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Editorial

Art has something to teach Marxism about the reasons for its great historical failure to understand nationalism, because art proceeds with the understanding that the materiality of representation is not the same thing as the materiality of production. If it were, if the value-process were reducible to the labor-process, or vice versa, then both art and inflation would be impossible.

Duchamp understood this even before Keynes did. Marxists don't like to admit it, but their whole show relies on the gold standard as a way of avoiding the problem of the materiality of representation; because labor can only immediately be the source of value if the medium used to represent value is uncontested. Once the gold standard vanishes, the mediation of value becomes a social question distinct from the social question of labor. And the social question of valuable media is determined, in the last instance, by the jurisdiction of the artist. The suspicion that the nation-state has for art is just the fear of losing its monopoly on the management of valuable material. National Socialism staged exhibitions denouncing degenerate art precisely because their own "national art"—their currency—had degenerated so completely as to become nearly value-less.

This explains the desire for artists to see themselves now as gods, now as slaves. In the first case they command the world because they can inscribe value into anything—think of Picasso paying for meals with scribbles on napkins—or Damian Hirst managing his dot paintings like a central banker. In the second they are workers like any other, happy to slip inside the warmth of a movement that needs more from them than ever. Sometimes solidarity means recognizing that the differences between us are only differences, rather than pretending to be all alike in order to hoard our singular editions for ourselves.

Once it was cliché that businesspeople only wanted to talk about art, while artists only wanted to talk about money. Today the space between these two obsessions feels more precarious than before. Rather than pretending to be slaves, maybe we should ask: What would I want from the free, if I were otherwise?

X

Hito Steyerl

A Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War

I love history.
But history doesn't love me back,
Whenever I call her I get her answering machine.
She says: "Insert logo here."

A tank on a pedestal. Fumes are rising from the engine. A Soviet battle tank—called IS-3 for Joseph Stalin—is being repurposed by a group of pro-Russian separatists in Konstantinovka, Eastern Ukraine. It is driven off a WWII memorial pedestal and promptly goes to war. According to a local militia, it "attacked a checkpoint in Ulyanovka, Krasnoarmeysk district, resulting in three dead and three wounded on the Ukrainian side, and no losses on our side."[1]

One might think that the active historical role of a tank would be over once it became part of a historical display. But this pedestal seems to have acted as temporary storage from which the tank could be redeployed directly into battle. Apparently, the way into the museum—or even into history itself—is not a one-way street. Is the museum a garage? An arsenal? Is a monument pedestal a military base?

But this opens up more general questions. How can one think of art institutions in an age that is defined by planetary civil war, growing inequality, and proprietary digital technology? The boundaries of the institution have become fuzzy. They extend from pumping the audience for tweets, to a future of "neurocurating" in which paintings will surveil their audience via facial recognition and eye tracking to check whether the paintings are popular enough or whether anyone is behaving suspiciously.

Is it possible, in this situation, to update the twentieth-century terminology of institutional critique? Or does one need to look for different models and prototypes? What is a model anyway, under such conditions? How does it link on- and off-screen realities, mathematics and aesthetics, future and past, reason and treason? And what is its role in a global chain of projection as production?

In the example of the kidnapped tank, history invades the hypercontemporary. It is not an account of events post factum. It acts, it feigns, it keeps on changing. History is a shape-shifting player, if not an irregular combatant. It keeps attacking from behind. It blocks off any future. Frankly, this kind of history sucks.

This history is not a noble endeavor, something to be studied in the name of humankind so as to avoid being repeated. On the contrary, this kind of history is partial,

A stormtrooper crashes the annual Battle Of Hastings reenactment in Northamptonshire, England, on July 20, 2013. Photo: Getty Images.

partisan, and privatized, a self-interested enterprise, a means to feel entitled, an objective obstacle to coexistence, and a temporal fog detaining people in the stranglehold of imaginary origins.[2] The tradition of the oppressed turns into a phalanx of oppressive traditions.[3]

Does time itself run backwards nowadays? Did someone remove its forward gear and force it to drive around in circles? History seems to have morphed into a loop.

In such a situation, one might be tempted to rehash Marx's idea of historical repetition as farce. Marx thought that historical repetition—let alone reenactments—produces ludicrous results. However, quoting Marx, or indeed any historical figure, would itself constitute repetition, if not farce.

So let's turn to Tom Cruise and Emily Blunt instead, which is more helpful. In the blockbuster *Edge of Tomorrow*, the Earth has been invaded by a savage alien species known as Mimics. While trying to get rid of them, Blunt and Cruise get stuck in a time-looped battle; they get killed over and over again, only to be respawned at sunrise. They have to find a way out of the loop. Where does the Mimic-in-chief live? Underneath the Louvre's pyramid! This is where Blunt and Cruise go to destroy him.

The enemy is inside the museum, or more accurately, underneath it. The Mimics have hijacked the place and turned time into a loop. But what does the form of the loop mean, and how is it linked to warfare? Giorgio Agamben has recently analyzed the Greek term *stasis*, which means both civil war and immutability: something potentially very dynamic, but also its absolute opposite.[4] Today, multiple conflicts seem to be mired in stasis, in both senses of the term. Stasis describes a civil war that is unresolved and drags on. Conflict is not a means to force a resolution of a disputed situation, but a tool to sustain it. A stagnant crisis is the point. It needs to be indefinite because it is an abundant source of profit: instability is a bottomless gold mine.[5]

Stasis happens as a perpetual transition between the private and public spheres. It is a very useful mechanism for a one-way redistribution of assets. What was public is privatized by violence, while formerly private hatreds become the new public spirit.

A helicopter aims for I. M. Pei's pyramid at the Louvre in a scene from Edge of Tomorrow (2014).

In Alfonso Cuarón's movie Children of Men (2006), Michelangelo's David has been damaged and is kept in Tate's Modern's Turbine Hall to protect it from the civil war raging outside.

The current version of stasis is set in an age of cutting-edge nonconventional warfare. Contemporary conflicts are fought by über-militias, bank-sponsored bot armies, and Kickstarter-funded toy drones. Their protagonists wear game gear and extreme sports gadgets, and they coordinate with *Vice* reporters via WhatsApp. The result is a patchwork form of conflict that uses pipelines and 3G as weapons within widespread proxy stalemates. The present permawar is fought by historical battle reenactors (in the Ukrainian example, on both sides of the conflict[6]), which one could well call real-life Mimics. Stasis is the curving back of time into itself, in the context of permanent war and privatization. The museum leaks the past into the present, and history becomes severely corrupted and limited.

