalis, no final decoding of "the meaning of Mariah Carey," because Mariah Carey remains always at a remove in her OTT, un-pin-down-able many-ness. This quality of lofty multiplicity that won't be contained or stabilized is something that can be felt in her melismatic vocals. Within a single vowel, she can change the note as many times as she changes her outfit—or, to use the word she prefers, *ensemble*—on her MTV cribs episode. In "My All," for instance, she sings "I-I-I-I-I give my all"—forming five syllables (or more, depending on the rendition) out of a single syllable, one letter, the "I," the first person singular, which is now made into an ensemble—a plurality that spills out from itself. It also spills (just like honey) out from the containers of globally imposed linearity, with its extractive logic that divides time up into dry, rationalized units. Her voice seems to know that to refuse to acknowledge time is impossible, ludicrous, and absolutely essential for all of us—because in the refusal, there is an affirmation of the otherwise.

In an essay about his decades-long love for the elusive chanteuse, writer Kristian Vistrup Madsen looks at how Mariah performs *persona* rather than *personhood*—and how her virtuosic skill can function as a means for deflecting from the particularities of individual identity. "Rather than a testimony to Mariah's emotions, or an appeal to ours, the heart-ached lyrics to 'If It's Over' (1992), 'Without You' (1993), or 'My All' (1997) are dramatic because they must be in order to meet her voice," writes Madsen. "Her ballads are never actually sad. They are impressive, not expressive, and as a result there's not much for us to identify with."[42] This is actually something that Mariah's harshest critics complained about in the early years of her career. In a two-star review of *Emotions* for *Rolling Stone* in 1991, for instance, one music journalist bemoaned, "Her range is so superhuman that each excessive note erodes the believability of the lyric she is singing."[43] To this I would say: if you're looking for believability, Mariah Carey is probably going to disappoint. But if you're partial to an unbelievable "propensity for extraness," and you're on board with the capacity to exceed the plausible, she might have something for you.

Mariah Carey becoming an ensemble in the music video for "Loverboy," 2001. [ID: Mariah Carey in a bikini top, with blonde, wind-blown hair, surrounded by four blurry duplications of her own image.]

X

This text began as a short talk for the “Public Sewer (Keep your mind in the gutter™)” event series at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, for which speakers are asked to address a submerged niche interest in the gutters of their creative practice. The author wishes to thank the organizers Aidan Wall and Artun Alaska Arasli for the invitation, as well as the audience members who offered helpful questions and responses. Thanks also go to Amalle Dublon, M. Ty, Elvia Wilk, and Vivian Ziherl who helped in developing the text in various ways—and to the participants at the Warman School Summer Residency who shared valuable insights and feedback.

Amelia Groom is a writer and art historian who is currently working on a book that looks at the art and anti-fascist activism of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore through the lenses of environmental art practice and queer and trans ecologies. Groom’s book about Beverly Buchanan’s swampy, ruinous environmental sculpture *Marsh Ruins* was published by Afterall in 2021.

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Samer Frangie

On Food as an Analytic of the System

Scenes from the Famine

1. The Discourse: Food as Identity

Facts about the famine:

–Four out of ten children residing in Lebanon face a lack of food security, according to Save the Children.[1]

–Human Rights Watch: "In more than one out of four households an adult had to skip a meal because there was not enough money or other resources to get food."[2]

–46 percent of Lebanon's population is hungry, according to the United Nations World Food Program.[3]

–According to the title of a recent article in *The Economist*, "In Lebanon, Parents Are Abandoning Their Children in Orphanages."[4]

The specter of hunger returns to loom over Lebanon. This famine ushers in the modern nation-state's expiry, the selfsame state that came into being after "people ate each other," as some history books describe the famine of a hundred years ago.

We do not need to return to the famine at the beginning of the twentieth century to get a sense of the magnitude of our current social tragedies, just as we do not need images of our past civil war to discern the features of our current collapse. Returning to the past, especially through canned images, can be an obstacle to understanding the present, especially when this present is on the threshold of a massive transformation. Such a transformation begins with malnutrition and its disastrous effects (indicated by the statistics above) but extends beyond that to affect the process of producing and reproducing life in Lebanon.

2. Our "National Kitchen"

> "Wherever we go in the world, we hear praise for Lebanese cooking, Lebanese food, Lebanese cuisine. It always comes up, as food that is appreciated by people." This is how the host of the TV program *Lebanon with a Story* begins his conversation with a historian.[5]
>
> The historian answers: "Lebanese food and oriental food … we say that it has soul. It is one of the only cuisines in the world that revives the soul, because we give it soul."

Lebanon with a Story, a program on the TV station LBCI, paradoxically seeks to retell the ideological narrative of the birth of this nation at the moment of its historical fragmentation. Several other attempts in the media and the arts tell the tale of the Lebanese nation's

Lebanese hummus

transformations in the twentieth century.[6] What began as a celebration of Lebanon's "story" quickly became, against the backdrop of the current collapse, an exercise in nostalgia—a yearning for a "golden era," or an implicit lament for Lebanon's lost master narrative. The above celebration of Lebanese cuisine, for example, was broadcast weeks after the publication of studies by international organizations on food insecurity, the increase in malnutrition, and the proliferation of hunger in the country. The celebration can also be read as a eulogy for a cuisine that no longer exists except on television, or in the diaspora, the last stronghold of this mythical story.

Maybe it was supposed to be a eulogy all along? What matters for this essay is the central role that Lebanese cuisine plays in the master narrative of the country. From the propaganda that addresses expatriates to the Ministry of Tourism's campaigns and the so-called "biggest" competitions—i.e., the biggest plate of hummus or the biggest shawarma sandwich—food appears as a central component, if not the last bastion, of a worn-out national ideology. "Lebanese cuisine is like Lebanese citizens, vibrant and trendy, and the freshness of its ingredients and diversity of its colors and aromas seem like a celebration of life, renewed daily." This is how a journalist encourages "food tourism" in Lebanon, in an article published in August 2019, a few months before the official start of the collapse.[7] In building an image of this country that fits the role that the main nationalist ideologues envision for it—from mid-1950s Christian intellectuals to their postwar revival with Hariri's neoliberal ideology—"Lebanese cuisine," or the historical narrative about food and its meanings, came to embody the "Lebanese personality," in its openness and renowned sense of hospitality and attachment to the family. It is also deployed to maintain emotional links with the diaspora as a constitutive component of Lebanese identity, and offers a lighthearted plane on which regional and sectarian competition can be safely performed.

The Question of Discourse

This image of Lebanon requires no critique. This story has become so rotten as to not even weather demystification. The mere co-occurrence of the ideology of excess, meze, and hospitality with the hunger suffered by 46 percent of

the country's population is sufficient to empty that ideology of any political content.

The climactic moment of this opulent narrative came in the middle of the last century. The postwar reign of prime minister and billionaire Rafic al-Hariri attempted to build on the narrative with its ideology of reconstruction. After his assassination, it was revived again in the so-called March 14 moment, when massive demonstrations broke out in Beirut. Nothing remains of this Lebanese story today except some television programs. Then the "revolution" tried, without knowing it, to salvage the remains of that story by feeding it some civil reforms and economic analyses. Today, we are no longer bound to this narrative through a relationship of power but rather through a relationship of nostalgia for a time when power had a narrative that could be dismantled.

Especially after the failure of this last attempt to fix things through reform, we need to reformulate a narrative about this country and its history that takes our troubled present as its point of departure. The "failure" of the revolution, in this sense, is the requisite entry point for a necessary rewriting of history.

INTERRUPTION

The Crisis in the Concept of Crisis

Much has been said about "the crisis" in Lebanon these days. The energy crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, the health care crisis. Add to this the presidential crisis, an institutional crisis, and a regime crisis. The surge in discourse about "the crisis" has become an obstacle to understanding our volatile reality, not to mention unpacking what we mean by the very concept of crisis.

The Dominant Semantics of Crisis

There are two definitions that dominate the deployment of the concept of crisis in the Lebanese media. The first is related to the political field, where the crisis is understood as a freezing, a vacuousness, or a paralysis. In this understanding, the crisis connotes a lack of movement on the level of politics, or more specifically, on the level of effective agency. Crisis here manifests in the inability of responsible powers to manage the conditions of the country, as a consequence of their institutional and political paralysis. Until the powers recover their effectiveness, society will remain bereft of any guidance or leadership, abandoned to face its tragedies alone. As for the second understanding, which is linked to social and economic themes, it is quantitative, and can be summarized with the following words: "decrease," "unavailability," "collapse." Thus the crisis is a generalization of "scarcity": power outages; shortages of gas, water, flour, etc.; a decline in purchasing power, social services, and growth indicators; a fall in currency rates, salaries, etc.

The relation between these definitions is causal. For "the paralysis" of power paved the way for society's free fall; political paralysis leads to economic decline. The ideological aims of this theory become apparent in the reassertion of the hegemony of existing powers over society, through yoking any overcoming of the crisis—or even an analysis of it—to the return of institutions to their effectiveness, the same institutions and powers that are responsible in the first place for this crisis. "Where is the government?" is perhaps the slogan that most instantiates this crisis today.

Liberating the Crisis from the Dominant View

Perhaps we ought to replace the concepts of "paralysis" and "decline" with concepts that do more to actually illuminate the crisis. Perhaps we ought to approach the crisis from a different angle.

This crisis is not only a crisis of rule but is itself a *tool of rule and management.* The authorities exploit the crisis to discipline society and to pass unpopular policies without facing resistance. The current decision to maintain the crisis is not some mistake committed by political powers. Nor is it a consequence of a presidential vacancy or institutional paralysis. It is a conscious decision made by the authorities to restructure society without facing resistance, so as to reproduce their hegemony under new conditions.

The crisis is not only about scarcity or decreases, especially for the impoverished class. It is also about a revaluation of sectors and assets, which is what capitalist economic policies periodically require to kick-start the process of accumulation, no matter how much pain it causes. At such moments, the value of assets drops alongside the cost of labor, which in turn rekindles profits and accumulation. Here too our crisis is not a mistake but an economic necessity after the Lebanese economy came to a dead end.

When we begin to think of the crisis as a method of rule and an economic necessity for our model of capitalism, we begin to move away from the dominant view. The crisis no longer seems to be a natural disaster that befell us all, both ordinary people and authorities, but an economic and social process where the intention is to reassert the hegemony of the authorities over society's resources while managing it with the least possible cost. The crisis is an opportunity for power. Were we not asked by the responsible powers to transform the 2020 port explosion into an opportunity?

Demonstrations in Lebanon triggered by the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister Rafic al-Hariri on February 14, 2005. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

Practice: The Family Fridge

The History of "Our National Cuisine"

No matter how sharp the contradictions of ideology are, they cannot be resolved on the plane of discourse. The "Lebanese narrative," no matter how outdated it is, is above all a set of social practices and structures. And "Lebanese cuisine" is the best example of this. It is a discourse that loads food with meaning, so it can become a conduit for more than its original utility as nourishment through practices, rituals, and social structures that have grown around food consumption. Food may be the primary link between our emotional structure and our history. We learn, from childhood, how to associate certain tastes with feelings of intimacy and comfort, how to build relationships and social bonds around certain ways of eating, how to organize our days around our eating habits, how to bind religious and social occasions to certain eating rituals, how to produce our identity in the kitchen.

In his book *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, the anthropologist Sidney Mintz argues that transformations in dietary systems historically entailed "profound alterations in people's images of themselves, their notions of the contrasting virtues of tradition and change, the fabric of their daily social life."[8] In this sense, what we are facing today is not simply a decrease in resources, the replacement of certain products, or the disappearance of certain foods. We are facing the beginning of a new social transformation that touches the simplest concepts and foundations of our social lives and our perceptions of ourselves.

There is no authentic cuisine, neither in Lebanon nor elsewhere. Food traditions are nothing but the result of long histories of economic and social transformations, some of which were compulsory. We cannot, for example, understand colonialism without learning about the history of manufacturing and trade in commodities such as sugar, spices, and coffee, or other such staple commodities. This is not only true in colonizing societies but also in colonized societies that received these ingredients and incorporated them into their own "national cuisines." Likewise, we cannot understand transformations to cuisine without understanding the mobility of people, through migration and asylum, which brought with it flavors that are now considered "national" ingredients in the kitchens of host societies. National cuisines also change daily according to the policies of food production companies and state policies that regulate trade, or due to marketing strategies.[9]

Our cuisine, the supposed repository of our Lebanese identity, is the product of invasions and empires, the movements of peoples (mostly forced), as well as colonialism and its imposition of goods and resources. Our kitchen is witness to all this. But it is also the result of social and economic transformations that changed the rituals around food in response to transformations in the economic structure. Our relationship to our natural "heritage" transformed as a result of our local practices of capitalism and its opposition to agriculture in favor of other sectors. Our kitchen is also the result of technological transformations, from the introduction of the refrigerator, which became a central part of the kitchen, to the evolution in cooking and preservation techniques that changed our concept of cooking and the rituals that can be built around it.[10]

Without a Refrigerator, There Is No Family

To focus on the history of our cuisine and its material foundations is to explore what the current crisis in our society is transforming without having to revert to prevalent theories of scarcity and decline.

Let's pause for a moment with the fridge and what social transformations were enabled by the democratization of the ability to preserve and store food. The entry of the fridge into every home allowed for the separation of the relationship between production and consumption. This made it possible to store raw ingredients and animal products, which had no place in the home prior to refrigeration technology. The refrigerator became the technological condition for the development of an entire economic sector, that is, the food-consumption sector, built around the institution of the supermarket, the church of consumer capitalism.

Alongside other technological transformations, the fridge contributed to severing the relationship between eating and its natural rhythm. It became possible to consume all kinds of food year around, erasing the notion of "seasonal food." Eventually, this concept would reappear by way of new-age restaurants and their "gentle" exploitation of food producers.

On the other hand, the refrigerator opened up the possibility of controlling the timeline of food production and consumption in homes, which contributed, along with other technical and social transformations, to liberating food products from the prison of the kitchen, releasing them into the prison house of the market. Subsequently, new "family" habits departed from the socially extended and interconnected family of the past. "Modern" families, consisting of parents and their children, reside in city apartments and orbit around the refrigerator and the TV.

So what does it mean when the refrigerator begins to disappear from our society due to the contemporary impossibility of securing electricity? In Hayy al-Tamlis, a neighborhood in Beirut, a resident tells me of families who no longer eat together because the refrigerator has disappeared from the house. We should perhaps pause to consider this remark about the entanglement between matter—the fridge—and the family, this sacred structure in our society. The family may be one of the most intimate structures in our society, but it has been changing for decades, adapting to historical shifts, and most recently, to the collapse. Some may still find it difficult to imagine that families transform, for family is the site of constancy. But let us recall the title of the *Economist* article mentioned earlier: "In Lebanon, Parents Are Abandoning Their Children in Orphanages."

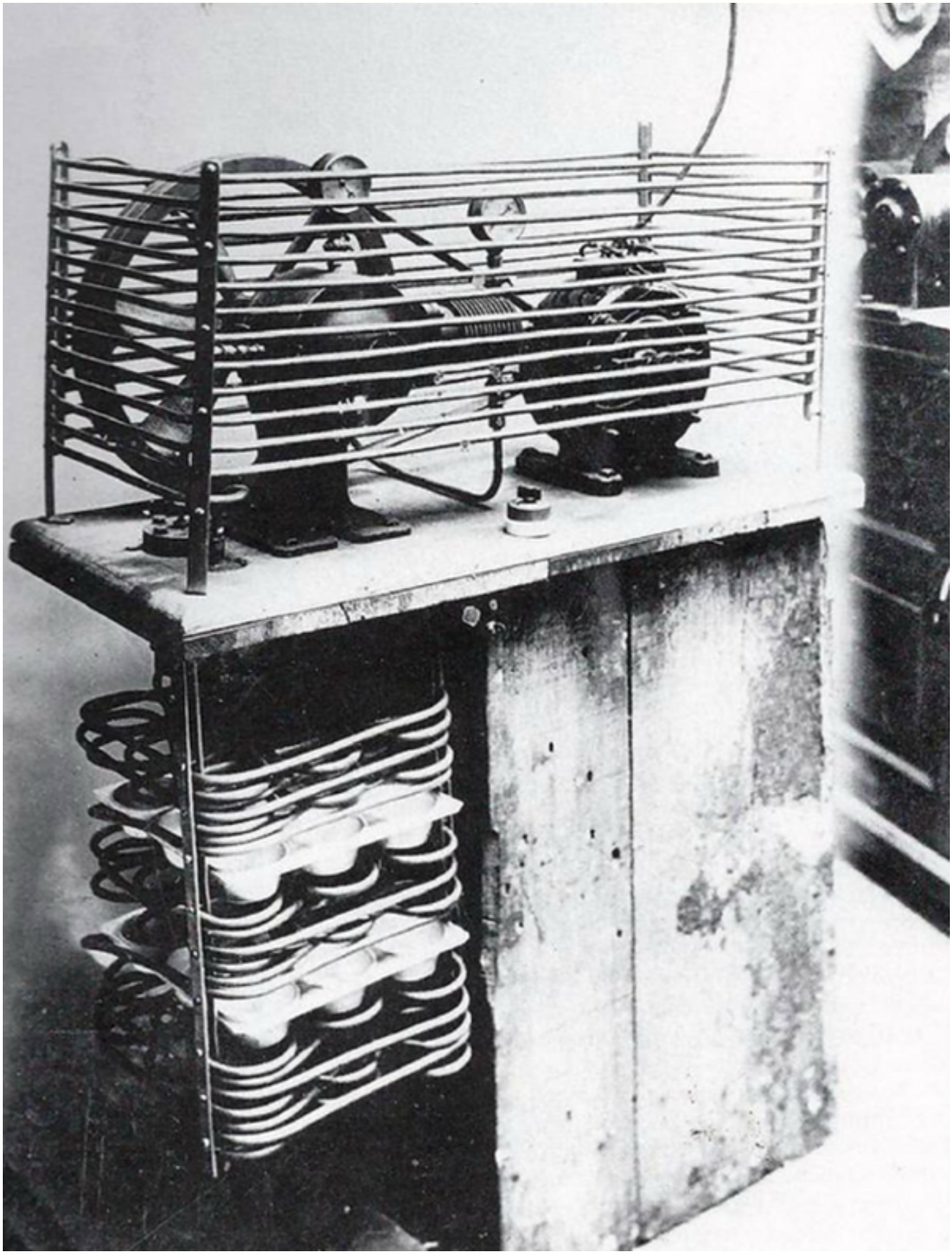
The Question of Practice

If we move away from discourse for a moment, and from the prevailing quantitative understanding of crisis, we notice that transformations in the structures of our society have begun at the level of practices that we cannot yet name. Practices change before discourse, so we still use old words to try and capture new practices. In the case of profound transformations, language fails us, as if it has expired. Here is the question we face: Outside of our defunct language, how do we begin to understand our new society, to capture its transformed features? If the "failure" of the revolution is the condition for the first question, then the completion of ceremonies of mourning for our former society is the condition for the second question.