Alfonso Cuarón's brilliant film *Children of Men* presents another way that art institutions might respond to planetary civil war.[7] It depicts a bleak near-future where humanity has become sterile. A planetary civil war has engulfed Britain, dividing the island into segregated zones, one for refugees and undocumented persons—a total dystopia—and another for citizens. Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern has become the home of the Ministry of the Arts; here, precious artworks are given a safe haven: an Arc of the Arts. In one scene set in Turbine Hall, Michelangelo's *David* is shown with a broken leg, perhaps damaged during the conflict.

The destruction of antiquities by Daesh, which was preceded by major destruction and the looting of cultural objects during the US invasion in Iraq, raises the question: Wouldn't it be great to have an Arc of the Arts that could rescue the antiquities of Palmyra or Nineveh and safeguard cultural treasures from violence?

However, the Arc of the Arts is a quite ambivalent institution. One is never quite sure what its function really is. In another scene, Picasso's *Guernica* is used as a decoration for a private dinner.[8] The Arc of the Arts might be an institution that has become so secure that the only people permitted to see the artworks are the Arc's directors, their children, and their servants. But it could also be an evolution of international freeport art storage, where artworks disappear into the invisibility of tax-free storage cubes.[9]

Besides the international biennial, duty-free art storage is probably the most important contemporary active form for art. It's like the dystopian backside of the biennial, at a time when liberal dreams of globalization and cosmopolitanism have been realized as a multipolar mess peopled with oligarchs, warlords, too-big-to-fail corporations, dictators, and lots of newly stateless people.[10]

In the late twentieth century, globalization was described as a formula: the value of civil society multiplied by the internet divided by migration, metropolitan urbanism, the power of NGOs, and other forms of transnational political organization.[11] Saskia Sassen characterized those activities as "citizen practices that go beyond the nation."[12] The internet was still full of hope and people believed in it. This was long ago.

The organizational forms pioneered by human rights NGOs and liberal women's rights campaigns are now deployed by oligarch-funded fascist battalions, GoPro jihadi units, displaced dudes playing FOREX exchanges, and internet trolls posing as feng shui Eurasians.[13] In their wake, para-statelets and anti-"terrorist" operation zones emerge alongside duty-free zones, offshore entities, and corporate proxy concessions.[14] At the same time, horizontal networks are turned into global fiber-optic surveillance: the planetary civil war is fought by engaging with the logistic disruptions of planetary computerization. Contemporary cosmopolitans do not fail to promptly engage in civil warfare whenever the chance presents itself. Every digital tool imaginable is put to work: bot armies, Western Union, Telegram,[15] PowerPoint presentations, jihadi forum gamification[16]—whatever works. Stasis acts as a mechanism that converts the "cosmo-" of "cosmopolitan" into "corporate" and the polis into property.

The corresponding institutional model for art is freeport art storage, built on tax-exempt status and tactical

American GIs, under the supervision of Capt. James Rorimer, exhibit some of the paintings recaptured from Nazi forces at Neuschwanstein Castle in southern Germany. The retrieval of 21,000 items looted by the Nazis was the basis of the plot of George Clooney's 2014 movie The Monuments Men. Photo: NARA.

Guernica was hung outdoors in the Spanish Republic's 1937 World Expo pavilion in Paris.

extraterritoriality. *Children of Men* shows how this model could become a template for public institutions amidst the effects of planetary civil war, securing artworks to the point of withdrawal. While the international biennial was the active form of art for late twentieth-century ideas of globalization, duty-free art storage and the terror-proof hypersecure bunker are its equivalent in the age of globalizing stasis and pop-up NATO fence borders. But this is not a necessary or inevitable outcome.

Consider how *Guernica* was hung during a previous global civil war.

Guernica was made for the Spanish Republic's pavilion at the 1937 World Expo in Paris, to show the results of airstrikes on civilian populations. In terms of conservation, this was a lousy decision indeed. The painting was hung more or less outdoors for quite some time.

In the future projected by *Children of Men*, Picasso's painting finds shelter from the mayhem of war in a private dining room. The painting might be "safe," and it certainly enjoys a climate-controlled atmosphere, but very few people will see it. In the historical civil war, however, a completely opposite decision was made: to expose the painting, to literally *put it out there*. After all, in French and other Latin languages, a show is called an "exposition." Not an imposition.[17]

In terms of conservation, the scenario in *Children of Men* is contradictory, because the first thing that has to be conserved or even created is a situation where art can be seen and accessed. Why is this so? Because art is not art if it cannot be seen. And if it is not art, there is no point in

Janson Yu and Liyan Hu have recreated the Bamiyan Buddhas by projecting a 3-D laser hologram into the niches that once housed the destroyed statues.

conserving it. More than the artworks themselves, the thing that's threatened by the institutional response to civil war—be it privatization or overprotection—is public access. But it is public access, to a certain degree, that makes art what it is in the first place, thus necessitating its conservation. Hence the contradiction: art requires visibility to be what it is, and yet this visibility is precisely what is threatened by efforts to preserve or privatize it.

But there is something wrong here. The Spanish Republic's pavilion is, after all, an example from 1937. Am I not lapsing into bad old nostalgic Zombie Marxism here? Isn't this repetition as farce?

The answer is no. Let's come back to *Edge of Tomorrow* to see how it solves the problem of the loop. It offers an unexpected solution to the problem of stasis, to escaping from history-as-repetition. The movie is based on the novel *All You Need Is Kill* by Hiroshi Sakurazaka, which built a narrative out of the experience of hitting the reset button on a video game console. So it is no coincidence that the movie narrates the impasse of a gamer being stuck, unable to complete a given level. But gamers are used to this: it is their mission to get to the next level. A gamer is not a reenactor. She doesn't derive pleasure from having to play the same level over and over again or endlessly reenacting historical models. She will go online and look up how to beat the level and move on. In gaming (most games at least), there is an exit for each level, each repeated sequence, each loop. Most likely there is a weapon or a tool hidden in some cupboard, and this can be used to vanquish whatever enemy and complete the level. *Edge of Tomorrow* not only maintains that there is a tomorrow, but that we are positioned at its edge, that it is possible to complete the level and break free from the loop. Gaming can evolve into playing. And here, the ambiguity of "play" is helpful. On the one hand, play is about rules, which must be mastered if one is to proceed. On the other, play is also about the improvised creation of new, common rules. So reenactment is scrapped in favor of gaming moving towards play, which may or may not be another form of acting.

What does all this mean for the museum? First of all, one could say that history only exists if there is a tomorrow—if tanks remain locked up within historical collections and time moves on. The future only happens if history doesn't occupy and invade the present. The museum must render the tank useless upon entry, the way old cannons are filled with cement before being displayed in parks. Otherwise, the museum becomes an instrument for prolonging stasis by preserving the tyranny of a partial, partisan history, which also turns out to be a great business opportunity.

"Any player may declare a new rule at any point in the game" is one of the many rules of the game Calvinball, played by the titular characters in the cartoon Calvin and Hobbes .

But what does this have to do with the Spanish pavilion? It's very simple. There was one detail I didn't mention but which is very obvious if you think about it. In 1937, *Guernica* was new. It was a newly commissioned artwork dealing with the present. The curators didn't pick *Desastres de la Guerra* by Goya or another historical work, even though it might have fit perfectly too. They commissioned new pieces and educational setups to speak about the present. To reactivate that model, one has to do the same. If one wants to reactivate this history, it needs to be different. On the next level. With new works. In

the present. This is a huge endeavor of course, one that goes far beyond the task of the museum as it is usually understood. It enters into the project of re-creating not only the city, but society itself. And here, we again encounter the idea of play. To play is to re-actualize the rules as one goes along. Or to create rules that demand new actualization every time. There is a continuum between games and play. Both need rules. On one end of the spectrum there is a looped form. On the other, an open one.[18]

To summarize these ideas about museums, history, and the planetary civil war: history only exists if there is a tomorrow. And, conversely, a future only exists if the past is prevented from permanently leaking into the present and if Mimics of all sorts are defeated. Consequently, museums have less to do with the past than with the future: conservation is less about preserving the past than it is about creating the future of public space, the future of art, and the future as such.

X

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1
Thank you to Oleksiy Radynski for this intriguing example. Video of the tank being driven off its pedestal can be found here http://veteranemployment.org/video/combat-vehicles/combat-tanks/ukrainians-hotwire-ww2-tank/3630574236001 ; more information about the tank can be found here https://web.archive.org/web/20150320062156/http://fortruss.blogspot.com/2015/03/wwii-tank-monument-joseph-stalin-from.html and here http://forum.worldoftanks.com/index.php?/topic/370057-is-3-used-to-attack-pro-ukrainian-forces/ . Since the video was recorded, the tank was reportedly recaptured by Ukrainian forces and taken to Kiev, although none of these accounts could be independently verified.

2
This is also addressed in Brian Kuan Wood's recent text "Frankenethics," in *Final Vocabulary* , ed. Mai Abu ElDahab (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 30–41.

3
Thank you to Stephen Squibb for mentioning the movie *Demolition Man* (1993), a science-fiction scenario in which weapons are banned. The main characters have to get them from a museum because it's the only place they still can be found. (This is not the case in Ukraine.) The institutional effort to preserve peace by remembering violence becomes the raw material for the recommencement of civil war.

4
Giorgio Agamben *, La guerre civile: Pour une théorie politique de la Stasis* (Paris: Points Collection, 2015). I can only hint at the genealogy and multiple implications of this term, starting from Carl Schmitt's idea of a "global civil war" (*Weltbürgerkrieg*), which itself might have originated with Ernst Jünger. In the 1980s, Ernst Nolte's use of the term led to the so-called *Historikerstreit*, and triggered a sort of revisionist mutiny by right-wing German historians seeking to minimize German responsibility for WWII and German crimes of all sorts. However, many other thinkers, including Hannah Arendt in *On R evolution* (1963), have reformulated this notion. It has also been used by Negri/Hardt and Jean-Luc Nancy, among many others.

5
Even though, of course, civil wars mainly produce the pauperization of people unwilling or unable to militarize their forms of organization.

6
On the Russian side, Igor Strelkow is probably the most famous reenactor of historical battles. He is currently being sued by the families of the people killed on Malaysian Airlines Flight 17; forces he commanded are suspected of having shot down the plane. On the Ukrainian side, "a military reenactment group is fixing the Ukrainian Army's decrepit Soviet equipment," according to Alexander Nieuwenhuis of *Vice News* https://news.vice.com/article/a-military-reenactment-group-is-fixing-the-ukrainian-armys-decrepit-soviet-equipment .

7
Thank you to David Riff for mentioning this film to me.

8
Full disclosure: I certainly wouldn't be writing so much about *Guernica* if I hadn't had first-hand experience of its current setup at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, where I just had a show. As usual, I assume a fully non-objective position in relation to just about anything.

9
See Hito Steyerl, "Duty-Free Art," *e-flux journal* 63 (March 2015) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60894/duty-free-art/ .

10
This was initially Oleksiy Radynski's idea.

11
"The context for this possible alteration is defined by two major, partly interconnected conditions. One is the change in the position and institutional features of national states since the 1980s resulting from various forms of globalization. These range from economic privatization and deregulation to the increased prominence of the international human rights regime. The second is the emergence of multiple actors, groups, and communities partly strengthened by these transformations in the state and increasingly unwilling automatically to identify with a nation as represented by the state." Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 46 (2002) http://transnationalism.uchicago.edu/RepositioningCitizenship.pdf .

12
Saskia Sassen, "Towards Post-National and Denationalized Citizenship," in *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* , eds. Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 2003), 277–91 http://www.columbia.edu/~sjs2/PDFs/Towards_Post-National_and_Denationalized_Citizenship.pdf .

13
For trolls, see Adrian Chen, "The Agency," *New York Times Magazine* , June 2, 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur .

14
See Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2014).

15
See Josh Meyer, "Are ISIS Geeks Using Phone Apps, Encryption to Spread Terror?" *NBC News*, November 16, 2015 http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-terror-attacks/are-isis-geeks-using-phone-apps-encryption-spread-terror-n464131 .