INTERRUPTION

Classes and Lives

There may be some exaggeration, or an excess of theoretical rigor, in the link proposed between the fridge and the structure of the family. Electricity will come back, if not this year, then in the coming years.



DOMELRE refrigerator c. 1914. License: Public domain.

Things will return to how they were. But electricity will not return for everyone, just like the neighborhood generators are not available for everyone. More difficult to capture are the invisible transformations that permeate social structures like the family. Doing so requires the ability to analyze our society outside the boundaries of our class belonging. Electricity will return to most of the Lebanese writers and readers who find themselves reading this publication, but it won't return to large sections of the country's population. This is a critical aspect of the current crisis, and it is persistently obscured by the quantitative approach and its conclusion that "the Lebanese" as a people suffer from a general decline in their quality of life.

Firstly, the current collapse does not impact everyone in the same way, despite the political use of generalizations like "the Lebanese" or "we." It is a crisis that strikes at the core of class difference.

Secondly, and more importantly, the crisis does not only deepen the economic differences between the classes; it also widens the significance of these differences, and touches aspects of life that were once outside the bounds of these differences. In the past, there were certain "compensatory institutions," such as the public-education sector, the Ministry of Health, the public electricity company, and other such institutions, that secured a minimum standard of living in our society. Today we are on the threshold of a rupture that

–Divides our society electrically between those whose lives are rooted in the electrical network and those who have exited this world.

–Divides our society biologically between those who have access to food and medical care and those who are excluded from both, creating a class rift between those who live and those who die.

–Divides our society between those who travel abroad via airplane and those whose journey to seek asylum in Europe ends on "death boats." These extremes represent divergent relationships to the outside world.

–Divides our society hydrologically between those who can shower and those who see water as a possible carrier of cholera.

–Divides our society educationally between the few in private institutions and the majority who are stuck in public institutions that are falling apart. Still others are altogether outside the education system.

–Divides our society between those who celebrate the birth of a new baby and those who search for an orphanage that can feed their new baby.

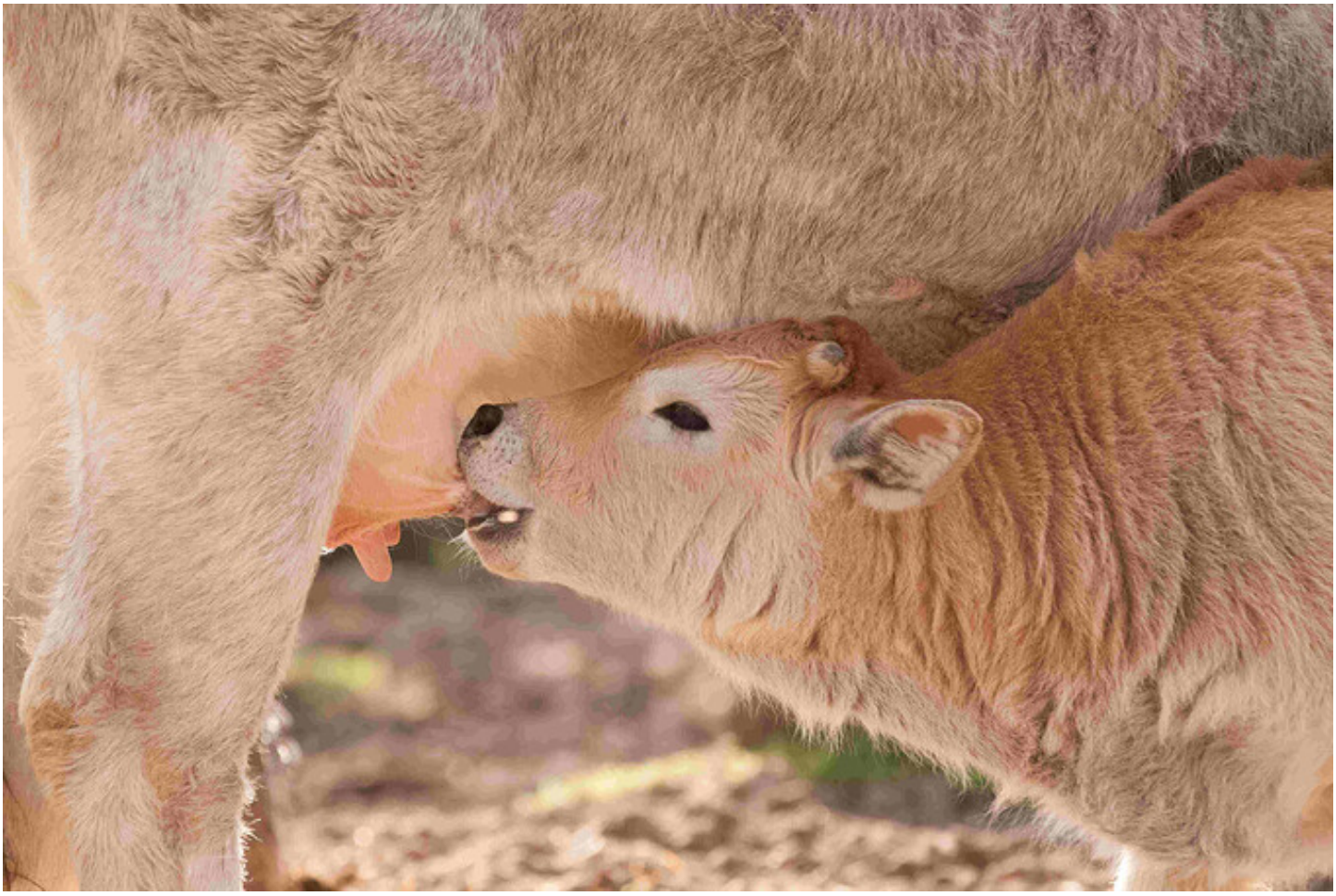
I could mention several more examples, but the bottom line is that class difference is no longer simply an "economic" difference. Perhaps what we are witnessing is the emergence of two societies that differ from each other in every aspect of life and death. This is what the word "we" covers up, this "we" that has been historically marshaled against sectarian divisions and strife. This "we" collapses today because of the deepening of class divides.

Structure: Food as a Component in the Social Reproduction of Life

A Crisis in the Social Reproduction of Life

We dislike classes because they disturb our "unifying" view of Lebanese society. This view, like the dominant Lebanese narrative, is not only the prerogative of the regime and its class interests but was also deepened by the "revolution" in its unifying view of a revolutionary people—a view that overlooks class distinctions. "We" dislike any mention of class, just as "we" dislike discussions about capitalism as an economic system. Rather, the dominant class prefers to think of capital as a "mere" economic system that does not affect our social identity, i.e., a system of market and labor relations only, as if capitalism is a system that starts in the morning at seven o'clock and ends at five o'clock in the evening. According to this fantasy, people leave the capitalist system to return to their other society, where they can be whoever they want.

But if the labor force produces value through relations in the labor market, as Marx said, then how is the labor force itself produced and reproduced? This is the question asked by the theorists of social reproduction. Put differently, if the theory of capitalism presents an account of what happens between seven in the morning and five in the evening, then the theory of social reproduction, as Marxist and feminist theorist Titi Bhattacharya argues, is an account of what happens before and after these hours. Workers under capitalism need to renew their labor power in order to sell it on the labor market, and this is what takes place outside the realm of the formal economy. The workforce needs food, shelter, care, and rest, and it receives this in the private sphere of the family. The workforce also needs health care, elder care, education, clean water, public spaces, electricity, and other benefits usually provided by the public sector. In addition, the working class must reproduce its members by generating new workers or by "importing" them, either forcibly as was the case in previous epochs, or voluntarily through immigration. The capitalist system needs a productive labor force, and what is called "society" is the domain of this process.



Mammals feeding

The theory of "social reproduction" attempts to link the process of producing commodities and value, which takes place in the market, with the process of producing life. Just as the economic system has historically taken different forms, systems of life-reproduction also differ between those inherently dependent on the family and those in which the public sector plays an important role. The relationship between the economic system and the system of life-reproduction is a relationship of necessity, but it is also a relationship of contradiction. Capitalism, in its relentless pursuit of accumulation, seeks to transform the reproduction of life into a field of profit and accumulation by commodifying some of its aspects, or by striving to reduce the cost of reproduction. Economic crises are not only crises in the market—that is, crises brought about by an imbalance between supply and demand, or by a decline in asset values. Crises also occur as a result of the contradictory relationship between the market and modes of life-reproduction. Economic crises often end with a restructuring of this system, as happened with economic crises in recent decades, most of which ended with a restructuring in favor of capital.

The Lebanese Mode of Managing Life

Let us return to our distressed food and kitchen. Our food crisis can be seen as a nutritional crisis affecting the possibility of reproducing life in our society, or at least in a form we recognize. Much has been written about the repercussions of the current crisis on Lebanese society, under the rubric of what the media calls the "living crisis." But our understanding of these repercussions remains embroiled in a quantitative approach to the crisis, with its theories of shortage and scarcity. In reality, what is happening goes deeper than mere shortages of certain goods or a difficulty in acquiring certain commodities, or even the interruption of basic services such as health care and electricity for more and more people. What is taking place is a harsh rearrangement of the process of reproducing life in Lebanon: how people are produced, taken care of, and then reproduced.

When we think of the Lebanese political system, the dominant image is one of violence. Our system is a *civil war system*. Its history is constituted by massacres, bombings, and corpses. Its main representatives are merchants of violence, from the heads of militias to the dispatchers of car bombs and the owners of silencers. Its structure of rule is based on militias that control and

monopolize armed violence. Its discourse glorifies weapons and force. The only state institutions left are those that specialize in oppression. Society has become subject to the rule of violence.

The Lebanese system manages its affairs through violence and death. In accordance with this view, life is managed outside the system, in the private sphere, in the family, or through immigration. We like to believe that our lives "as Lebanese" lie outside this system that we abhor. When we notice the intersection between the system and the management of life, we call it corruption. We mean this in the political sense (interventions that secure the life needs of political supporters). But the actual meaning of corruption is moral, in the sense that we do not want to admit that our lives are intertwined with the system in ways that cannot be untangled.

Most of the vital areas for managing life in Lebanon are outside the scope of the public sector, especially with its current state of collapse. This does not mean that they have nothing to do with the system. Whether it be the family, the private sector, or other institutions entrusted with the reproduction of life, they are all in a necessary but contradictory relationship to the market. More importantly, they evolved in relation to capitalist exigencies. Today, they are transforming under pressure from trends old and new:

Firstly, ever since certain government subsidies ceased, there has been a tendency towards the commodification of good and services. These include electricity and water, which were mainly provided by the state, as well as gasoline, medicine, flour, and other commodities subsidized by the state. (By "state" I mean society itself, since the money comes from the public.) These resources for the reproduction of life have become commodities that are bought and sold on official or unofficial markets. The end of this path is the complete official commodification of these goods. They will be subject to market dynamics when the state legitimizes this commodification process. (Here "state" refers to the legal institution that reflects the interests of the ruling class.)

Secondly, the privatization of certain tasks and functions related to the reproduction of life is an old tendency that is undergoing a revival 1) in the family, from childbearing to caring for children and for the elderly, to providing a degree of social protection; and 2) in social institutions such as associations, parties, and religious and humanitarian institutions, which are assuming responsibility for caring for the poorest, the sickest, and the most needy. The complete collapse of public institutions has placed health care, education, and other means for reproducing life in the hands of private institutions whose services are not sufficient to meet those life needs.

Thirdly, changes in the management of life have produced a shift in the relationship between Lebanese people and the outside world. In the past, this relationship was based on remittances from the expatriate Lebanese labor force (which itself was produced in Lebanon). This paved the way for the importing of cheaper labor.[11]

With the collapse of the Lebanese currency—and with it, living standards—the features of a new policy began to emerge. This policy exports the management of life, via an increased reliance on humanitarian aid from international organizations to secure the minimum necessities of life.

The Question of Structure

With the collapse of the system that reproduces life, a void has appeared in our political discourse. The duality of the market and the state, or the private sector and the public sector, has unraveled. Attempts to separate politics from the economy, or even to link the two through discourses of corruption and governance, have disintegrated. How do we rethink our predicament from a standpoint that focuses on, and emerges from, the problem of reproducing life? How do we repair what was ruptured by the liberal ideology of the Lebanese system?

INTERRUPTION

Society 1507

Some may conclude that nothing is new in this crisis except the deepening of a certain structural tendency in the Lebanese system, namely a tendency to depend on the market for the reproduction of life.

But there is a key difference from the time before 2019, with consequences that we have not yet fully apprehended. The previous currency exchange rate was not simply a financial indicator but constituted a key material condition for the reproduction of life and its overall management. We can call Lebanese society under these conditions "Society 1507." The process of reproducing life prior to the current financial collapse was basically subsidized through a rentier system, at the rate of 1507 Lebanese pounds to one US dollar, which enabled this form of life to maintain itself by lowering its cost (and making future generations bear its burden).

If we return to the process of reproducing life before 2019, we find that all Lebanese institutions rested on this currency exchange rate. For example, the *kafala* system would not have been possible without a currency exchange rate that made it cheap to own the lives of other people. Likewise, systems of private care, whether in education or health, were accessible to large sectors of the population because they were subsidized by the currency exchange rate. At the same time, imported goods, which are vital for

the reproduction of life—from petrol to flour—were also primarily subsidized through the currency exchange rate.

Identifying Society 1507 as the foundation for the reproduction of Lebanese life allows us to break free from the binary of public and private—from the binary of those who fulfilled their needs through the private realm and those who depended on public services. The truth that has become apparent now is that we were all dependent on this system, irrespective of our class or our means of reproducing our lives. Regardless of how much we would like to morally expel Society 1507 from our private spaces, we returned to it daily through every payment we made.

The previous system was not egalitarian. The secret of its persistence was its ability to internally subsidize the process of reproducing life. This subsidy was the cost that the system acceded to in order to accumulate wealth. Inequality was not the only problem. With the collapse of this system, it has become clear that our society is unable to provide the bare minimum for the reproduction of life, if not for staying alive.

Materiality: Food, Viruses, and Infrastructure

There is no modern family beyond refrigeration technology, and there is no typical Lebanese family beyond Society 1507. In a less direct manner of speaking, the "family" is historically contingent on changes that occur in society. I don't mean to simply point out that even our most intimate familial relationships are shaped by social structures, or that that the "family" is affected by material conditions. What I mean is that the coldness of the fridge and the warmth of the family depend on this "materiality," on our basic existence as creatures, which we try hard to ignore because it constitutes a narcissistic wound to the image of ourselves as rational individuals with sovereignty over our lives and choices.

Starting a few years ago, we had to confront ourselves as material beings. It began with the garbage crisis in Lebanon. The company responsible for managing our garbage was no longer able to control the dumps entrusted with keeping it out of sight. Rubbish accumulated on city streets, exposing the corrupt and deteriorating social structures responsible for managing waste. We tried to contain the scandal by returning the garbage to its rightful place, that is, out of sight. But we refused to learn the lesson that we are just part of a larger configuration.

We persisted in ignoring our marginalized position until a little virus came to paralyze the planet and confine us to our homes. With the virus, we each had to face the materiality of our existence, as biological beings, carriers of a virus against our will. Despite our objections, the pandemic succeeded in demonstrating our marginality to us. Then came the vaccine; with it, we reasserted our sovereignty over life. But for those of us who live here in Lebanon, in the land of cholera, this return is no longer possible. No matter where we look, we find ourselves within "configurations" that conflate the natural with the artificial, turning man into mere matter. Some of these configurations become evident only in crisis, such as:

—The cholera crisis: cholera bacteria—refugee camps—government asylum policies and the racism of the Lebanese state—deteriorating water infrastructure—population density in cities.