16
See Jarret Brachman and Alix Levine, "The World of Holy Warcraft," *Foreign Policy*, April 13, 2011 http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/13/the-world-of-holy-warcraft/ .

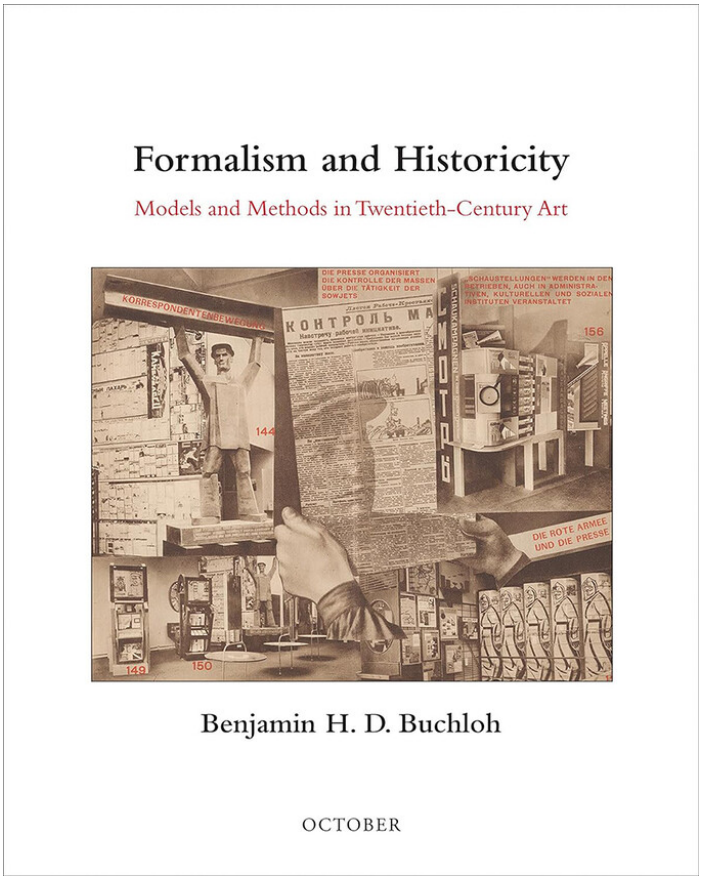
17
It is fascinating to see how security measures to protect *Guernica* have evolved over time. While on display at Casón del Buen Retiro in Madrid recently, the painting was inside a massive bulletproof glass case and was watched by guards with machine guns.

18
In a private conversation, Stephen Squibb mentioned to me that Agamben writes about people freeing themselves from sacred, looping, repetitive time by "forgetting" it in human time.

Gleb Napreenko

A Farewell to Totality

In the introduction to *Formalism and Historicity*, a compilation of essays originally published between 1977 and 1996, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh suggests that these should be read from the perspective of contemporary art. Acknowledging the current crisis provoked by the decline of criticism's historical function, Buchloh reveals that the spectrum inhabited by what he considers to be meaningful, radically reflexive, and critical art has become extremely narrow. Such art is situated on the verge of invisibility, on death's door, at history's end.



The cover art of Formalism and Historicity features an El Lissitzky artwork.

Looking up from the book, the reader inevitably tries to relate Buchloh's persuasive diagnosis to the reality that art goes on being produced, albeit in tandem with the culture industry and in shapes we may find unsatisfying. And history goes on, too, however frightened and hopeless its continuation might make us feel. We still view our contemporary art; more than that, we consume and ponder it as never before.

Although Buchloh writes of the present, he is always gazing backwards into the past. Loss orients his approach to the now. Themes of disrupted historical continuity, impersonations and absences, false doubles and careless

heirs arise throughout the articles in the book. Buchloh points to the reductions and simplifications perpetrated by art historians (for example, by Clement Greenberg in "Cold War Constructivism"), the neo-avant-garde's failures in interpreting avant-garde tendencies ("The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde"), American art's similar failures vis-à-vis European art ("Formalism and Historicity"), the interwar return to figuration, and modernism's radical aspirations ("Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting"). But Buchloh continues to find the prototype for all these twentieth-century losses in the failure of social revolution's extreme aspirations, most notably the one that, via the Sergei Eisenstein film, gave the journal *October* its title.

Following Alain Badiou, we might say that Buchloh remains true to the event of revolution, but the path of this fidelity has become ever more attenuated and difficult as it has passed through two periods of unconditional decline, the 1930s and the 1980s. The first saw the rise of totalitarian regimes and preceded the moment when Buchloh entered the arena as spectator and critic. Buchloh himself witnessed the second period, which saw the rise of neoconservative and neoliberal regimes and the dismantling of the welfare state.

In Buchloh's tradition, revolutionary fidelity devolves into a tense orthodoxy and austerity à la Theodor Adorno, one of the few writers the critic definitively respects. Wholly in keeping with Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*, with its contrasts between the "good" Schoenberg with the "bad" Stravinsky, Buchloh likewise divides artists into sufficiently and insufficiently radical, into the faithful and the renegades. The essay "Formalism and Historicity" contains a whole string of such juxtapositions: Daniel Buren is better than Donald Judd; Judd is better than Yves Klein; Jackson Pollock is better than Georges Mathieu, and so on. Among postwar European artists, the principal positive characters in the book are Marcel Broodthaers and Piero Manzoni, who migrate from one essay to the next. Buchloh regards the former, in particular, as a supremely important practitioner of allegorical strategies in contemporary art, and the essay on his work is the only monograph of its kind in the book. Buchloh was among the first to apply Walter Benjamin's understanding of allegory to twentieth-century art, with its disintegration of the natural, organic links between things coming as a consequence of the loss of connection to the source of meaning as exemplified by the gap between use-value and exchange-value.

Buchloh has inherited both Adorno's orthodox supreme court of judgment and the melancholic falling away from meaning in Benjamin's treatment of allegory as the central elements of Frankfurt School religiosity—not to say mysticism. To these we can also add messianism, which is likewise explicit in Benjamin and implicit in Adorno. The

Steve Kado, October Jr., 2010. Artists' book and 45 min presentation. A 1/2-scale model of the Spring 1980 issue of October 12.

question of whether art offers the hope of salvation and redemption from capitalism's sinful totality is still *the* question for Buchloh. While he constantly denies art's claims to exclusivity and brilliance by locating it within the process of social production and reproduction, it is nevertheless impossible to mistake the passion in his judgments or the depth of his disappointment in the failure of the avant-garde to perform its historical task of exodus.

But this is not all that Buchloh has learned from the Frankfurt School: he has also mastered the art of locating cultural products within the overall system of production predominating in a given society. For example, he brilliantly shows the connection between the poetics of conceptualism and economic administration in "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." No method could be more relevant today, but perhaps using it effectively requires criticizing the messianic aspects of the Frankfurt School legacy as well: not only the longing for a supreme historical teleology, but the corresponding revolutionary melancholy, and the resulting privilege granted to art over other human practices. Rejecting this quasi-religious heroism might involve recognizing the

Theodor Adorno poses for the camera with an equestrian painting in the background, date unknown.

historic defeat of a certain project of criticism and art history, and this accounts for the tragic cast such a refusal receives in the introduction to Buchloh's book. But it might also make us freer, even as it moves the contemplation of art away from the realm of criticism and art history and toward contiguous disciplines such as anthropology.

The implicitly spiritual inheritance of Hegelian-Marxism can also be detected in Buchloh's passion for totalizing schemata. The all-embracing system of spectacle, which infiltrates and appropriates for its own profit even consciously resistant artistic strategies, is Buchloh's eternally returning and unconditional nemesis, his original sin, whether understood as capitalist ideology or state propaganda (e.g., "From Factura to Factography"). "Capitalism remains my Devil," as his contemporary T. J. Clark once put it, revealing more with the second noun than with the first.

Buchloh defines art's current conjuncture by the collapse of any hope for the democratic cultural production that was supposed to follow the devaluation of craftsmanship known as deskilling. Here the history of radical art is that of an endless war on a spectacle, which is perpetually seizing the weapons of resistance. Attempts to elude such recuperation set art on a path of monkish asceticism, which manifests as the rejection of any intoxicated delight in the illusions art is capable of supplying, in the exposure of all fascination with fetishistic possession or seamless identities. Buchloh points to the fissure within the subject as a truth we cannot ignore if we try to talk seriously about emancipation and self-awareness in the modern world ("Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture"). Paradoxically, however, the critic's signature omniscience and unsleeping rigor are themselves undivided in their totality. Buchloh is like the vigilant guard at the heart of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, and it is sometimes difficult to read his systematic severity otherwise than as the correlative underside to the same relentless discipline he would ascribe to global capitalism.

It is no wonder that "correct" and "genuine" radical art is coherent and undivided in Buchloh's reading, with clear lines of continuity, inheritance, and evolution. His ideological orthodoxy corresponds to a geopolitical centralism. Although Buchloh himself has regularly criticized American ethnocentrism in art history (beginning with the earliest essay in the book, whence its title), he has remained suspended in the dialectic of internationalism and imperialism, between the elitism of the historical avant-garde and the elitism of the neo-avant-garde's attempt to transgress it. The social function of these essays cannot be structurally separated from either, which does nothing to alter their sobering critical value.

A book which lifts writings from their historical context in the soft-cover magazines where they originally appeared can only reinforce the impression of a seamless system of analysis, crushing in its grandeur. Of course, the sense of summation and academicization of hitherto living reflection is an unavoidable side effect of such collections. A stronger impression of the same sort was produced by *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, a two-volume textbook authored by Buchloh, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, and Yve-Alain Bois, and designed to cement the exceptional authority that has long collected around *October*. We must remember, however, that originally all of Buchloh's articles were utterances produced in a particular place: witty, pointed interventions in contemporary discussions of art and tactical maneuvers in his struggle against the spectacle.

Buchloh calls for responsive strategic thinking. Heeding his call, we should ask whether it is possible to tear our eyes away from a totalizing vision of the spectacle, from the mesmerizing investigation of power's mechanisms and the insistence on an unrelenting social determination, without forgetting its institutional reality. For the investigations that occupy Buchloh promise their own sort of intoxication, albeit one different than that of conservative art, which charms us with illusions and oblivion. The glare from his enlightenment is blinding, and

Marcel Broodthaers, Décor: A Conquest (detail), 1975. Installation.Copyright: The Estate of the Artist; Courtesy of Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London

as we observe the patterns Buchloh has detected, we cease to consider the peripheral, the incomplete, or the contested. Despite the undeniable charisma of Buchloh's total criticism, can we recognize the value of a method that would indulge asceticism only to the extent that such refusal serves the larger project of emancipation, rather than the other way around? For the real fissure of the subject, which Buchloh himself discusses, consists in the detection of the inevitable blind spots that arise in any system of knowledge, panoptical or otherwise. Identifying these fissures—which are present within each of us—can hardly be labeled practically or pragmatically valuable if we deem practical and pragmatic only what is subject to instrumentalization, monitoring, and rational management. And yet, this fissure is inseparable from any attempts to act on current conditions.

For example, what do I see around me? I see that young artists in Russia, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America want to say something, to speak about what worries and interests them and to pursue social change. Almost none are interested in a hermetic criticism and reflection on language itself, neither modernist nor postmodernist, and this obliviousness renders many of them naive. Some of them go to art school where, as some people think, they can be trained to speak the idiom of contemporary art. But even those young artists who do not study anywhere see this language art as a ready-made means of communication, one of many possible media, as an extant medium, and as a global post-Conceptual language. But who can hear what is said in this language? What place does this medium occupy among all the others?

In these circumstances we can draw a contradictory lesson from Buchloh's book. On the one hand, as Buchloh teaches—and following the legacy of the Frankfurt School—we should not relegate the structures of art production to oblivion; we should not indulge in childish rapture over the very fact of access to utterance. At the same time, *pace* Buchloh, we should not let negative theology enchant us; we cannot be paralyzed by a

spiritual mourning for art's ultimate mission as evinced by the historical austerity of the avant-garde. Instead, the question, as ever, becomes: How can we proceed to speak within the real of our current moment, here and now, without being overly flattered by our own articulations or indulging any unnecessary illusions about their place in the political economy? What does the desire for art look like, under the circumstances? An unequivocal, universal, and seamless answer to these questions is impossible.