—The electricity crisis: the Lebanese financial crisis—the war in Ukraine—crumbling supply infrastructure—pollution—cancer—smuggler networks.

—The food crisis: the financial crisis—export and import policies—a history of soil degradation—irrigation infrastructure—the electricity crisis—the food market—global warming.

These specific crises (and not "crisis" as an abstract concept) have made manifest the social structures that manage every aspect of our live. These crises also have an epistemological dimension: social structures do not appear to the public except at the moment they collapse.

There is no ready answer to the question of what kind of new politics could accord with our present reality. But what is required is not frantic questioning but rather curiosity, the curiosity of a society open to radical change. As the feminist writer Sara Ahmed writes in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, "To see the world as if for the first time is to notice that which is there, is made, has arrived, or is extraordinary. Wonder is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work."[12]

Perhaps what is needed today is curiosity about this new reality that is still searching for its vocabulary.

X

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1
"Lebanon: Children Facing Crisis Hunger Levels to Rise by 14% in 2023 Unless Urgent Action Taken," Save the Children, January 23, 2023 https://www.savethechildren.net/news/lebanon-children-facing-crisis-hunger-levels-rise-14-2023-unless-urgent-action-taken .

2
"Lebanon: Rising Poverty, Hunger Amid Economic Crisis," Human Rights Watch, December 12, 2022 https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/12/lebanon-rising-poverty-hunger-amid-economic-crisis .

3
"Help Lebanon Rebuild and Recover," UN World Food Program USA https://www.wfpusa.org/countries/lebanon/ .

4
Wendell Steavenson, "In Lebanon, Parents Are Abandoning Their Children in Orphanages," *The Economist*, January 31, 2023 https://www.economist.com/1843/2023/01/31/in-lebanon-parents-are-abandoning-their-children-in-orphanages .

5
For *Lebanon with a Story*, see https://www.instagram.com/p/CoG8CwStrL3/?img_index=1 (in Arabic).

6
In a similar vein, the other main TV station in Lebanon, MTV, launched the program *Saru miyye* (Turning One Hundred) to commemorate a hundred years since the state's inception and also celebrate our so-called national cuisine.

7
Camellia Hussein, "A Daily Celebration of Life: What Do You Know about Food Tourism in Lebanon?" *Al-Jazeera*, August 16, 2019 https://www.aljazeera.net/midan/miscellaneous/2019/8/16/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9 (in Arabic).

8
Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin, 1986), 13.

9
We can think here of modernity as affecting the senses and not only ideas. The historical transformation commonly referred to as modernity is not only meaningful at the level of thought, as some of our Arab theorists of modernity like to say, but also at the level of a transformation in diets. Modernity entails a movement away from a mono-crop diet to a more diverse one, where animal products take up a bigger share of the average diet.

10
Modernity is often explained through technological advances like the introduction of the radio or TV. The focus on these forms of technology betrays a certain understanding of technology as a vehicle for words—for discourse. But these technologies also included the fridge, which transformed, in a nondiscursive manner, not only our food but also our habits, social structure, taste, and sensitivity to the meanings of food.

11
The importing of cheap labor did not only serve the market. It was also essential for the management of life: thousands of foreign laborers were assigned the responsibility of caring for children and the elderly, which permitted "the family" to persist in its recognized form. In the same way that there is no Lebanese family today without a fridge, there is no Lebanese family without the *kafala* (sponsorship) system.

12
Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburg University Press, 2014), 179–80.

Serubiri Moses

Audre Lorde's Bloody Rush-Hour Revolution

1. Gotham Subway

In 1975, a critic complained that some of the poems in Audre Lorde's *New York Head Shop and Museum* (1974) were "not what one expects from Lorde"—who was nominated for the National Book Award for poetry a year earlier.[1] Still, the reviewer said that a study of the influence of New York City on Black poetry should be written and that it must include Lorde. The book came out on Broadside Press, founded in 1965 by Detroit-based poet and editor Dudley Randall, a monumental figure in the Black poetry movement. Judging by the lukewarm response, perhaps some felt that Lorde had gone too far in her unsparing depiction of New York as a "beleaguered city." *New York Head Shop and Museum* is far from an optimistic Beat-generation volume; Lorde's is an opposite picture to Frank O'Hara's 1954 depiction of architectonic space in the "mountains of New York."[2] Two decades after O'Hara, Lorde provides stark images of death and survival in Gotham. It is a different city. In *Poetry Magazine*, another reviewer of *New York Head Shop and Museum* made much of Lorde's alienation from the city on account of her race, gender, and her vocation as a poet: "Lorde is of course an outsider in more ways than one."[3] Neither reviewer made much sense of the poet's complicated relationship to New York City. However, as scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs has argued, Lorde's intent is to engage deeply with the city as a metaphor that can illustrate the resilience of Black life in squalid and punishing labor conditions.[4] In this way, Gumbs seems to suggest that Lorde's literary strategies are effective in ways that transcend the model set by O'Hara and the rest of the New York School poets. She may thrive in a modernist lexicon already established by the New York School, but she embraces modernism while simultaneously rejecting the city's display of empire and of a capitalism that has genocidal tendencies towards the city's Black, Indigenous, and Latinx residents. While predominantly known for her writing on feminist topics including care, sisterhood, breaking the silence, and sexual ethics, a lesser-known aspect of Lorde's writing—which shows up in *New York Head Shop and Museum*— concerns Black spirituality, especially orishas that Lorde turns to while looking beyond empire from within its crumbling constraints.

In the backyard of a Brooklyn coffee shop this spring, I heard the queer immigrant poet danilo machado read poems centered on the New York City subway. Perhaps what drew me in was machado's emphasis on poems about cruising on the subway, and the language appropriated from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority woven throughout machado's concise 2023 volume, *This is your receipt and is not a ticket for travel*. We hear in these poems not only PA announcements from the Q line, but also the voice of the New York Police Department telling commuters: "If you see something, say something." The subway voice is a kind of "consciousness" that infiltrates the speaker's mind when reading the poems. We hear other voices too. In the coffee

NYC Subway, rush hour. Photograph: Willy Spiller

shop backyard, the audience burst out laughing when machado read a poem in which a protagonist hears two men gossiping within earshot on the subway platform: "biologically, it just leads to extinction"—a reference to homosexuality.[5] Revisiting my encounter with machado's poems has brought me back to the subway and to the issue of surveillance there, a theme that is prominent in their book. machado's poetry presents sexual encounters that take place in subway cars. Cruising, in this setting, consists of communicating without words. It is done with the eyes. This focus on riders watching one another becomes a way for the poet to illustrate how desire meets with surveillance. machado has long been concerned with police surveillance, particularly regarding Black men, who are routinely stopped by police officers on the station platforms and in the subway cars.

machado's poetry, rife with corporeality, eye contact, queer sex, witnessing, cruising, and naming police terror, paints a multifaceted picture of the subway. machado is also determined to hold subway officials accountable for facilitating state surveillance and racist violence. They invoke the forceful language of subway authority, which recalls the way Lorde depicts the vulnerability of Black bodies in the long aftermath of slavery. machado writes in "symphony (N to Astoria-Ditmars)": "I closed my eyes and what opened / them was thinking about the conductor / whose consciousness I was deferring to."[6] What I understood when reading this poem was that machado embraces an American modernism, though one funneled through queer subculture—a subculture that includes writers like O'Hara, who perhaps went cruising on the subway too. O'Hara wrote that "subways are only fun when you're feeling sexy," and expressed the carefree joie de vivre of a flaneur: "The subway shoots onto a ramp overlooking the East River, the towers!"[7]

There's a long history of the subway as literary setting. It can be found in the work of writers like O'Hara and John Ashbery but also Amiri Baraka and Ann Petry. In contrast to O'Hara, Baraka and Petry, also modernists in their own ways, were as interested in the subway's racial violence as they were in its vividness and intimacy. Listening to machado on that spring evening in Brooklyn, I did not immediately think about Baraka's play *Dutchman* (1964), perhaps because it has a more aggressive, urgent tone. In the play, a young Black man and a white woman get into a heated argument in a subway car. The woman's remarks

imply an increasingly violent racialization, which is echoed in the unfolding of the plot. Listening to machado's lyrical though at times programmatic poems, I more readily recalled *The Street* (1946) by novelist Ann Petry. I thought about her engagement with modernism vis-à-vis the city, movement, and relationality. Set in World War II–era Harlem, *The Street* follows a single Black mother, Luttie, and her son, Bub, in their daily struggle to achieve the American dream despite violence and desperation magnified by racial, gender, and economic discrimination. I thought especially about Petry's descriptions of the subway cars of the 1940s, with passengers getting off the subway at Lenox Avenue in Harlem, or a passenger boarding a subway train and picking up a discarded Black newspaper to read. In scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin's articulation of the horizon of modernism through the lens of the Great Migration, Petry's subway is depicted through sound and image. And the subway itself spurs the writer's creativity. Griffin writes of Petry that "some days an idea or an image would appear as she rode the subway," noting that the novelist was inspired by the "jolting of the subway cars on the long ride."[8] These writers present not only an architecture of movement but also an intimacy that can be risky. In their varied work, the subway is a space of adventure, newspaper reading, voyeurism, literary inspiration, and sex.

2. Gotham as Necropolis

By contrast, Audre Lorde saw Gotham and its subway tunnels through a dark lens. Her poem "New York City, 1970" shows a necropolis in which "murderous deacons" preside over "subway rush-hour temples."[9] Lorde's New York is a city breaking down into ruins. "There is nothing beautiful left in the streets of this city," she laments, which a page later becomes a refrain: "I walk down the withering limbs of my discarded house / and there is nothing worth salvage left in this city." Her necropolis architecture interests me not merely because it is vulgar and filled with "stench" and "rats." I view her disgust as evidence of Lorde's own self-awakening, including her gradual political demoralization. Lorde's drug-filled and rat-infested subway presents a scattered and fragmented rather than a whole and coherent architecture. Her architecture is a social and a bodily one, complete with "a needle in our flesh" and "horses in (our) brain(s)." Her visceral pictorial representation of the city is a far cry from the "urban renewal" promised by the likes of Robert Moses decades earlier. Instead, we are faced with bodies sent to the "gallows" and the manufacturing of "niggers." The inherent violence of urban planning, among other forces in the city, is a continuation of genocide. Lorde's language makes this clear. She knows that she and her children will be "tried as new steel is tried" and "the city shall try them / as the blood splash of a royal victim." She is clear about the way the city exploits its (Black) labor. Lorde's own self-awakening and her "bloody rush-hour subway revolution" takes place in poetry.

Lorde's "beleaguered city" is a place where "broken down gods survive / in crevasses and mudpots" and where, evoking the long aftermath of slavery, bodies are carted to the "gallows," when in truth "nobody wants to die." Lorde's poem is a stark departure from many earlier writers and philosophers who responded with enthusiasm to the formation of the modern state and modern city.[10] Walter Benjamin, for example, believed in the potential of cities and mass media to bring about a new kind of producer, one not merely serving an industrial capitalist system.[11] Others praised the workings of modern statecraft and modern architecture, despite the devastating removals, displacements, zoning, exclusions, and reclamations that characterized these formations. Lorde, with a view from deep into the twentieth century, instructs us to think about "broken down gods" and vulnerable Blacks "sent to the gallows." The book's dedication reads: "To the Chocolate People of America." According to Gumbs, Lorde uses the cockroach as a metaphor to symbolize the persistence of Black life, "unbound by the limits of the patriarchal family or the internalized values of capitalism."[12]

While one can attribute the somber mood of *New York Head Shop and Museum* to the various economic and political crises that would eventually lead the city to bankruptcy in 1975, there is something profound about Lorde's meditation as a longer historical reflection of ongoing and untenable labor and living conditions that connote the continuation of slavery in the US. Lorde's vision can be unsparing: "I condemn myself, and my loves / past and present / and the blessed enthusiasms of all my children / to this city / without reason or future / without hope / to be tried as the new steel is tried / before trusted to slaughter."

Despite her bleak vision of the city, Lorde is also interested in the ways New Yorkers are connected by nourishment and intimacy, whatever their circumstances. In her Brighton Beach apartment, Lorde's Jewish housemate, an old lady, teaches her how to boil stale corn in the husk. Combined with chicken feet stew, this makes Lorde fat.[13] Elsewhere she tells her son Jonno to "cherish this city" and meditates on the "old men who shine shoes" and who "share their lunch with the birds."[14]

Lorde's engagement with the theme of intimacy in the city is expressed in lines such as "I am bound like an old lover—a true believer— / to this city's death by accretion and slow ritual."[15] Like machado after her, Lorde bears witness to the many random and sometimes disturbing encounters that take place on the subway. She writes about a Black girl sitting next to her in the subway who nods off, high from taking cocaine: "A long-legged girl with a horse in her brain / slumps down beside me / begging to be ridden asleep / for the price of a midnight train free from desire."[16]

Her intimacy with the long-legged girl nodding off on the train also reveals the queer dimension of Lorde's desire. Like in her Yoruba-inspired poem "Oya"—"I love you / now

Frances Clayton and Audre Lorde in an undated photo. Source unknown.

free me / quickly / before I destroy us"—the subject of desire here is female.[17] Lorde's first mention of her lesbian desire came in a 1970 poem titled "Martha."[18] Critic Barbara Smith wrote in her seminal essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" that "Lorde had risked everything for the truth … I am not convinced that one can write explicitly as a Black lesbian and live to tell about it."[19] Even though four decades have gone by, this statement rings true today. It makes me ask whether it is possible to "attend to the work of Black women," to quote critic Jessica Lynne.[20] If anything, a study of the influence of New York City on poetry would reveal the dominance of white men and their joie de vivre.

3. No Longer at Ease

Lorde is no longer at ease in Gotham, to judge by her poetry. She asks us to riot if we're fed up: "If we hate the rush hour subways / who ride them every day / why hasn't there been a New York City Subway Riot / some bloody rush-hour revolution." Lorde's words are poetic utterances, and as such they are rooted in the imagination. The "bloody rush-hour revolution," in my reading, is not meant literally. Her words regarding this "beleaguered city" are more cautionary than prophetic. At the time of her writing, New York City hadn't seen a subway protest of the kind Lorde imagined. But there have been a few since, most recently in May of this year, after Jordan Neely, a Michael Jackson impersonator, was killed in the subway by a former US marine who put him in a choke hold.[21] Lorde's words about a "bloody rush-hour revolution" were written at a time, in the mid-seventies, when the activist strategies and contributions of Black women in the sixties were being strategically cannibalized by the women's movement, and white women in particular.[22]

Lorde's work from this time, however, is not limited to her grim picture of a 1970s Gotham rife with disempowerment. She simultaneously undertakes a more hopeful project—a search for the orisha spirits, the Black

gods, and the Vodou and Santería priests that German anthropologist Hubert Fichte wrote about on his visit to New York in the seventies.[23] This is the source of Lorde's spiritual-ethical stance. She conjoins intimacy and sexuality with religious philosophy and ritual practice. Lorde's complaint about "this city / without reason or future" also directs us to the Black gods—the exclusion of which was one of her major gripes with white feminists at the time.[24]

Lorde practiced rituals associated with the Yoruba orisha Oya and other deities. Her poetry points to African and Black spirituality as a locus of sensuality, corporeality, and intimacy. While these do not explicitly concern capital, labor, or law, they are political in the historical sense described by C. L. R. James and Brazilian philosopher Conceição Evaristo. Lorde was a follower of Oya, the goddess of the Niger River. (The Yoruba call a follower of Oya *Aboyade*, or "one who arrived with Oya.") In Yoruba divination, like in Indigenous divination practices in Oceania and South America, bodies of water are often ascribed human characteristics and pronouns. In this case, the Niger River is described as a "she." The followers of Oya and other deities treat the river with the same respect they would treat a person. These ways of being show respect to the environment and earth. It is also believed in Yoruba spiritual practice that Oya was a wife of Sango, a deity associated with fire and lightning. Myth states that Sango used Oya in battle, particularly for her ability to command the winds and thunder.