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Translated from the Russian by Thomas Campbell

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Carol Yinghua Lu

From the Anxiety of Participation to the Process of De-Intern ationalization

It was not long ago that the Western art system was an object of intense focus and emulation throughout China. Beginning with the enthusiastic introduction of Western philosophical writings and Modernist artworks in the 1980s, this one-way exchange crystallized into a dichotomy, with China and tradition on one side, and modernity and the West on the other. Post-Mao, Chinese intellectuals embraced a progressive narrative of history wherein Western Europe and North America represented the contemporary standard to which China was forced to catch up. As Shi Chong, an artist and professor at the Qinghua Academy of Art in Beijing, put it: "In the 1980s, it was still a learning process. On the one hand there was Western classical art and on the other there was Western modern art. We were in the middle of the two processes as they interweaved with one another." But beginning in the 1990s, the rapid rise of China's position in the global economic hierarchy set in motion a process of de-internationalization. This initially imperceptible shift has surfaced more clearly since the worldwide economic downturn of 2008. As a result, for Chinese art practitioners the globalization of the contemporary art system has been accompanied by the disappearance of the international, both as an aspiration and as a horizon.

In the intervening years, de-internationalization has evolved into a new historical condition shaping the thoughts and feelings of Chinese art practitioners, especially among those born after 1980. Like their peers in other fields, many young artists and critics were exposed to Western culture at a young age through the proliferation of English-language training programs, a gift of globalization. Moreover, the consumer society that has grown with the economy has no shortage of Western concepts and products. After high school, many students are sent to North America and Europe for higher education. Having lived in both worlds, it is perhaps not surprising that they feel empowered to reject the international realm and claim, with much more certainty than their predecessors, that China and the West are equal. There is a sense of unprecedented conviction and optimism about what is happening in China socially and politically, and this means that the image of the West as a place of promise and progress has faded. In this respect, it is difficult to separate the process of de-internationalization from one of de-Westernization. With China now the world's second-largest economy, the West and its democratic values are generally portrayed and perceived as a model in decline, both in the rhetoric of the Chinese government and in the sentiment of the general public.

The 2008 economic slowdown brought a noticeable reduction in demand for Chinese art, especially overseas. However, the domestic market rebounded quickly. In a matter of years it not only compensated entirely for the loss of international demand, but became a powerful force in its own right. The current domestic Chinese market for contemporary art consists of a relatively steady pool of

private collectors supported by a significant amount of government resources. Some collectors have even opened museums of their own, and in some cases, these museums have received substantial reductions in rent and even investment capital from local governments. This trend is especially pronounced in Shanghai, where the city government has taken many of the remaining venues from the World Expo of 2010 and offered them to select individuals who can afford to turn them into museums and art venues maintained by private funds. The government is also committed to supporting the booming art fair culture in the city, with three fairs each year. At the same time, the city remains one of the strictest in terms of content censorship and ideological control. Like the Shanghai Biennial, the fairs are subject to a thorough inspection by government officials prior to opening.

The slow rejection of Western influence has grown harder to detect as Chinese participation in the locality that we call the global has increased dramatically. In the 2013 Venice Biennale, more than one hundred exhibitions featuring Chinese artists and curators were organized by Chinese institutions, funders, and artists. More and more galleries from China have taken part in art fairs in such prime locations as London, New York, Basel, Madrid, Singapore, Taipei, and Hong Kong.

Since 2005, when the Chinese government made the decision to participate in the Venice Biennale—but could not fully join due to the SARS outbreak—there has been a conscious effort by the government to promote its brand of contemporary art on the international circuit. Government-supported survey exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art have been and continue to be mounted in museums and temporary venues around the world, none bigger than "China 8," staged in Germany in the summer of 2015. Eight exhibitions in nine museums across eight German cities opened simultaneously, featuring five hundred works by 120 contemporary artists from China. Codirected by Walter Smerling, director of the Museum Küppersmühle, and Fan Di'an, director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, this event was the biggest state-level exhibition of Chinese art in Germany. The participating artists consisted of both non-official artists and official artists, including the likes of Xu Jiang, the director of the National Art Academy in Hangzhou. This event intended to demonstrate that the Chinese government was and is open-minded enough to endorse and present contemporary art. For the Chinese art community itself the government has proven to be a promising promoter, offering much-needed platforms and opportunities. What is not discussed, however, is how this relationship shapes the direction of artistic practice.

The de-internationalization of the contemporary art world in China is further concealed by the Chinese art system's ability to continuously adopt terms and references from its Western counterpart while at the same time giving them a Chinese interpretation. In 2001, a new media art department was established in the National Art Academy, with many other art academies subsequently following suit. The artists and teachers who helped push for this change considered it a covert opportunity to generate a more progressive teaching program and to break away from the institution's conservative and stagnant atmosphere. Privately, this move found its spiritual origin in the radicalism associated with the emergence of new media art in Europe at the end of the 1980s. But publicly, the artists and teachers behind the new department linked it to the society-wide and not-at-all-radical obsession with new technology in China at the time.

In 2005, experimental art was first offered as a major at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, and was established as a department two years later. In 2014, it gained semi-autonomous institutional status, becoming the CAFA School of Experimental Art. Currently, around fifteen art schools across the country provide courses in experimental art in their official curriculum. The integration of "experimental art" into the curriculum of Chinese art academies over the last decade has seemed like an inevitable step in a process that begun when Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy cleared the way for foreign investment in China in 1978. It exemplifies the leap of the academy out of a single, realist model of artistic production and into a much more diverse landscape of methods and training—practices which, of course, have helped prepare the Chinese art system for a more advanced level of international competition.