Lorde begins her poem "Oya," which appears in *New York Head Shop and Museum*, by sketching out two characters who seem to be Sango and Oya, and who are called "mother" and "father." This means that the poet identifies as Oya's daughter. "My mother is sleeping," Lorde writes. Throughout the poem we see the characteristics of both deities. We see how Sango is "my father / returning at midnight / out of tightening circles of anger." We see "my mother / asleep on her thunders … Hymns of dream lie like bullets / in her nights' weapons / the sacred steeples / of nightmare are secret and hidden." Oya is a warrior whose nights are dedicated to dreams of strategy. Oya's nightmares are sacred, secret, and hidden. The image of the warrior who dreams of strategies resonates with Lorde's later statement that "self-preservation is an act of warfare." Lorde then inserts herself into the line: "I too shall learn how to conquer yes." With this statement, Lorde transforms her spiritual devotion into a weapon to use against the exploitative and violent regime that continues even in the aftermath of slavery. Lorde's account of sex in the poem ("Yes yes god / damned / I love you / now free me / quickly / before I destroy us") reveals desire, anger, strength, and character, all while remaining fully engaged in the battle for self-preservation.[25]

The necessity of this constant battle for self-preservation is perhaps why Lorde later declared, in a 1984 interview with James Baldwin, that "the [American] dream was never mine." In her disappointment at this discovery, Lorde says, "I wept, I cried, I fought, I stormed."[26] While Lorde's writing reveals her intellectual formation in psychology (her poetry is full of references to interior and psychic life) and post-structuralism (while she does not directly reference figures like Derrida and Foucault, Lorde's conception of "difference"[27] challenges the essentialism often deployed in the identity projects of Black power and American feminism), I want to argue that Lorde's view of the American dream, like her view of New York City in *New York Head Shop and Museum*, is complicated by the fact that she understands that there is more. New York is not the last word. Her ritual practice and her Black theology point to the Caribbean and Africa. She isn't just thinking about the Empire. Lorde is the Black child of migrants from the small island nation of Grenada, and that "Old Country" occupies a huge part of her imagination. By contrast, on the topic of the "country" Frank O'Hara wrote that "one need never leave the confines of New York to get all the greenery one wishes—I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway handy."[28]

In *New York Head Shop and Museum*, Lorde reminds me of a young Chinua Achebe writing about what it means to be "no longer at ease." Her work deals with the aftermath of slavery by confronting the ongoing genocidal tendencies of Gotham and advocating healing practices from African and Black spirituality. Achebe's novel *No Longer At Ease* (1960)—a phrase lifted from T. S. Elliot's poem "Journey of the Magi"—is the story of an Igbo man, Obi Okonkwo, who was educated in England. When he returns to his village in Nigeria, Obi engages in a battle between Western education and African ethics that is directly tied to intimacy. Obi's romantic relationship with Clara, who is an *osu*, or outcast, transgresses Igbo ethics. Given that Achebe's novels coincide with the movement for African independence after the Second World War, questions about "Westernization" are accompanied by those of "Africanization," as Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy exit the stage. Over a decade earlier, South African authors like Alan Patton and Peter Abrahams had written novels that exposed the suffering of Black people under oppressive white colonial regimes, but Achebe's task was different. His was to imagine what came after. And he did this by portraying possibilities for what "modern" African ethics might look like. In an interview with Charles Rowell, Achebe states that Clara, Obi's love interest, is not "unreasonable."[29] This was Achebe's way of thinking through Igbo ethics. Clara represents an aporia or incommensurability within the plot itself. When she asks, "Do you know that you're not supposed to marry someone like me?" Obi responds arrogantly: "Nonsense," he spits out, before adding, "We're beyond that; we're civilized people."[30] Igbo values are incommensurable with Euro-modernity. Lorde too deals with the incommensurable, since she is unwilling to conform to the imperialism and violent negation of 1970s New York City. She too is "no longer at ease." Remember that Lorde's critical attitude towards Gotham, her necropolitan characterization of New York's capitalist and

Mmkgabo Helen Sebidi, Tears of Africa, 1989, 230 x 300 cm. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

genocidal violence, is antithetical to the jazzy and hip New York of the Beat poets that preceded her. Her work challenges postmodern ideas of architecture that revel in the "excitement" and the "neon lights" of grand cities like New York. She deconstructs the iconography of Euro-modernity, especially the New York subway. In this sense, Lorde's architecture is disembodied, fragmented, scattered. It is a forensic architecture detailing rats and roaches—a city in disrepair.

4. A Search for Meaning in a Troubled World

Lorde's response to the violent regimes of modernity and hyper-capitalism reminds me of the artwork of Mmapula Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi (born 1943). Like Lorde in Gotham, Sebidi was no longer at ease in Egoli, South Africa. Sebidi painted and wrote during the South African crisis of the 1980s, which involved intensified armed struggle by the ANC guerrilla army, Mkhonto we Sizwe, and increasing police attacks on urban Black communities. Sebidi's work reflects the violence that had taken hold in the townships. Similar to Lorde, her work straddles two fronts: one is urban space, specifically in the aftermath the Urban Areas Act that banned Black people from moving freely in South African cities without internal passports; the other is rural areas, with their connection to Setswana knowledge, the "Old Country," and African diaspora wisdom. Elsewhere I have written about how Sebidi's focus on the rural was misconstrued as being "without reason."[31] South African art historians portrayed what she had learned from her grandmother—mural painting techniques—as strictly formal instruction, without acknowledging how Setswana proverbs and the wisdom that accompanied such instruction comprised a form of knowing. The artist consciously incorporated this Sestwana knowledge into paintings such as *The Mother Holds the Sharp Side of the Knife* (1988–89). Regarding the artist's relationship to the political climate of late-eighties South Africa, it is worth quoting at length from artist and curator Gabi Ngcobo's critical comment on Sebidi's painting *Tears of Africa* (1989):

> *Tears of Africa* was created during a two-year period of self-imposed isolation. This was after Sebidi had enrolled for a creative writing course with, according to her instructor, undesirable results: too deranged to fathom and perhaps too big a responsibility to guide as a writing process. The body of work created during this time, more evident in *Tears of Africa*, resounds the personal as the political and vice-versa. It is an accumulation of her inner turmoil that was being released. This enunciation of subjectivity was paralleled with conflicts that were unfolding at the time in South Africa and its neighboring countries—conjointly with struggles that have marked the African continent, from slavery to the anti-colonial drive and the civil wars that ensued after political independence had been achieved. Much of this historical knowledge was not available in its detail to Sebidi, nor, undoubtedly, to most (Black) South Africans. The work came to be realized "outside of the realm of consciousness" but not outside that of responsibility for the youth in her

> teaching capacity and involvement in the artistic political climate as it was unfolding.[32]

The phrase "outside of the realm of consciousness" is derived from Félix Guattari: "The subject is not a straightforward matter; it is not sufficient to think in order to be as Descartes declares, since all sorts of other ways of existing have already established themselves outside of consciousness."[33] This repositions Setswana oral history, and what Ngcobo calls "an accumulation of inner turmoil," at the forefront of a search for meaning in a troubled world.[34] Per Ngcobo, this search spans "from slavery to the anti-colonial drive, and the civil wars that ensued after political independence had been achieved." I am reminded here again of the aftermath of slavery and what Lorde describes, in one of her poems in *New York Head Shop and Museum*, as the seemingly ceaseless production of "niggers." Ngcobo's discussion of subjectivity and inner turmoil points to the kind of interiority that Lorde's work depicts. Because for Lorde, with New York City falling into bankruptcy, the horizon of freedom slipped further into the distance. The gains of the Civil Rights era and the Black women's movement of the 1960s seemed to be disappearing. Poems like "Oya," in which Lorde writes about mother and father personas, echo Sebidi's grandmother and her Setswana proverbs. Perhaps Lorde and Sebidi are also united in a "responsibility for the youth"—they were both teachers—and in their efforts to shape the direction of aesthetic production as crisis unfolds.

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This text is an edited version of an online presentation delivered on April 25, 2023 for a panel called "Nobody Was Dreaming About Me," associated with the exhibition "When We See Us: A Century of Black Portraiture" at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa.

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"When a people share a common oppression, certain kinds of skill and joint defenses are developed. And if you survive you survive because those skills and defenses have worked. When you come into conflict over existing differences, there is 'vulnerability' to each other which is desperate and very deep. And that is what happens between Black men and women because we have certain weapons we have perfected together that white women and men have not shared." Audre Lorde in Adrienne Rich, "An Interview with Audre Lorde," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 4 (1981).

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Ratheesh T

Observing Kilimanoor

South Indian artist Ratheesh T's practice of looking centers objects, spaces, and people, including his family in his hometown of Kilimanoor, a small town in Trivandrum, Kerala. Here we begin to peel away the layers of a "generative objective knowledge" of a place that forms the core of his work. Many of his paintings show family members and depict land, neighborhoods, and stories that have unfolded within a forty-mile radius of Kilimanoor. In effect, his paintings reveal the lives of his people and the place of his birth. However, *Man and Doll (careless objects 2)*, a 2023 painting, turns Ratheesh T's gaze inward. The painting shows a stuffed Mickey Mouse doll laid on what appears to be a leather couch, leaning to one side as if alert and at rest at the same time. As much as we stare at this Mickey, it stares back at us, with a consciousness of its own. Surrounding the doll is a green fabric strewn on the surface of the couch, and across from it lies a pair of Jockey boxer shorts. According to the artist, the painting functions as a kind of still life in which he observes a "careless object." In his parlance, the careless object is something which, though mundane, can provide both the artist and the viewer with various possibilities. It is this "careless object" that offers some kind of beauty. The painting is included in his 2023 solo exhibition at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke in Bombay.

Trained at the Trivandrum College of Fine Arts, Ratheesh T's focus on forms of looking is reminiscent of philosopher Sundar Sarukkai's question: "Can experience really be materialised, commodified and transferred without taking the subject of experience into account?"[1] The artist's "careless objects" cannot be divorced from "the subject of experience." Thus, in addition to a view of art that extends to the social fabric of his community—which is consistent with the spirit of his mentors in the leftist Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association (1986–89)—what might at first glance appear "mundane" in Ratheesh T's work can actually point towards deeper embodied knowledge, if not fundamental experience. This becomes clear in this oral history account by Ratheesh T, which is a revised and edited version of an interview conducted by curator Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi.

—Serubiri Moses

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Dance Before Painting

I begin this oral history with dance. I performed Indian classical dance in my childhood, and between ages seven and thirteen I actively performed on stage. But very quickly I was confronted with this white, pale skin all around me. Right now, Indian classical dance is mostly performed by white-skinned people (often upper caste). Black-skinned people (often Dalits and other lower castes) also study Indian classical dance, but today they are made to perform with white makeup. This is a distinctly caste-based politics that plays out in the centuries-old movement practice. I

Ratheesh T, The Opening, 2023, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

now know the purpose of this, but in childhood I didn't understand much about the nature of caste, and where the makeup came from. On stage, I wore light-colored makeup, but I still didn't understand its context in the politics of performance. Then, as I got older, I found out that I had no interest in makeup. Yet when I danced without makeup, I couldn't win over the audience. As a result, I stopped pursuing classical dance, and became interested in Western dance, which, in my opinion, is much better to perform.

I also started to breakdance and got involved in cinematic dance, also known as film dance, which is associated with Bollywood. Then I found that it is good to perform all over the city. As a result, I became aware of and began studying Michael Jackson's style of dance. His dancing was impressive. A lot of people in Kilimanoor were familiar with Michael Jackson during the late eighties and early nineties. After a few years of working within the cinematic dance and breakdance circuit, I took classes in hip-hop. I excelled and became a professional dancer in Trivandrum city.

I had not yet attempted painting. At the time, which is when I matriculated into the Trivandrum College of Fine Arts, my drawings were like those of a craftsman. I must be honest and say I only chose to attend the College of Fine Arts in order to explore the city. I wasn't there to study painting or anything like that. That wasn't my way. I thought that if I came to the city, I could explore

breakdance much more than I had before. That's how I arrived at the College of Fine Arts, and how my career as an artist began.

It was during my time at Trivandrum College that I came across members of the Radical Group, which was an association of artists at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda between 1986 and 1989 who were influenced by leftist ideas.[2] During my earlier studies there were no prominent artists to speak of. I only got to know about these people when I entered Trivandrum College. Jyothi Basu and Alex Mathew and these people were always coming to Trivandrum College, and we spoke about many things.[3] I spent a lot of time with them, and learned a lot about the Radical Group. Nowadays, the group is considered canonical. But personally, I could sit down with them. I had a very good relationship with them. That is very important.

Real Experience in Kilimanoor and Varkala

While I studied at Trivandrum College, I got an overseas scholarship and traveled to London. While abroad I managed to visit the Tate Modern and the Barbican Gallery. I gained a deeper understanding of the pulse of contemporary art internationally. When I returned to Trivandrum College, there were a lot of students studying printmaking. They could only understand the technical form of print. We were thinking only about the (formal aspects of the) artwork. That was the main problem I was facing as a student. Unfortunately, today the same thing is happening all over India, such as at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Today, learning is technically possible everywhere, from the library to the internet. But *real experience* is very different. After returning from London to Trivandrum, I went to Baroda (that is another matter), but I have always remained familiar with my people in Kerala. I have always remained much more familiar with my local community.

Kilimanoor and its forty-kilometer radius have provided the entire source material for my artwork. I have a studio in Trivandrum city, and I have another studio in Kilimanoor, and yet another one at my residence in Varkala (both places are near the city). My family is in Varkala. When traveling to Kilimanoor, I know many people there—given that it is my hometown—and I know a lot about the place. I observe the exterior. I then go back to my residence in Varkala and observe my family, including my kids. They appear in a number of my paintings. But then I return to my studio in Trivandrum, where I observe myself. Painting has become a process of moving between these places and looking at them from different vantage points. I have painted a lot of landscapes and made figurative paintings by observing Kilimanoor and that area. But where does the family painting come from? It is made by observing Varkala and that area.

The making of Born Free, a sculpture created by John Devraj with three thousand school children, 1994. Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association.

A Messy Table and Careless Objects

Recently, I was in my studio looking at an object. I recently made two paintings there titled *careless objects*. When I entered the studio, it was messy. Everything was carelessly placed on the table, like underwear and everything. And once I beheld those *things*, there was some kind of beauty as I looked more closely. Even if someone else could not envision it, I saw beauty while looking at this messy table. I try to paint *things*. Put another way, there is a skill that I use very freely in this process of looking more closely at things while in my studio. I witness many more possibilities within these two *careless objects* paintings. For other works, like *black objects*, I collected things from the local community in Kilimanoor and Varkala. People were using these dark objects, which I took to the studio. I observed and studied them like a still life. With some other works, such a process wasn't possible: I couldn't relocate the objects and therefore was forced to work on the spot. But I have felt the most possibility open up with the *careless objects*, and I am now able to develop a new painting style. That's very important for me.

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Ratheesh T received his BFA in painting from the College of Fine Arts Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram. His work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, most recently: Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga (2021); "Lokame Tharavadu" (2021), curated by Bose Krishnamachari, Alleppey, Kerala; Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai (2020/2018); Jeonbuk Museum of Art, Wanjugun (2015); the 5th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka (2014); and the 1st

Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi (2012), among others. His work is also held in various public collections, including: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi; and Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga.

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Sven Lütticken

Capitalism and Schismogenesis, Part 1

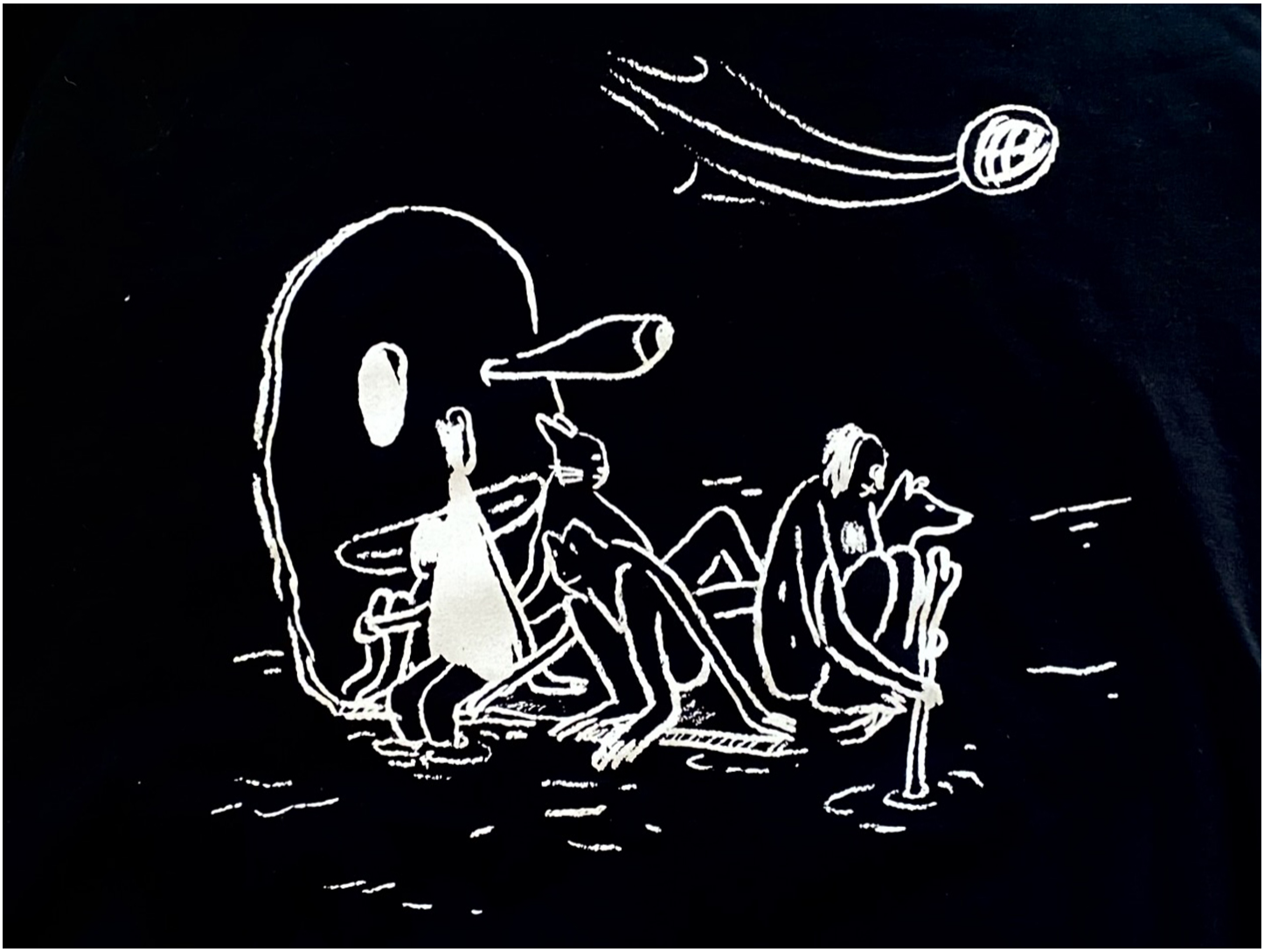
Prefiguration, Emergence, Divergence

With the return of certain Cold War dynamics, the social imaginary is undergoing a renewed reduction. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sandro Mezzadra looked back to the distant times of 2003, when the *New York Times* called the peace movement coming out of Seattle, Porto Alegre, and Genoa the "second world power."[1] If "another world is possible" is the slogan that best encapsulates the last two to three decades of nondogmatic (autonomist, alter-globalist, Indigenous, abolitionist) emancipatory politics, today the risk is all too real that the possible alternatives will be reduced to currently available models.