The three missions of the CAFA School of Experimental Art are, first, to sort through international examples of the theory and practice of modern and contemporary art; second, to establish an academic structure for experimental art in contemporary academic art education; and finally, to explore feasible ways of launching an international modern art trend that is rooted in Chinese characteristics. To fulfill such a vision, the teachers at the CAFA School of Experimental Art direct their students to focus on three things: "traditional language translation," "research on experimental art," and "material language expression." As proof of its academic achievements, the CAFA School of Experimental Art highlights published research carried out by its graduates and professors on certain folk art traditions, such as written Chinese language, traditional farming tools, and crafts like paper cutting and shadow puppetry. The choice of folk art subjects, concerned mostly with tradition, conveniently avoids contemporary social, political, and intellectual issues in China. This emphasis on folk art in a program intended to update rigid academic teaching rooted in Soviet models from the 1950s evinces the continued influence of Mao's 1942 Yan'an speech demanding an art in the service of "workers, peasants, and soldiers." However, while in Mao's era folk art was an important channel for communicating political messages, today it no longer expresses any distinctive political position. This is why it is the official art form of choice at the CAFA School

Atelier Deshaus's design of the Long Museum West Bund, one of the new private collections in Shanghai. Photo: Su Shengliang.

Adrian Wong, Telepathically Designed Bespoke Rabbit Warren No. 2, 2015. Courtesy Adrian Wong. Wong was one of the participants in the exhibition "China 8."

An image of the exterior of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing can be found on the school's website.

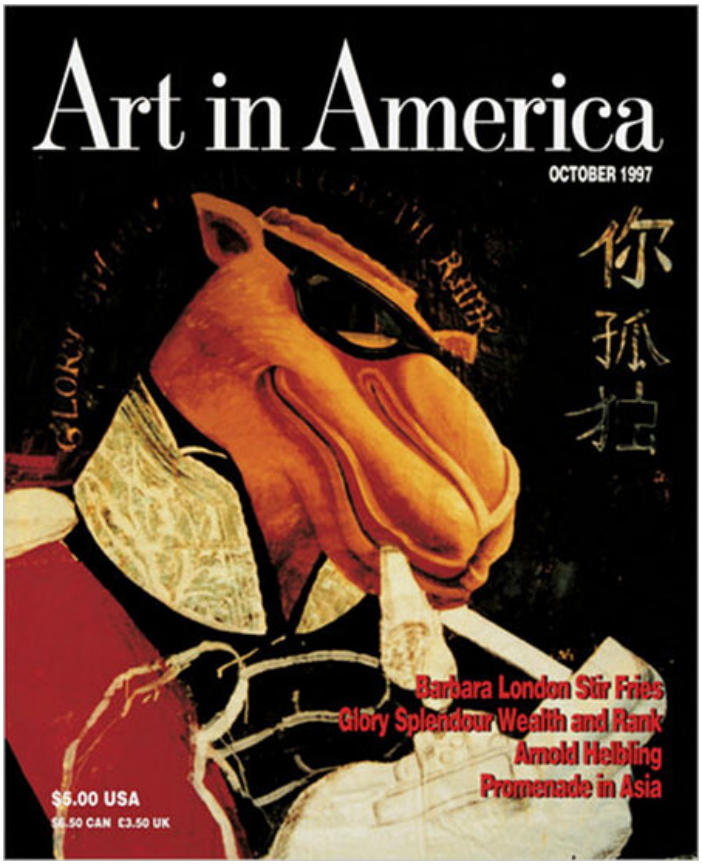
of Experimental Art.

China's process of globalization unfolds mostly on its own terms and in its own ways, while consistently referring to a Western vocabulary to evoke empathy and familiarity. Through the use of terms and references from Western discourses, China, on the one hand, projects the image of integrating itself into the international community and situating its own development within the Western art historical narrative, while on the other hand insisting on developing its own identity and proving the legitimacy of its own model. The process is rife with contradictory emotions and ambitions. Sometimes the Western art system is regarded as superior and worth emulating, while at other times it is a bully that exercises power through the inclusion or exclusion of Chinese artists in its exhibitions, collections, and art historical narratives. The fluctuating feelings of the Chinese art community towards the West spring from the community's anxiety over its own self-definition and self-perception. The ultimate goal is actually to fully develop its own subjectivity and its own art system, comparable in sophistication and influence to the West's.

Since 1989—around the time when the exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris—Chinese contemporary art has gradually appear more frequently in exhibitions organized by Western art institutions, riding the wave of globalization in the art world. In the 1990s, Chinese artists, curators, critics, and dealers actively participated in promoting the brand of Chinese contemporary art abroad, while immersing themselves in constructing a domestic art system based on their own knowledge and understanding of the Western art system. They often attributed problems at home to an underdeveloped art system lacking commercial operations and academic engagement. They lamented the fact that in the international art world, Chinese art was like a plate of spring rolls—present as a kind of appetizer but never as the main course.

From 1995 to 1998, Shanghai artist Zhou Tiehai created a series of seven fake covers of international magazines such as *Newsweek*, *Flash Art*, *FACTS*, and *Art in America*, placing images of his artworks or himself on the front. He realized that an artist needed to be on an exclusive list in order to be welcomed into museums and galleries, to receive the attention of art critics, and to be highlighted by the media. This list was primarily Western. Zhou's series was prompted by an incident at another artist's studio. A French photographer who was doing a special feature on Chinese contemporary artists visited this artist's studio, but confessed that he had never heard of the artist before. To Zhou, it became clear that Chinese artists needed to become a part of the international exhibition and museum circuit before they could get any recognition in the art world.

This anxiety among Chinese artists vis-à-vis the global art market was aggravated by the marginalization of contemporary art practice and the tightening of ideological control that occurred after the Tian'anmen Square demonstrations of 1989. There was a great deal of tension between the authorities and contemporary artists, whose performances and exhibitions were often censored or completely shut down. These two anxieties—domestic censorship and the position of Chinese artists within the global art market—shaped Chinese artistic practice and thinking in this period. In 1996, Zhou Tiehai created a sound piece entitled *Airport*. It consisted of announcements of international flight departures from



Zhou Tiehai, Fake Cover, 1995–98.

the Shanghai airport—" *Ladies and gentlemen, boarding has commenced for flight 949 from Shanghai to Tokyo* "—broadcasted throughout the exhibition space. One announcement said that a flight bound for Kassel was delayed until Documenta took place the following year. This work vividly illustrated the urge of Chinese artists to participate in the international art world. The surge of international biennials during this period gave these artists hope, opening new platforms for international participation that went beyond the existing Western structures of national museums and art institutions.