The historian Kenneth Pomeranz famously characterized the emergence of industrial capitalism in eighteenth-century Europe, and not under broadly similar conditions in East Asia, as "the great divergence."[2] Today, China's status as an economic and political threat to the West obscures the *reconvergence* that has taken place as various varieties of capitalist statecraft face off against each other. The only "world powers" today appear to be those that curtail emancipatory forces in different ways and to different degrees (and those degrees do, of course, matter deeply). Or is this appearance of stifled possibilities precisely part of the problem, a symptom of a receding revolutionary horizon?

Questions of prefiguration and emergence loom large in the current conjuncture, in the present planetary pickle. While the terms "prefigurative practice" and "prefigurative politics" only gained some traction in the 1970s and '80s, and particularly in more recent years in post-Occupy anarchist and autonomist theory, the concept of practices that materially anticipate postcapitalist and antiauthoritarian social forms has a much longer history on the left.[3] No doubt the realization of this ideal was always a compromised and contradictory affair, for anarchists and for Marxists alike, due to internal and external factors. In a remarkable 1928 book, the Austrian Marxist Otto Neurath mused on the possibilities and limitations of socialist *Lebensgestaltung* (the organization of life) or attempts to create new *Lebensformen* (forms of life) under capitalism. While clinging to a highly problematic theory of the unavoidable transformation of capitalist planning into a moneyless socialist planned economy, Neurath was nonetheless a keen and nuanced observer of the ways in which the practice of socialist activism was shaped by existing conditions; building socialist organizations under capitalist conditions was obviously a contradictory and vexing task. Even so, Neurath argued that proletarian organizations—especially youth organizations and forms of self-organized education—offered an anticipation of a *kommene Lebenssstimmung*, a coming "mood of life."[4]

Among cultural disciplines, it was architecture that Neurath deemed of central importance, with the architect having the task of anticipating both technological and



Cráter Invertido, drawing from the collective comic Kuns by Return, 2022, produced in the context ofArts Collaboratory's participation in documenta fifteen. This version of the drawing is from a T-shirt.

social developments in the near future, including "*Änderungen der Lebensformen*" (changes in the forms of life).[5] Such remarks are suggestive in the context of contemporary aesthetic practices that seek to common or decolonize the means of artistic and intellectual production, which can easily be chided for amounting to little more than a woke reshuffling of the deck chairs on the Titanic. However, Neurath's use of the storied term *Lebensformen*—recently revived by authors like Giorgio Agamben and Rahel Jaeggi—drives home the point that any crudely economistic relegation of culture to a merely superstructural epiphenomenon must be rejected.[6] Yes, the capitalist value-form informs and deforms many *Lebensformen* and social relations—but its reign is not homogeneous, its sovereignty not absolute. As Raymond Williams rightly insisted already in 1973: "No mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts the full range of human practice, human energy, human intention."[7]

In his writings on dominant, residual, and emergent forms of culture, Williams maintained that "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created" within and against the dominant, and beyond residual or archaic elements.[8] When Williams began to theorize the concept of emergent social and cultural forms in the 1970s, the Western New Left tended to adhere to a strictly class-based analysis of historical development, though there was much debate about the relative importance of revolutionary "class consciousness" in relation to economic parameters—with Perry Anderson, for instance, emphasizing the importance of "those collective projects which have sought to render their initiators authors of their collective mode of existence as a whole, in a conscious programme aimed at creating or remodeling whole social structures."[9] While the historical dialectic of

feudality/aristocracy and bourgeoisie/proletariat informs Williams's account of residual, dominant, and emergent forms, on a fundamental level he insists that in any given order "there is always other social being and consciousness which is neglected and excluded: alternative perceptions of others, in immediate relationships; new perceptions and practices of the material world."[10] Hegemony is never total; "those practices, experiences, meanings, values which are not part of the effective dominant culture" can go from being *alternative* to being properly *oppositional*.[11]

post-Leninist, operaist guise.[12] A key example of a feminist movement with some roots in autonomous Marxism, while challenging its parameters in a process of immanent critique, is the Wages for Housework campaign, whose key theorists and organizers included Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici.

Indicative of the tensions between various "autonomous movements," Wages for Housework—like 1970s feminism in general—is often accused of disregarding the struggles of women of color, or the labor performed by Black women outside of the heteronormative white household. This

A Wages for Housework march, 1977. Source: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute / Bettye Lane.

For all his undogmatic subtlety, Williams never paid significant attention to the problematizations of Marxist accounts of class that were emerging from Black, anti-colonial, feminist, and queer movements. As the seventies progressed, an increasing divergence became apparent between a (male- and white-dominated) class-focused Marxist political theory and practice and emergent autonomous social movements. It should be noted that in the context of the seventies, the notion of autonomous social movements often referred less to Italian autonomous Marxism than to more expansive feminist, gay, or Black groups that had become autonomous from any Marxist vanguard— even in its

accusation hardly holds for someone like Selma James; through her background in C. L. R. James's post-Trotskyist Forest-Johnson tendency and in feminist community work, James developed a seminal analysis of the dialectic of "class" and "caste"—the latter being her term for nonclass identity in terms of gender and race, which is "the very substance of class," as she put it.[13] The objective of her early intersectionalism was not to play these categories off against each other, but to do justice to the "complex interweaving of forces" in social composition—noting, for instance, that "Black women will know what organization (with Black men, with white women, *with both, with*

neither) to make that struggle. *No one else can know*."[14] Thus, we are dealing with an analysis that complements and complicates Williams's account of emergence. Multiple identities may diverge and remerge over time. Black Marxists become Black nationalists, female socialists become feminists, queer theorists and anti-racist activists create coalitions for social justice that go beyond and challenge reductive notions of identity politics—even while lines keep being drawn among those who might be allies or, beyond that, comrades.[15]

Just what, then, is it that *emerges* in activist circles, in marginal milieus, in artistic and intellectual networks? Today's forms of emergence seem less like prefigurations of a foreordained future and more like forms of divergence that may or may not become concatenated to the point where they would amount to a *great divergence*. As "collective projects" and "collective agency" take on new and complex forms, how *can* processes of collective self-identification be grasped—not just historically, but also for the social media–driven present? How can such processes be intervened in and *shaped*? What is the role of disidentification between various "peoples" who cast each other in the role of other, alien, enemy? Are divergences always motivated through negation, by opposition?

Counter-Imitation and Schismogenesis

During the 1970s and into the eighties, a Deleuzo-Guattarian/autonomist shift to molecular micropolitics became pronounced in much theory and activism. Critical of the more orthodox brands of Marxism, Deleuze and Guattari sought out alternative ancestors such as Gabriel Tarde—turning one of the founders of French sociology into a radical thinker, precisely insofar as Tarde was non-dialectical, non-Hegelian, and non-Marxist.[16] Opposing a sociology that fetishizes binary and overcoded "collective representations," such as class, Deleuze and Guattari appreciated Tarde's micropolitical, molecular attention to "the little imitations, oppositions, and inventions constituting an entire realm of subrepresentative matter."[17] Tarde thus proved surprisingly relevant in the context of the molecular revolution that was inaugurated in May '68. In *A Thousand Plateaus*—the second volume of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*—Deleuze and Guattari quote him as arguing that in order to understand revolutionary transformations, "what one needs to know is which peasants, in which areas in the South of France, stopped greeting the local landowners."[18] While they obviously do not use Williams's terminology, Deleuze and Guattari can be said to side with forms of preemergence that may never fully settle into familiar identity categories such as class.

A central concept of Tarde's social philosophy is imitation, which he defined as "action at a distance of one mind upon another."[19] Distinguishing between imitation and counter-imitation, Tarde notes that some social actors are associated with each other in the negative, by virtue of being adversaries. Deleuze and Guattari note Tarde's focus on "the little *imitations, oppositions,* and *inventions* constituting an entire realm of subrepresentative matter," but they abstain from discussing his analysis of imitation in the realm of representation par excellence: the media and the opposing publics they constitute.[20] In Tarde's words:

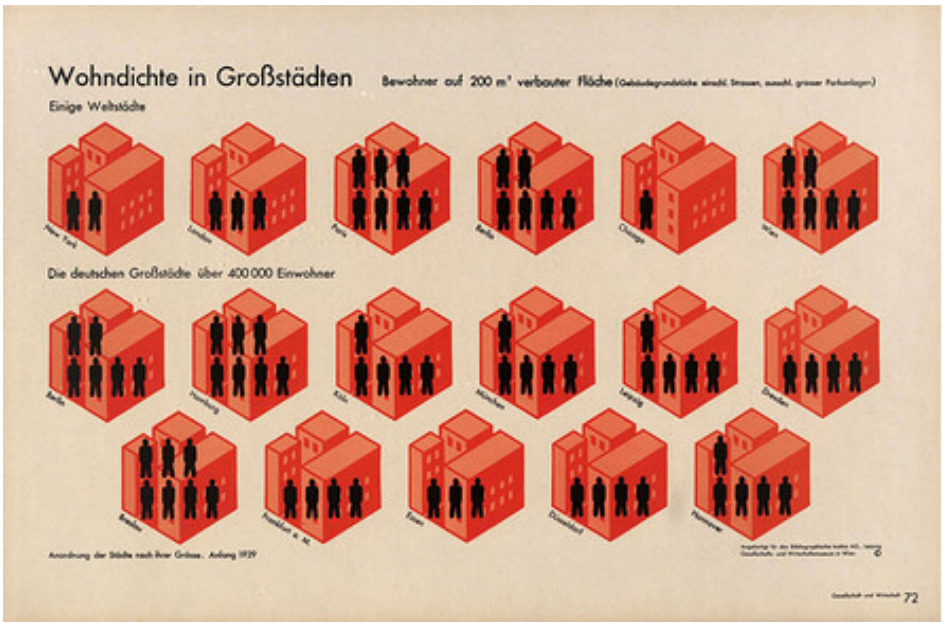
> No opinion is discussed by the press about which, I repeat, the public is not daily divided into two camps, those who agree with the opinion and those who disagree. But the latter as well as the former admit that it is impossible to be concerned for the time being with anything other than the question which is this forced upon them.[21]

Around 1900, in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, in which the French media had fueled anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, Tarde distinguished between the *crowd* (which had been theorized by Le Bon) and the *public*: the former is an embodied assembly, whereas the latter is a virtual entity created by print media, and, as such, is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Tarde's publics are not quite the same as Jürgen Habermas's idealized "reasoning public": they are produced and manipulated by professional journalistic agitators and can be as murderous as crowds. Tarde's print publics already generate filter bubbles. Whereas LeBon had focused on the dangers of the crowd, for Tarde the lesson of the Dreyfus Affair was that publics were less diverse than crowds, and more open to manipulation. In an analysis that takes on new relevance in the age of riots organized on social media, Tarde argued that crowds can become criminal, murderous mobs—but publics too can become criminal if properly molded by opinion makers, and behind every murderous modern mob there's an even more criminal public.[22]

It is no surprise that Tarde has become a reference for recent affect-theoretical accounts of the "spreadability" of hate on social media, while Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen struck a neo-Tardean note when noting that the platform has been designed to foster extremism and hate, testifying to a UK parliamentary committee that "anger and hate is the easiest way to grow on Facebook."[23] Such calculated (counter-)publics perform what one might call an *aggressive disengagement* with the other side, refusing to enter into even the most critical dialogue and opting instead for endless trolling, physical violence against racialized or sexualized Others, and attacks on institutions and organizations.[24] From a Deleuzian perspective, all of this is depressingly *molar*: the culture wars revolve precisely around overcoded representations of the most noxious kind, imposing segmentations on the molecular assemblages that traverse the social realm.

Even the meekest progressive attempts at alleviating necropolitical violence find themselves integrated in a narrative about Woke Antifa Socialists attacking Freedom or the American Way or Christian Values (take your pick).

classic 1936 study *Naven*, Bateson analyzed the society of the latmul people of New Guinea as a complex admixture of "complementary schismogenesis," such as ritualistic boasting battles between (groups of) men, and "symmetrical schismogenesis," such as the relations



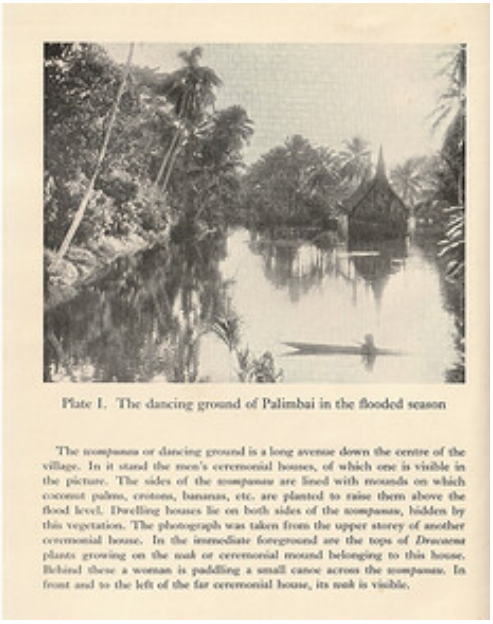


Plate I. The dancing ground of Palimbai in the flooded season

The *nompanua* or dancing ground is a long avenue down the centre of the village. In it stand the men's ceremonial houses, of which one is visible in the picture. The sides of the *nompanua* are lined with mounds on which coconut palms, crotons, bananas, etc. are planted to raise them above the flood level. Dwelling houses lie on both sides of the *nompanua*, hidden by this vegetation. The photograph was taken from the upper storey of another ceremonial house. In the immediate foreground are the tops of *Dracaena* plants growing on the *mak* or ceremonial mound belonging to this house. Behind these a woman is paddling a small canoe across the *nompanua*. In front and to the left of the far ceremonial house, its *mak* is visible.

Left: Otto Neurath, diagram showing residential density in major international and German cities,from Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft, 1930. Right: Page from Gregory Bateson, Naven: A Survey of theProblems suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe drawn from ThreePoints of View, 1936.

This is precisely where Tarde's sociology of mimesis displays its limitations. From a Deleuzian perspective, the main problem lies in what one could term Tarde's sociological realism: he attempts to identify and map social forms that are so many *processes of capture*, so many molar structures imposed on molecular becoming. This is why Deleuze and Guattari need to cherry-pick, and a full encounter with Tarde is avoided. The same applies to Gregory Bateson, whose impact is manifested in the very title *A Thousand Plateaus*—yet here too Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation is marked by occlusions and refusals. They note that Bateson uses the term plateau "to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end."[25] In Balinese culture, according to Bateson, sexually tinted games between mothers and their children substitute a "continuing plateau of intensity" for sexual climax, and Deleuze and Guattari use this to chide Western culture for its fixation on "exterior or transcendent ends."[26] What they do not mention is that Bateson's theorization of the plateau in Bali was occasioned by a failure, in the face of Balinese culture, of one of his key concepts: that of schismogenesis.[27]

Bateson's schismogenesis makes for a compelling companion concept to Tarde's counter-imitation.[28] In his

between the sexes. The latter case is marked by differentiation between different types of behavior, i.e., dominant and submissive, rather than by rivalry on the basis of a shared behavioral form, as in boasting. The "naven" ritual, which involves gender inversion through cartoonish transvestitism, allowed Bateson to analyze these schismogenetic patterns in extreme forms. While he was clearly convinced that he could extrapolate from the latmul case, and that all societies are partly shaped through this kind of "cumulative behavior," the Balinese ethos turned out to be different.[29]

One can hear Deleuze and Guattari applaud, yet Bateson did not replace one paradigm (schismogenesis) with another (the plateau). Rather, his analysis suggests that *some* societies have a "distaste for schismogenetic sequences" and organize their culture accordingly, seeking to substitute "a plateau for a climax."[30] Bateson presented this as *one* type of culture among others, and as a fairly exceptional one. He continued to return to schismogenesis, a concept whose versatility was evident early on. Already in *Naven*, Bateson used it to analyze colonial contact, explaining that "the average European resident believes that the natives in all parts of New Guinea are remarkably similar in all parts of the country" because the natives "have adopted the same tactics in

dealing with the Europeans," creating the same schismogenic pattern everywhere.[31] Beyond that, he summarily applied the notion to phenomena such as class war (complementary) and international rivalries (symmetrical).[32] After WWII, in the context of emerging cybernetics and systems theory, Bateson would (re)conceptualize schismogenesis as being regulated through feedback in self-corrective causal circuits.[33]

It is precisely the concept avoided by Deleuze and Guattari, schismogenesis, that has come to the fore in recent theory. Rodrigo Nunes's *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal* not only draws on Tarde, but also on Bateson, with Nunes arguing that neo-Leninist melancholia for "1917" and autonomist melancholia over "1968" exist in

> a relationship of mutual reinforcement that corresponds quite precisely to what Gregory Bateson called symmetrical schismogenesis: a "cumulative interaction" in which the members of two groups react to each other with an identical pattern of behaviour, with equal intensity but in opposite directions, so that each group will drive the other into excessive emphasis of the pattern, a process which if not restrained can only lead to more and more extreme rivalry and ultimately to hostility and the breakdown of the whole system.[34]

More commonly, Bateson's concept is used in the context in which it originated: the anthropological study of Indigenous or tribal societies.[35] In an essay on the anarchist anthropology of Pierre Clastres, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro notes that Clastres effectively distinguishes between "complementary" and "symmetrical" societies in the northwestern Amazon.[36] Whereas Viveiros here follows Bateson's lead in discussing schismogenetic processes *within* individual tribes/societies, Clastres's famous claim that many tribal societies have created mechanisms for preventing the emergence of hierarchies and state-like structures can itself be read in schismogenetic terms: these "societies against the state" do not represent some aboriginal primitive evolutionary phase, but a form of symmetrical schismogenesis through which certain tribes differentiate themselves from more hierarchical states in that part of the world.[37]

David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* (2021) is rife with references to Clastres. In what can be seen as a "Clastrean" response to Bateson, Graeber and Wengrow note that "Bateson was interested in psychological processes within societies, but there's every reason to believe something similar happens *between* societies as well. People come to define themselves against their neighbours"—and this, they argue, happened not only between different native societies in the Americas but also between European colonizers and Native Americans.[38] More specifically, it occurred between Indigenous American and European intellectuals during the eighteenth century. In their brilliant chapter on the "indigenous critique" of European society, Graeber and Wengrow argue against the assumption that the "noble savages" who proffer critiques of European society in the writings of Enlightenment writers were nothing but convenient fictional mouthpieces for the authors' opinions. Rather, Graeber and Wengrow adduce evidence that the model for many of these texts—the Baron de Lahontan's 1703 dialogues with the Native American statesman Kandiaronk—gives the reader a real sense of the latter's critical views of European society and morals. Faced with an expansionist form of life marked by unfreedom and inequality, Kandiaronk came to define Native American society in starkly opposite terms—a striking example of complementary schismogenesis *between societies*.[39]

To what extent is this translatable to the present? In a surprisingly totalizing statement that evokes Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, Graeber and Wengrow note that

> ever since the Iberian invasion of the Americas, and subsequent European colonial empires, … there's ultimately been just one political-economic system and it is global. If we wish, say, to assess whether the modern nation state, industrial capitalism and the spread of lunatic asylums are necessarily linked, as opposed to separate phenomena that just happen to have come together in one part of the world, there's simply no basis on which to judge. All three emerged at a time when the planet was effectively a single global system and we have no other planets to compare ourselves to.[40]

If Graeber and Wengrow largely avoid using the term "capitalism" and often appear to disconnect the analysis of the state from any systemic account of the rise of the capitalist mode of production, here they arrive at a nuanced position: it is not the state (or "the people") or "capitalism" that is sovereign but a politico-economic system in which the nation-state has served as a conduit for capital, even while regulating and at times blocking its flows. But if the nation-state was an "amalgam of elements" that are now "in the process of drifting apart," then to what extent will this process of disintegration open a potential for fundamental divergence?[41]

Fugitivity and Intercommunalism

Raymond Williams's opposition between the merely *alternative* and the properly *oppositional* (think sixties counterculture versus the politicized New Left) was called

into question by the micropolitical turn of the seventies and eighties, associated with Deleuze and Guattari's writing. While the effects of this have been ambiguous, it was also a theoretically and tactically rich moment.[42] With the notion of desertion being given positive valence, seen not as escapism but as a bid for autonomy, oppositional practices now came to be regarded as limited and as *insufficiently alternative*, as they remained beholden to what they oppose through an always partial negation. Deleuze's insistence on divergences that are irreducible to counter-imitation or complementary schismogenesis has been echoed recently by Isabelle Stengers, who strikes a Deleuzian note when she argues that processes of divergence should not be understood as "diverge from others," as doing so would turn divergence into fodder for comparisons:

> Divergence is not between practices; it is not relational. It is constitutive. A practice does not define itself in terms of its divergence from others. Each does have its own positive and distinct way of paying due attention; that is, of having things and situations matter. Each produces its own line of divergence, as it likewise produces itself.[43]

Stengers's turn of phrase, "line of divergence," is one of her nods to Deleuze and Guattari's "line of flight."[44] This, in turn, points to yet another element in the theoretical assemblage of *A Thousand Plateaus*: American Black radicalism of the late sixties and early seventies. The notes of imprisoned "Soledad Brother" and Black Panther activist George Jackson were published in a French translation in 1971, and in that same year Foucault's Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (Prison Information Group) put out a tract titled *L'assassinat de George Jackson*. Jackson's dictum that "I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon" became a crucial reference for the elaboration of the concept of lines of flight in *A Thousand Plateaus*.[45] Here too the use or appropriation of an author proceeds by way of decontextualization and abstraction—and in many respects, this parallels the occlusion of the theoretical contributions made by Black Panther activists. It is hard to argue with Harney and Moten's assessment that autonomism has a "debt at a distance to the black radical tradition"—and it is perhaps precisely in the maintenance of this distance that the debt lies.[46]

If Jackson's fugitivity was transmuted into Deleuzian desertion, more problematic than such appropriation is the decades-long theoretical neglect of the main Black Panther theorist, Huey P. Newton, who is only now beginning to come into view as an "unacknowledged intellectual" of the New Left—albeit one with troubling moments and patterns in his biography.[47] In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri appear to begin a much-needed reassessment by noting the importance of Newton's abandonment of his earlier Black nationalist "affirmation of identity": Newton "progressively shifts the revolutionary framework from nationalism to internationalism and finally 'intercommunalism' in an effort to designate a theoretical framework for liberation that implies the abolition of racial identity and its structures of insubordination."[48] Newton's intercommunalism was an attempt to articulate emergent forms of collective identification and collaboration beyond and against the nation-state. "We say that the world today is a dispersed collection of communities. A community is different from a nation. A community is a small unit with a comprehensive collection of institutions that serve to exist (*sic*) a small group of people."[49]

Newton argued that the present world was stuck in a state of reactionary intercommunalism, which is marked by a struggle "between the small circle that administers and profits from the empire of the United States, and the peoples of the world who want to determine their own destinies."[50] Here, in other words, a "community" that is an imperial elite extracts value from the world in the framework of a nation-state become global hegemon. The diagnosis was prescient, even if some of the details are dated. For Newton, it was clear that "reactionary intercommunalism (empire)" needed to be replaced by "revolutionary intercommunalism." He continues: "The people of the world, that is, must seize power from the small ruling circle and expropriate the expropriators."[51] The translation of this revolutionary horizon into revolutionary practice could take diverse and contradictory forms. On the one hand, Newton regarded China, North Korea, and Vietnam as "liberated territories" ruled by their people, or communities—though here he collapses his concept of communities back into that of a nation-state, ruled by a party that serves as the people's avant-garde. The Black Panther Party, of course, modeled itself on such parties, and Newton's Oakland chapter was clearly where the politburo was located.[52] This is not the place for a disquisition on the tensions within and between Black Panther theory and practice. Nothing is to be sugarcoated, but Newton's pronouncement that "there will always be contradictions or else everything would stop" suggests that even the most painful contradictions are to be worked with, and worked through.[53]

One particularly cogent feature of Newton's thinking is his rejection of identitarian closure, and his insistence on intercommunal, or transversal, concatenation. His analysis of empire, as well as personal encounters, led him to the conviction that Black and gay liberation movements needed to combine their struggle, as both groups found themselves victimized and brutalized by the state apparatus.[54] The Black Panthers should not be seen as an "identitarian" movement in any reductive sense, with Newton asserting the need for a "universal identity" created through the dialectical interplay of social groups and forces, opposing "cultural, racial, and religious chauvinism, the kind of ethnocentrism we have now."[55]

Left: Emory Douglas, Black Panther Party poster, 1969. Collection of Oakland Museum ofCalifornia. Right: Installation view of BELL Invites, curated by Vivian Ziherl and Aruna Vermeulenat Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, 2016, showing murals by Emory Douglas and theUniversity of Colour.

While he appropriated Leninist/Maoist rhetoric and methods for the Black Panthers, his concept of community broadened the horizon of struggle and prevented him from getting bogged down in debates about class vs. race or class vs. gender. What united all the struggles and made intercommunalism a necessity was the various communities' experience of oppression.

However, it is obviously not a given that such experience will actually be seen as a shared experience, and become the basis for solidarity and action. As John Narayan argues in an article that stages a critical dialogue between Newton, Deleuze, and Hardt/Negri, "Newton's account of the divisive effects of reactionary intercommunalism on the multitude and the need to combat such effects" is a particularly productive feature of this thought," providing "the missing link Hardt and Negri fail to provide in their account of the revolutionary assemblages of the multitude."[56] Newton's insistence that "the material and ideological effects of empire provide real and significant obstacles to the unification of a globally dispersed revolutionary subject" has never been more relevant.[57] From segments of the white working class supporting fascist candidates to Black anti-Semitism and feminist trans-bashing: the symptoms of reactionary intercommunalism abound.

The collision of identities is encapsulated beautifully by *Twilight City* (1989), an essay film by the Black Audio Film Collective, whose members were well-versed in American as well as British Black radical theory. *Twilight City* is set in an Afro-Caribbean community in Thatcherite London, which is being displaced as the Isle of Dogs is transformed into the Docklands financial district, a site of deterritorialized capital. The film's fictional narrator and a number of "talking-head" interviewees reflect on a kind of negative intercommunalism talking hold: Paul Gilroy, for one, insists that in Thatcher's London, people often inhabit the same physical space, being "physically proximate," without actually encountering each other in any meaningful way.[58] Communities are connected only negatively, as competitors; at worst, they become enemies subjecting each other to racist or homophobic violence.

The film's narrator, in fact, reveals that such negative intercommunalism runs right through her, as her Caribbean mother has no way of understanding her participation in queer nightlife: "As the old London dissolves, the lost souls are becoming more visible." Her friends are "creatures of the night" that her mother cannot accept. Her split identity is evoked in nocturnal views of London as well as through staged tableaux of aestheticized (male) bodies. This nightlife may well be seen as a desertion from Thatcherite London, with uncertain lines of divergence veering off into different trajectories, from careers in the arts and academia to truly marginalized forms of existence. Meanwhile, Gail Lewis notes that Black people now seem to move through London with more confidence, and that she is optimistic about the symbolic and cultural dimension but depressed when it comes to the material side of surviving in London.

Twilight City toured the festival circuit in the fall of 1989, around the time the Berlin Wall came down. In the wake of this historical event, Stuart Hall and Fredric Jameson had a

Black Audio Film Collective, Twilight City, poster, 1989.

conversation for the British magazine *Marxism Today* in which they grappled with the prospect that both the second and the third worlds would be "netted" in "a new world system" of post-1989 global capitalism—with the term "world system" again evoking the Marxist "world-systems theory" developed by Wallerstein.[59] If both Jameson (the American Marxist theorist of postmodernism) and Hall (the Jamaican-British pioneer of cultural studies) where attentive readers of Raymond Williams, Jameson stresses the systemic and the dominant, whereas Hall sides with difference and emergence. For Jameson, postmodernism was marked by dominant culture becoming more pervasive and hegemonic than ever before. As a "tendentially complete modernization" in which "older remnants have been removed," postmodernism is the apogee of cultural imperialism.[60] Hall insists on a dialectical counterpoint: from his British postcolonial standpoint, what is key is that postmodern standardization and mass culture produce, in a dialectical reversal, "a proliferation of difference, of otherness."[61]

In 1989, Hall had contributed two lectures to a symposium on "Culture, Globalization and the World-System" at Binghamton University, home to Immanuel Wallerstein and his institute.[62] Here, Hall analyzed "the global postmodern" as falling short of becoming a "unitary regime," in contrast to what certain French theorists decreed. Noting that "marginality has become a powerful space," Hall asserts that "our lives have been transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation."[63] Hall was of course highly aware of the limits of identitarian representation under capitalist conditions, with Blackness having the potential to sabotage as well as foster solidarity.[64] In the interview with Jameson, Hall seems more inclined to dwell on the problems: "Our sense of agency on the Left has always depended on a sense of coming together: solidarity—not just the 'lonely rebel' individual. But it's exactly that sense of totality, of collective action and solidarity, which has been undermined by the new logic of 'difference' which dominates the era of the postmodern."[65]

At Binghamton, Hall seemed more inclined to focus on potentiality. Invoking Williams, Hall went on to suggest that the marginal is a site of cultural emergence: "In the contemporary arts, I would go so far as to say that, increasingly, anybody who cares for what is creatively emergent in the modern arts will find that it has something to do with the languages of the margin."[66] However, we might also consider this notion of the marginal as troubling Williams's conceptual distinctions: in the sphere of marginality, the residual and the emergent can be hard to disentangle. *Twilight City,* from the same year, certainly suggests that marginality is contested terrain. With the social margins intensifying the pressures and contradictions of the system, they can easily become divided and conflictual—breeding grounds for reactionary intercommunalism.

Continued in " "

X

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Sandro Mezzadra, "Deserting the War," trans. Kelly Mulvaney, *transversal texts* , March 2022 https://transversal.at/transversal/0422/mezzadra/en .

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See Paul Raekstad, "Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defense," *Constellations* , no. 25 (2018) https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8675.12319 .

4
Otto Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf* (Laubsche Ver lagsbuchhandlung, 1928), 19. The declension in the text is " *kommender Lebensstimmung* ."

5
Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf* , 23.

6
On the genealogy of *Lebensform* /life-form/form-of-life, see my essay "Habitual Art History," in *In the Maze of Media: Essays on the Pathways of Art after Minimalism* , ed. André Rottmann (Transcript, forthcoming 2023).

7
Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (1973), in *Culture and Materialism* (Verso, 2005), 43.

8
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 123.

9
Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (Verso, 1980), 20.

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12
For this usage, see for instance Selma James, "Sex, Race, and Class" (1974), in *Sex, Race, And Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1951 –2011* (PM Press, 2012), 97, 100; and Sheila Rowbotham, "The Women's Movement & Organizing for Socialism" (1979), in Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (Merlin Press, 1979/2013), 181.

13
James, "Sex, Race, and Class," 96.

14
James, "Sex, Race, and Class," 98, 99, emphasis in original.

15
For a critique of the notion of the ally, see for instance Laurel Mei-Singh and Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor, "To Be Done with Allyship: Towards Oceanic Justice in the Pacific," *The Funambulist* , no. 46 (March–April 2023).

16
More recently, Maurizio Lazzarato has pursued this reading of Tarde. See for instance Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life," trans. Valerie Fournier, Akseli Virtanen and Jussi Vähämäki, *Ephemera* 4, no. 3 (2004).

17
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* , vol. 2 (1980), trans. Brian Massumi (Bloomsbury, 2013), 255.

18
Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* , 253.

19
Gabriel Tarde, "Preface to the Second Edition," *The Laws of Imitation* , trans. Elsie Clews Parsons (Henry Holt, 1903), xiv.

20
Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* , 219, emphasis in original.

21
Tarde, "Preface to the Second Edition," *Laws of Imitation,* xviii.

22
Gabriel Tarde, "Le Public et la foule" (1898), in *L'Opinion et la foule* (Félix Alcan, 1901), 48–49, 56–57. Today, as the dialectic of crowds and print publics has given way to one of crowds and networks, parliaments are stormed by mobs organized on Facebook and Telegram. Just like Tarde's print publics, today's networks have great criminal potential. Does this becoming-criminal begin when the network materializes as a physical mob, or before?

23
Denis Staunton, "'Anger and Hate Easiest Way to Grow on Facebook,' Says Whistleblower," *Irish Times* , October 25, 2021 https://www.irishtimes.com/business/technology/anger-and-hate-easiest-way-to-grow-on-facebook-sayswhistleblower-1.4710204 .

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For the notion of calculated publics, see Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* , ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo. J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (MIT Press, 2014).

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Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 20–21.

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Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 22.

27
Gregory Bateson, "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State" (1949), in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1972).

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See Matei Candea, "Revisiting Tarde's House," in *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and As* sessments (Routledge, 2010), 20n10.

29
Gregory Bateson, *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View* (Cambridge University Press, 1936), 171–197.

30
Bateson, "Bali," 113, 115.

31
Bateson, *Naven,* 184.

32
Bateson, *Naven,* 186.

33
See the 1958 epilogue in Bateson, *Naven*.

34
Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal* (Verso, 2021), 63.

35
Bateson first developed the concept in the article "C *ulture C ontact and Schismogenesis*" in *Man , no.* 35 (1935), and at book length in *Naven*.

36
"Clastres judiciously opposes the verticalizing and centripetal dynamics—differentiation by complementary schismogenesis, as Bateson would say—of the Chibcha, Aruaque and Carib peoples of this zone, to the horizontalizing and centrifugal dynamics—i.e. by symmetrical schismogenesis—which motivates the Tupi-Guarani people, hostile to social stratification." Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Politique des multiplicités: Pierre Clastres face à l'état* (Ed. Dehors, 2019), 88. My translation.

37
Pierre Clastres, *La Société contre l'Etat* (Minuit, 1974).

38
David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Hum anity* (Allen Lane, 2021), 57, emphasis in original. The motif of schismogenesis also shows up in some previous work by Graeber, such as the "Theses on Kingship" coauthored with Marshall Sahlins, which introduces the line of inquiry pursued in *The Dawn of Everything.* See Graeber and Marshall Sahlins, *On Kings* (Hau Books, n.d. (2017)), 1–22.

39
Graeber and Wengrow, *Dawn of Everything* , 27–77.

40
Graeber and Wengrow, *Dawn of Everything* , 449–50.

41
Graeber and Wengrow, *Dawn of Everything* , 231.

42
For cautioning remarks about the dangers of disregarding "collective struggle by actual minorities" in favor of "creative minorities yet to come," see Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 71.

43
Isabelle Stengers, "Comparison as a Matter of Concern," in *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 59.

44
See also Isabelle Stengers, *In Cat astrophic Times: Resisting the*

Coming Barbarism, trans. Andrew Goffey (Open Humanities Press/Meson Press, 2015), 23–24.

45
Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 239.

46
Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 64.

47
John Narayan, "Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019): 1–2. Patterns of misogynist violence in the Black Panther Party must be addressed as part of an overall reassessment of the movement's strengths and shortcomings.

48
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 336.

49
Huey P. Newton, "Intercommunalism" (1974), *Viewpoint Magazine* , June 11, 2018 https://viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-1974 .

50
Newton, "Intercommunalism." An early lecture by Newton on intercommunalism was published in *The Black Panther* 5, no. 30 (January 23, 1971). The newpaper would soon change its subtitle from *Black Community News Service* to *Intercommunal News Service* .

51
Newton, "Intercommunalism."

52
Delio Vásquez avers that "the Oakland chapter ended up in practice functioning as yet another political body, in addition to the FBI and local police, that some local chapters found themselves pitted against." Vásquez, "Intercommunalism: The Late Theorizations of Huey P. Newton, 'Chief Theoretician' of the Black Panther Party," *Viewpoint Magazine,* June 11, 2018 https://viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-the-late-theorizations-of-huey-p-newton-chief-theoretician-of-the-black-panther-party/ .

53
Newton, "Intercommunalism."

54
See Jared Leighton, "'All of Us Are Unapprehended Felons': Gay Liberation, the Black Panther Party, and Intercommunal Efforts Against Police Brutality in the Bay Area," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 3 (2019).

55
Newton, "Intercommunalism."

56
Narayan, "Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism," 15, 18.

57
Quoted in Narayan, "Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism," 16.

58
Hardt and Negri read Newton's anti-identitarianism as "the basis of Paul Gilroy's efforts to shift the discourse of black politics toward an abolition of race." Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 336.

59
Here I am combining elements from statements by both Jameson and Hall in "Interview with Stuart Hall" (1990), in *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism,* ed. Ian Buchanan (Duke University Press, 2007), 120. This conversation originally appeared in the September 1990 issue of *Marxism Today* under the telling title "Clinging to the Fragments."

60
Jameson in "Interview with Stuart Hall," 114. For Jameson's Williams-derived notion of postmodernism as "cultural dominant," see *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 6.

61
Hall in "Interview with Stuart Hall," 116.

62
See the second and definitive edition of the conference volume edited by Anthony D. King, *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

63
Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System,* 32, 34.

64
Hall in "Interview with Stuart Hall," 118.

65
Hall in "Interview with Stuart Hall," 118.

66
Hall, "The Local and the Global," 34.

Keti Chukhrov

Cracks in Theories of Emancipation under Conditions of War

What Caused the Crisis of Theories of Emancipation?

The current war in Ukraine has revealed numerous inconsistencies in certain left-leaning political theories—theories that have been regarded as cornerstones of emancipatory thought and practice. These theories propose alternatives to liberal-democratic mantras of "real politics."[1] The liberal-democratic worldview at issue here is well known: Western democracy is an advanced and civilized form of social organization; representative democracy is preferable to autocracy; the UN and NATO are alliances for collective defense; the democratic West supports the removal of autocratic regimes.

Since 1989, many of these liberal-democratic premises have been disputed. Some have been challenged as inapplicable to the struggles of disadvantaged social groups, for example. NATO has been criticized as a military alliance with a long history of imperialist interventions; representative democracy, some have pointed out, has been no obstacle to war crimes and is therefore remote from real democratic agency; and so on.[2] Western modernity and even Marxist universalism have been put under suspicion for neglecting the true concerns of the Global South. Moreover, as the cultural left (meaning the writers, academics, and cultural workers who do not participate in political movements or party politics) has argued almost universally, the governments of representative democracies often behave as badly as autocratic governments, with little difference between the two.

With the war in Ukraine, the above-mentioned critiques have lost some traction, especially as they have been forced to confront the aspirations of people in post-socialist societies—Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, the Baltic republics—to *voluntarily* orient themselves towards European democracy, NATO, and the EU, with all of their promised social protections. In most cases, this desire on the part of these populations has not been the result of coercion by EU or US interests. Rather, it has generally been an autonomous civil aspiration to use the West as a way to escape Russia's paternalist control. This strong aspiration for entry into NATO and the EU in some post-Soviet states was provoked not only by the fall of state communism, but also by the widely held conviction that affiliation with the EU represents a path to a more advanced form of contemporary civilized sociality.

After 1989, the populations of several post-socialist states—among them Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—came to see NATO as the greatest safeguard for their newly established sovereignty and independence from the Kremlin's expansionist policies, which continued after the Iron Curtain came down. Compared to post-Soviet oligarchic dictatorships, which restrict liberties and independent media completely, even neoliberalism came to be seen by such people as the lesser of two evils, and one worth fighting for.

Drawing of the war in Ukraine by Daria, nine years old, from Kharkiv. Courtesy of the "Mom, I See War" project.

This leads to my central point: it is important to dispute arguments that see the present conflict in Ukraine as merely a proxy war between two empires—on the one hand, the US, EU, and NATO, and on the other, Russia. Arguments that ascribe definite blame for the conflict to NATO also tend to underestimate and disrespect struggles for independence in post-socialist countries, depriving them of political subjectivity. According to these views, the aspirations of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and other countries towards NATO membership and EU candidacy have no agency of their own, which implies that these voices are unimportant. Moreover, blaming NATO for the Russian invasion underestimates the Russian Federation's responsibility for its vicious imperialist policies.

Ironically, Western "leftist" voices who claim that so-called Western values—representative democracy, freedom of speech, LGBTQ rights—would not bring any considerable changes to the lives of people living under post-Soviet autocracy usually live in the West and take advantage of those rights, however imperfect they may be.

However, the inability of some segments of the cultural left to recognize the new conditions of "real politics" is understandable. For decades, their discursive work was grounded in a critique of Western liberal democracy, and for good reason. However, after February 24, 2022, when Russia pierced the Ukrainian border, a mere critique of neoliberalism is no longer sufficient for developing a critical perspective on the situation in Eastern Europe, given that the post-socialist countries are at present much more endangered by their quasi-feudal oligarchies and autocratic repression than by liberal democracy. In other words, I am arguing that in a paradoxical twist of fate, liberals seem to have a greater understanding of real politics today than the (cultural) left, which historically had the task of organizing workers and other destitute populations to negotiate their participation in emancipatory politics. The comfortable position that allowed the cultural left to confirm its emancipatory reputation outside the realm of real politics is no longer

US navy war ship USS Simpson sails with the NATO fleet in the Adriatic Sea during Operation Sharp Guard, a blockade on shipments to the former Yugoslavia, 1995. License: Public domain.

plausible.

After the collapse of the socialist project, Western social democracy came to be seen as the only relatively progressive option for confronting post-Soviet oligarchic autocracies and dictatorships. Responding to this political climate, most developed capitalist systems incorporated leftist cultural politics and institutional practices of social democracy, which some people have used as tools to confront neoliberalism and expand the domain of the commons. Cornelius Castoriadis showed very clearly that under global capitalist conditions, this is the primary relationship between capitalist economics and the emancipatory institutions that contest it.[3]

Of course, it is very tempting to create an imaginary realm free from capitalism. It is more productive, however, to start from an awareness that *we are always already inscribed in capitalism*, as a basis for developing realistic strategies for diminishing its impact.

Once the socialist system was rejected, building an efficient capitalist system was the only option for post-socialist countries against post-Soviet nepotistic shadow economics. In other words, the course towards democracy in the post-socialist world has evolved under capitalist conditions. Because of this, in today's context we must undertake a more orthodox historical-materialist analysis and accept that Western liberal democracy, with all its awful features, is more progressive than autocratic post-socialist "feudalism."

The NATO Issue

According to numerous arguments from key left figures and publications in the West, NATO expansion into Eastern Europe was a historical mistake that triggered the Kremlin's recent reaction.[4] This implies that the Russian Federation and NATO are isomorphically equal counterparts. However, this reading of the situation is inaccurate for three reasons.

Firstly, even if there had been an unofficial agreement between Gorbachev and his Western counterparts in 1990 that NATO would not seek expansion, this agreement only held as long as NATO's counterpart was the Soviet Union.[5]

Secondly, despite certain colonial features, the Soviet Union was not a nation-state but a confederation of states, held together by a socialist political economy rather than by classical nineteenth-century imperialist aspirations. Indeed, the role of the Soviet Union as a superpower of global influence rested on its ideological and social impact worldwide. In the ideological rivalry between capitalism and socialism, there was a tacit distribution of influences between the Western (capitalist and liberal-democratic) hemisphere and the Eastern/Southern (pro-socialist) hemisphere. It was thus the political-economic and ideological dimension of socialism that had an influence on real politics, rather than the aspirations of a single state. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, is a nation-state and cannot exert this same impact, because it cannot profess any international political idea similar to socialism (as the USSR did). Thus, the Kremlin's belligerence today stems not so much from NATO expansion but from the inability of the Russian Federation, as a former major agent of world politics, to be content with being merely a federal nation-state. Russia's desire to have both—to be a capitalist nation-state and preserve the pretension to influence the former socialist countries, or to identify the historical Soviet borders with the Russian ones—demonstrates the most malign and outdated imperialist aspirations.[6] The expansion of NATO was thus an inevitable process triggered by the imperialist vision of an ideologically empty nation-state. If the NATO navy hadn't entered the Black Sea in 2008, for example, Russian troops might have invaded Tbilisi, despite agreeing to a ceasefire with the Georgian government.

Thirdly, no Russian leader feared NATO invasion in 2011 or 2012—at least publicly. Indeed, in 2012 American leaders believed that they were pursuing a "reset" of relations with Russia.[7] As Timothy Snyder argues,

> In 2002 Putin spoke favorably of the European Union and avoided portraying NATO as an adversary. In 2004 Putin spoke of European Union membership for Ukraine, saying that such an outcome would be in Russia's economic interest. He spoke of enlargement of the European Union as extending a zone of peace and prosperity to Russia's borders. In 2008 he attended the NATO summit.[8]

These statements seem to suggest that NATO expansion was not a primary issue for Russian security at the time; it was rather a bargaining chip to use with the former satellite states (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova), pressuring them to abandon their stated aspirations for closer relations with Europe. It is worth remembering that the Kremlin's support for the Abkhaz separatists in Georgia in 1991–93 was not provoked by any aspiration by Georgia to join NATO or the EU. Georgia was actually planning to maintain its neutrality. However, even though Georgia initially refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States—formed in 1991 by Russia and eleven other former Soviet countries, after the collapse of the USSR—later that same year Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze signed a charter stating Georgia's intention to eventually join the Commonwealth. As a result, Georgia was deprived of two of its regions—Abkhazia and Ossetia—and forced to become a satellite state of Russia, which was head of the Commonwealth. This situation continued until Mikhail Saakashvili, president of Georgia from 2004 to 2013, formally declined Commonwealth membership in 2009. Officially, under the USSR, Georgia and other republics were considered equal states. Back then, the fact that republics were satellites of Russia was tacit rather than formally acknowledged. However, after the formation of the Commonwealth in 1991, and a year later with the establishment of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Yeltsin and then Putin coerced certain former Soviet republics (Armenia, the Central Asian countries) into membership. Putin wanted to do the same with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, which would de facto contradict their sovereignty and independence. This is why these states revolted when they did.

Such inconsistent foreign-policy moves by Russia—claiming one thing and doing another, agreeing to international laws and then unexpectedly violating them—are part and parcel of the shadow tactics that the Kremlin has developed over the last twenty years. Putin's government has used both legal and illegal tactics in the political management of conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. Internally, Russian government officials claim that Ukraine and Russia are one nation, and that the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Ossetia should be annexed. But externally, on the stage of international law, they support a legal resolution to these issues, at least for certain period of time—until suddenly they carry out the political decision they had already developed internally, irrespective of international law. In this way, an abrupt and illegal political step is made "legal" unilaterally, without coordination with any international political or legal institution.

It goes without saying that NATO's military interventions in Iraq, Serbia, Libya, and elsewhere must be condemned according to a similar logic. Furthermore, NATO and EU membership didn't prevent the rise of right-wing governments in Hungary, Croatia, or Poland. Nor did it protect Greece from financial crisis and ruinous debt, or diminish the need for Greek, Croatian, and Polish citizens to become migrant workers in more prosperous EU cities. Were Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova to become EU members, this would not immediately solve the problem of the migration of their local populations to more prosperous Western countries. The hegemonies and

tensions, even colonial relations, between the richer and poorer EU countries would remain. However, it is also clear that without alliances with the West, the economic and political situation in these countries would become much worse.

Autocracy vs. Democracy: The Variegated Uses of Surplus Value

The present war in Ukraine makes evident systemic differences between two forms of governance: antidemocratic isolationist autocracy, and globally oriented pro-Western liberal democracy. Certain political scientists (like Vladimir Pastukhov) assume that for Russia this military invasion is a strategy for inciting an internal civil war between pro-autocratic and pro-democratic social groups, which it can then export to other territories like Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and so on. The filmmaker and writer Oleksiy Radinsky also argues that the real problem of the present war is not so much rooted in Ukraine; it is embedded in the malign social mutations and inconsistensies within Russia that it exports to other post-Soviet states.[9] Both autocratic governments and Western neoliberal ones affirm and reproduce capitalist economics. However, in Western liberal democracies there is a long history of counterbalancing neoliberal policies with social democratic programs, civic agencies, progressive taxation, spending by nongovernmental institutions—to uneven degrees of course. In such countries, especially those with strong social-democratic and nongovernmental institutions, the middle and lower classes have a relative ability to form civic networks and collective agency. In autocratic societies like Russia, class confrontation plays out less between the rich and poor than between autocratic ruling groups united with the "people" (including socially vulnerable populations), and the educated and internationally oriented middle class. As has been noted by many observers inside and outside such regimes, autocratic rulers often paradoxically manage to gain political legitimacy by espousing what sounds like anti-capitalist critique. Indeed, this is a method for dismissing democracy, by equating it with "Western capitalist perversities" or by pointing to the existence of social and economic injustice in Western countries—injustice that mirrors the autocrats' own but is erroneously differentiated.

While the production of surplus value governs economic policy in the US and EU just like in Russia, Kazakhstan, Iran, or Saudi Arabia, autocratic governments and Western liberal democracies distribute it in very different ways. As Boris Kagarlitsky emphasizes, in contemporary liberal democracies—especially in their social-democratic variants—the surplus is partially invested in municipal infrastructure, education, technology, contemporary culture, and so on, even if unevenly and conditioned by the capitalist logic of property. In post-socialist autocracies, however, surplus funds are almost always embezzled, invested in luxury commodities and private infrastructure, directed to the military, or transferred as assets to neighboring former socialist countries (like Georgia and Ukraine).[10] Typically, this last mechanism functions as follows: the Russian government purchases a business in a neighboring former Soviet republic while also bribing a politician to lobby for that business. As Kagarlitsky says, even if only a few people are corrupt in such a system, corruption becomes the basic operating principle of the whole system. When it is impossible to effectively invest money into upgrading economic and social infrastructures, it can only be embezzled.

Desiring the Facade

After the invasion of Ukraine, many wondered about Russia's motives: major Russian cities were bursting with money and the urban middle classes were relatively well-off and didn't engage with official political life. In February 2022, Moscow was ranked first in urban infrastructure development and quality of life by the United Nations Human Settlement Program. Crimea, the Luhansk People's Republic, and the Donetsk People's Republic had already been annexed. Why would Russia so cataclysmically jeopardize its prosperity and its impunity for these imperial crimes in exchange for the vague possibility of preventing Ukraine's pro-Western drift by military means? This is a thorny question to formulate, let alone answer. But the reality of the invasion and the broad public support it currently enjoys in Russia demonstrates that the material conditions for this war were in place long before 2023.

In December 2011, large protests broke out in Moscow against what was perceived as a rigged election. After these protests, the Russian political class sought to quiet the unrest through investment in urban consumerist infrastructure. Instead of investing in the development of a professional meritocracy (something that liberal proselytizers like Sergey Guriev and Alexander Navalny have called for), Putinist urban technocrats focused on developing consumer luxuries and cultural recreation. In the Putinist system, access to versatile modes of consumption acts as a substitute for the development of technology and social agency. This is the logic of the Potemkin village carried into the autocratic present: the facade is enough, regardless of the content behind it. Here is where the population of the major Russian cities comes to a vicious consensus with power. In his analysis of Putinism, political theorist Ilya Budraitskis paraphrases Hannah Arendt from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "For Arendt," writes Budraitskis, "the essence of fascist totalitarian society is not the penetration of politics into all social life, but rather the ultimate depoliticization."[11] Even when urban-dwellers do not support the Kremlin's decisions, they are more or less content with the new facade—a higher quality of life (for some), clean streets, access to digital technology and diverse services, and perhaps most notably the omnipresence of contemporary

culture and art. Thus, consumption connoisseurship has come to define the path to being a successful contemporary citizen in Russia. Outside the main centers of power and wealth, the citizens of poorer regions have also gained access to new forms of consumption, which have alleviated some resentment toward the elites.

Moscow even became enticing to Western cultural workers, who willingly frequented its cultural venues and came to enjoy its glamorous hotels and restaurants. On December 3, 2021, three months before the invasion, Moscow saw the opening of a luxurious cultural institution, GES-2 (financed by oligarch Leonid Mikhelson). The grand opening was attended by an enormous number of prominent art workers from all over the world. The foreign guests competed to be involved with or employed by GES-2 projects. Again, a glossy facade concealed a shadow capitalism that had no interest in actually developing productive industry or social and technical infrastructure.

Indeed, the principle device of Putinist political technology is the manipulation of semantics to shape appearances, where any signifier or term can be imposed on any event, thing, or situation. This is the context in which a Federal Security Service worker can pretend to be an art historian, an orchestra conductor can be introduced as a curator, and an aggressor can be called a victim.

Unfortunately, voluntarily or not, Russian contemporary art has been compliant with such manipulations—and in many cases has employed the same techniques. My Western colleagues often asked me how GES 2 and the Garage Museum in Moscow managed to achieve such high levels of attendance—levels that seem unattainable to many Western contemporary art centers. The reason, to my mind, is that after the first Moscow Biennale in 2005, contemporary art in Russia became part and parcel of the consumerist paradise of the megapolis. It was associated with social prestige, thus garnering a huge amount of money from private and public sources. Art and culture enhanced the consumerist standards of the city, while expanded consumption allowed policymakers to integrate culture and art into economic planning.

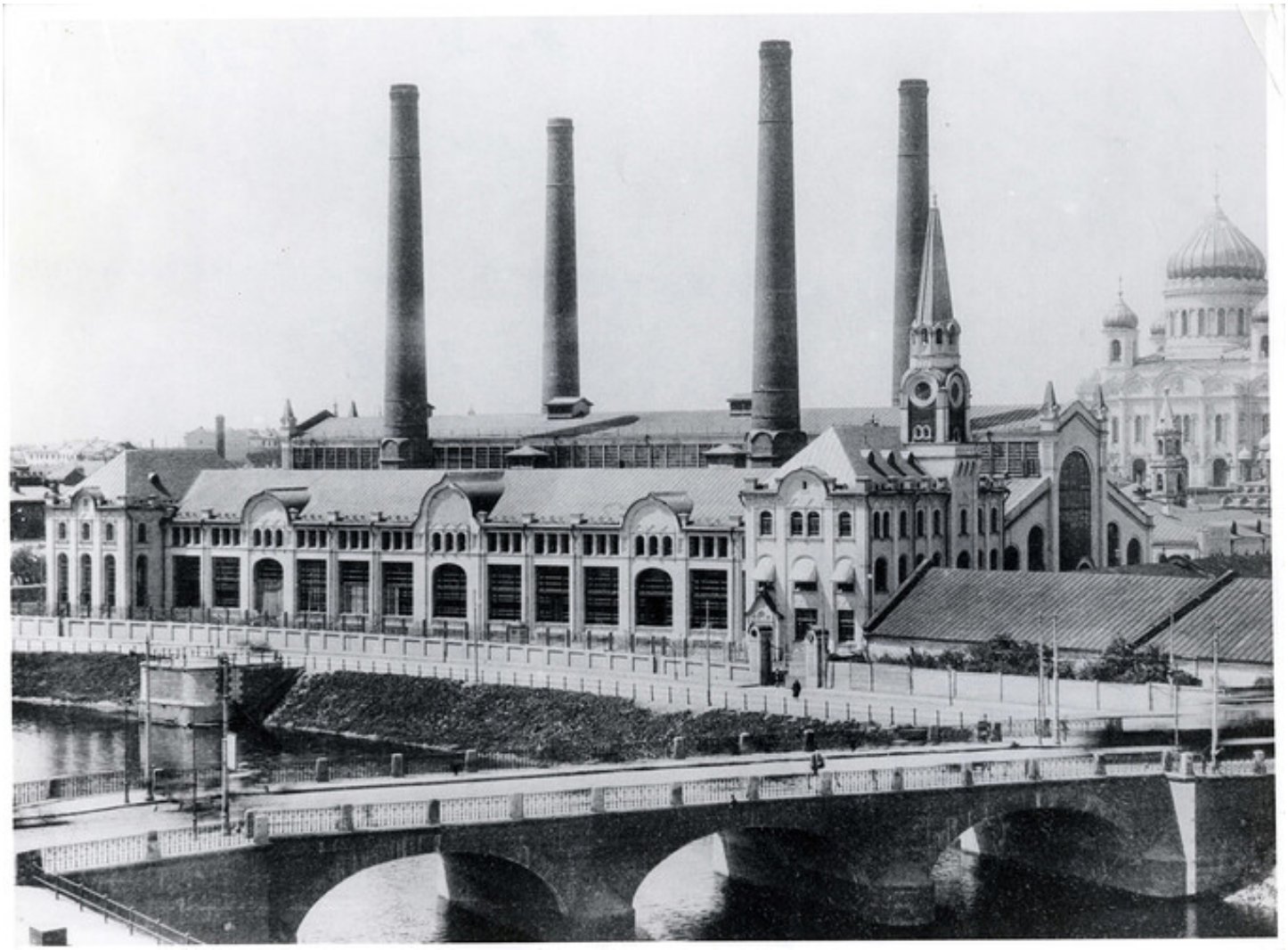
Numerous art projects in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg that at first seemed cutting edge and attracted progressive international artists, curators, and theorists often forcefully marginalized longstanding forms of artistic and intellectual expertise in Russia. What was ousted was not so much grassroots art production but rather the credentialed experts, creators, and inventors of the intellectual and artistic milieu that emerged at the end of the 1980s and continued until the mid-2000s. Indeed, it was in the mid-2000s when the living process of cultural and intellectual production in Russia was hijacked, first by big capital and then by the state. Today, most positions in museums and other important cultural institutions are filled by technocrats or other nonart workers. Even though cultural workers in Russia have mourned the recent resignations of Pushkin Museum director Marina Loshak and Tretyakov Gallery head Zelfira Tregulova, it must be said that their appointment already marked the evacuation of the cultural and intellectual sphere of experts. Figures like Loshak and Tregulova occupied the artistic space that had been earlier created by others. By 2015, for example, there was not a single practicing curator in charge of any Russian contemporary art institution, only managers on good terms with the Ministry of Culture.

Three Factors in the Electoral Support for Post-Socialist Autocracies

How is it that the most wealthy representatives of the ruling class, whose immense fortunes had been made through the criminal abuse of limited resources and negligence towards underprivileged populations, are supported by the majority of voters in post-Soviet autocracies? I would point to three factors.

The first lies in the association of freedom with the right to ignore the law. For self-made post-socialist entrepreneurs, the arrival of democracy was associated with freedom *from* the law and taxation, freedom *from* any civic responsibility and transparency about the source of one's wealth. Such freedom implied legitimizing the shadow areas that were criminalized during the socialist period but nevertheless thrived in the underground economy. When post-Soviet elites saw that accumulation and enrichment were not sufficient for building capitalist democracy, post-Soviet governments and the newly enriched oligarchs reverted to kinship-based relations. For example, numerous Georgian oligarchs used to be "thieves in law" and members of the shadow mafia. As soon as their sources of wealth had to be made transparent, they became enemies of Western democracy and even ardent "critics" of capitalism. It is therefore understandable why the post-Soviet communist parties and certain leftist groups seem to be more loyal to local clans and oligarchs than to Western neoliberalism grounded in law: they think they are siding with a less developed capitalism, against a more advanced one .

The second factor follows directly from the first: the illegal post-Soviet privatization and then random distribution of the former social wealth among private owners caused both extreme pauperization and extreme enrichment among former Soviet populations. In the post-Soviet period, democracy was therefore often associated with this economic injustice. Putin managed to deflect the guilt and blame for privatization onto Yeltsin's government; Putin associated himself instead with a return to social guarantees reminiscent of state socialism. Paradoxically, Yeltsin's government—which is considered to be more liberal and democratic than Putin's—was not very supportive of the unprivileged, whereas Putin first gained electoral support by attending to public employees (e.g.,



GES-2 power plant before it was converted into a contemporary art venue, Moscow, date unknown.

by indexing the salaries of educational and medical workers to inflation and by preserving free health care). For post-socialist liberal democrats, the struggle against Soviet totalitarianism entailed the complete demolition of the Soviet social sphere, including the cornerstones of a de-privatized social state: free education, free health care, free housing. As they privatized industrial production, media, and public services, they did not notice that they merely deprived the bulk of the population of social guarantees. The biggest revolt against the capitalist democratic changes took place in October 1993 in Moscow. This is when the Supreme Soviet disobeyed Yeltsin, who planned to dissolve it in order to create a new parliament, which was needed to legalize privatization. Protests broke out in defense of the Supreme Soviet. They were ruthlessly suppressed: 154 people were killed and even more wounded. In short, post-Soviet liberals ignored social-democratic programs, which are usually part and parcel of European democracy. It is no surprise then that the unprivileged populations united around the paternalist political forces that guaranteed at least some minimal social spending. As Dmitry Muratov remarks, when in democratic societies welfare diminishes and people get poorer, they usually put pressure on their governments. In autocratic societies—in Russia most visibly but not exclusively—the poorer people are, the more they unite around authority in the expectation of some small reward.

The third factor is more complex. It has to do with the split between official politics and the spheres of civic emancipatory autonomy. Citizens of Western democracies—despite the many deviations from democracy in these countries—have legacies and traditions that exist outside the sphere of the state, in public and nongovernmental spheres. These nongovernmental spheres nudge governments against austerity and various kinds of discrimination and supremacy. Here, civic life is not confined to social assistance but presupposes intellectual work, public agonism, and an expanded body of critique. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and elsewhere, discuss the forms of public

agonism at length. Even with the considerable drawbacks of capitalist democracy and its limited response to emancipatory demands, public debate is not censured by the state in Western democracies. As a result, the gap between intellectual workers practicing emancipatory critique and various sorts of laymen is lessened. In Russia, Belorussia, and other autocratic political systems, the gap between educated cultural workers and other communities—be they richer or poorer—is vast. As stated above, in autocracies social segregation is not between the poor and the rich but between the enlightened middle class/intellectuals and the rest, regardless of their income. In the absence of powerful left-leaning and progressive opposition in parliament, the "people" side with the paternalist autocracy.

The present war crystalizes the division between two social domains: on one side, liberals, critical intellectuals, and contemporary art workers (often with left-leaning politics); on the other, political and business elites, official cultural workers, and the majority of the population. Each of these domains refuses to recognize or legitimize the social representation of the other.

Catastrophe

The formula for the present catastrophe of Russia is the transformation of socialist and post-socialist reality into a quasi-fascist phenomenon: the most unprivileged social groups side with the ruling elites and become the electorate of corrupt autocratic oligarchies. They support war and imperialist expansion, homophobia, clericalism, and anti-Western xenophobia. Meanwhile, the enlightened and globalized intelligentsia, as well as the former meritocracy (i.e., the critical middle class, which of course encompasses not only liberals but left-leaning students and cultural workers), supports human rights, civil liberties, and emancipation. They consequently become outcasts or exiles.

Interestingly, the social composition of the 1917 revolution was different. At that time, the left-leaning middle class managed to find a shared language with the proletariat. We, the intelligentsia today, haven't managed to form such a continuity with the unprivileged layers of society in Russia. Nor have we managed to construct any agonal buffer zones in the cultural and artistic sphere to influence emancipatory transformation. Navalny's program was a very basic attempt to do so, but it focused much more on the denunciation of corruption than on social construction. Instead of building agonism on the cultural terrain, we allowed the state and pro-state private capital to appropriate the sphere of civil agency, until it was too late.

Considerable responsibility for the appropriation of the civic sphere by the regime lies with several liberal politicians of Yeltsin's time. After Putin's appointment, they preferred to serve his government rather than contribute to the parliamentary opposition when they still had agency and visibility. Some of them even participated in bringing Putin to power. In fact, the liberal political technocrats—such as Gleb Pavlovsky (Foundation of Effective Politics), Stanislav Belkovsky (Institute of National Strategy of Russia), Marat Gelman (gallerist, another founder of the Foundation of Effective Politics, and deputy director of Channel One Russia), and Anatoly Chubais (Rosnano Group)—were the principle architects of the initial stage of Putin's power. They all threw their weight behind the empowering of Putin's regime, only joining the liberal opposition *after* Putin got rid of them.[12] As the liberals often themselves acknowledge, they helped Putin to make the autonomous leftist (socialist) opposition vanish completely. Paradoxically, their contribution brought about an unexpected effect: the leftist parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition was subsumed by the autocratic and military elite. Due to the neutralization of leftist and social-democratic viewpoints, the discourse of social justice was usurped by the regime, while the absence of a liberal opposition enhanced the power of the military and security services.

In *Fascism in its Epoch*, Ernst Nolte argues that the fascist turn in German politics came about because liberals ousted leftists from the political-economic arena. In Russia, the situation was similar: the state, having transformed itself into a militarized dictatorship, expelled not only left-liberals and communists but also competitive market economics, subsuming both capitalist democracy and socialist politics.

The Russian political situation of the last ten to fifteen years is in many respects reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s. Meanwhile, emancipatory theory and the contemporary global left have reached an impasse: while they fairly criticize both capitalism and right-wing politics, they regard the abolition of private property and capitalist surplus-value economics—the political-economic achievements of the October Revolution—as coercive and totalitarian. In other words, the cultural left claims to be against capitalism but at the same time opposes the revolutionary abolition of capitalist economics. The left's dismissal of the radical anti-capitalist political-economic changes initiated by the Third International after 1917 demonstrates that *equality politics without these political-economic transformations is possible only with the preservation of the capitalist condition, regulated by social-democratic institutions*. The global left thus associates emancipatory politics with the Menshevik stance. If this is true, then the politics of emancipation and social justice can only exist under conditions of capitalist democracy—a formula that is the inevitable status quo of post-socialist global politics. Consequently, it is inconsistent for the left to denounce Western liberal democracy and sneer at the EU aspirations of post-Soviet republics without providing a radical political-economic alternative—as the Marxists did in 1917.

X

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1
By “theories of emancipation” I refer to an array of critical and political theories that propose anti-capitalist ideologies and practices that go beyond liberal-democratic politics and the arena of “real politics”—the arena of executive state power exercised through official government institutions.

2
For an example of these kinds of critiques, see DIEM 25, a pan-European direct-democracy movement founded in 2016 by, among others, former finance minister of Greece Yanis Varoufakis https://diem25.org/en/ .

3
Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Polity Press, 1987).

4
For examples see this interview with Noam Chomsky https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nj8X1uvM-A ; and Benjamin Schwartz and Christopher Layne, “Why Are We in Ukraine?: On the Dangers of American Hubris,” *Harper’s Magazine* , June 2023.

5
According to unconfirmed discussions, Gorbachev acceded to the unification of Germany on the condition that NATO not pursue expansion.

6
At an awards ceremony for the Russian Geographic Society six years ago, Putin asked a schoolboy where Russia’s borders ended. The boy responded nervously in front of a crowd that they ended after the Bering Strait, just before the US. Not quite, Putin retorted: “Russia’s borders never end” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S75f65c8YT0 .

7
Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (Tim Duggan Books, 2018), 48.

8
Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*, 42.

9
Oleksiy Radynski, “The Case Against the Russia Federation: One Year Later,” *e-flux notes*, May 15, 2023 https://www.e-flux.com/notes/539829/the-case-against-the-russian-federation-one-year-later .

10
Boris Kagarlitsky spoke about this in an interview with K. Sobchak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gv3a2dozvA (in Russian).

11
Ilya Budraitskis, “Putinism: A New Form of Fascism?” *Spectre*, October 27, 2022 https://spectrejournal.com/putinism/ .

12
Marat Gelman participated in the Ukrainian electoral campaigns of Viktor Medvedchuk (2001) and Victor Yanukovich (2004).