Domestically, the 1990s witnessed the gradual transition of the Chinese art world from a mixed community of idealistic intellects, radical conceptualists, pragmatic revolutionaries, and naive entrepreneurs to one of market believers. While the government promoted the market and economic growth as the new national ideology for all walks of life, intellectuals and artists dove right in, mistakenly considering it a means to a more open society. Pragmatically speaking, the marketization of art also demonstrated to the government that art had value, thus giving it a legitimate status in China. The reformist liberalism of the time imagined a market-driven liberation of society from the state. The government, however, used this zeal for the free market to integrate a great number of intellectuals and educated elites into economic activities that depended on political access and privilege. Some of those who would otherwise have taken to the streets became invested in political stability.

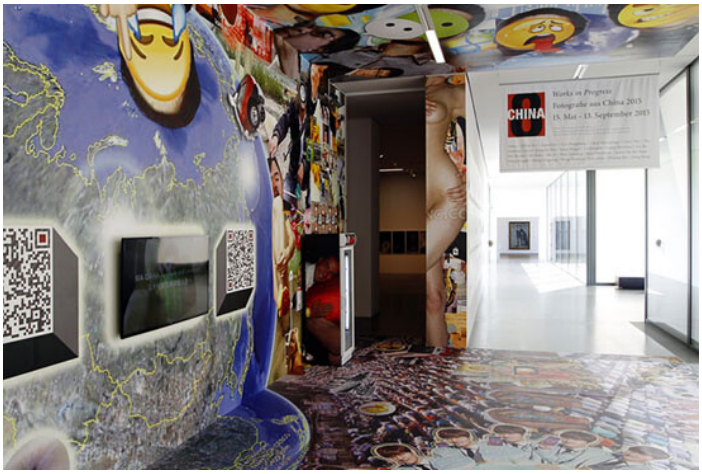
At this time, state-run art magazines gave considerable space to reports from art fairs and lists of auction prices. Former translators of Western art history books and emerging art critics set out to organize a biennial that aimed to emulate the Venice Biennale, especially in its origin as a trading platform. They also attempted to launch an art magazine entitled *Art Market*, with a core mission to promote market discourse in the art world. Some of these ideas seemed liked misreadings and mis-translations of practices from the Western art system, but they nonetheless had a profound impact in China. There was a pervasive sense of excitement about the concept and language of "business," which evoked a kind of formality—something regulated, orderly, and efficient that can be taken seriously and yield a livelihood, rather than being just a cultural and idealistic pursuit. This business mindset spread throughout the Chinese art world.

The general perception and historical narrative of this period is thus dominated by accounts of market success and international recognition garnered by a small number of Chinese art movements, christened and heavily promoted by art critics and dealers. With this rise in global participation, another kind of unease would soon cast a shadow over the Chinese art community. As artist Zhang Peili put it:

> I envy those Chinese painters prior to the Ming Dynasty. They were more or less free. There was not so much contact between Chinese culture and the West. The infiltration of Western culture into China was very slow then. After the Ming Dynasty, there were more and more missionaries. Many artists were court painters previously. Then Western paintings started to come in. Artists who worked in China before the Ming Dynasty might not have had to worry about what was Chinese. Like many artists in the West they believed that "what is me" is the most important thing, instead of thinking about "what is Chinese, what is French."

Clashes between Chinese and Western cultures intensified as a result of increased contact. Many Chinese artists experienced various levels of uneasiness through this encounter. Artist Zhang Xiaogang said that it was difficult to continue making art after he returned to China from an extended visit to European museums:

> I was not so interested in what was happening in China then. My whole brain was awash in the West. I



Ma Daha, Everything that Exists is a Thought in the Mind of Ma Daha, 2015.

> kept thinking that China could not reach the same level, and was only at the very beginning. I did not pay any attention to what was happening here. My focal point then was to look for my own position, even to think about whether I should continue to paint or not.

This feeling of restlessness resulted not only from the increasing pressure of participating in the international art world. It also came from the weight of a Chinese art system that was coming into its own thanks to the success of the domestic art market. Some Chinese artists felt so uneasy that they decided to exit the art world entirely. In 1996, Shanghai-based artist Qian Weikang made his last video work, *Breathing, Breathing*, in which the repeated sound of a toilet flushing breaks up footage of TV commercials, of street scenes full of advertisements, and of Qian's artist friends gathering for parties and other social events. Since then, Qian has not produced anything that resembles visual art, and has not participated in any exhibitions or art events. He has also refused to provide curators with instructions for re-creating some of his site-specific installations from the 1990s, which he destroyed due to lack of storage space.

Since then, thanks to China's soaring economy and increasing international presence, the country has been the subject of many art exhibitions throughout the world. For example, "China Power Station," co-curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Gunnar B. Kvaran, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, toured various venues throughout Europe between 2006 and 2010. Many similar exhibitions have been initiated throughout the West. I have been invited to speak about China at many conferences organized by Western art institutions, and at a certain point I became fed up. In this wave of singling out China as a curious social, political, and cultural phenomenon to study and exhibit, individual artists are canonized and inevitably imprisoned by the collective identity of China.

In China, the art community's silence when it comes to political issues is one of the most distinctive features of artistic production and discourse today. As already noted, this silence results from the government's growing support of the domestic art market and its promotion of Chinese art exhibitions abroad. Judging by the market-oriented political and legal reforms it has implemented over the past few decades, the Chinese government has no real interest in developing a social model that can be championed and promoted to the rest of the world, or that can be carried into the future. Similarly, the Chinese art community has no vision for the future, but is only concerned with its own self-interest and self-preservation. As a result, the contemporary art world in China has not broken free from the government's narrow political vision, and has instead fallen prey to self-isolation and arrogance.

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A longer version of this essay was originally commissioned by the Kunstmuseum Bern for the catalogue of their upcoming exhibition "Chinese Whispers."

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Ilya Budraitskis

The Eternal Hunt for the Red Man

The dramatic events in Russia and Ukraine over the past two years have begun a new phase in the struggle over the legacy of communism in the post-Soviet space. As the concrete features of "real socialism" become blurred and vanish, those necessary for the production of ideology become ever more sharply defined. It's often argued that communism, buried a quarter of a century ago as living practice, has since acquired an afterlife in the form of a restlesscorpse, a remnant, a regurgitated survivor from the past, blighting the lives of new generations.

A popular explanation for the unfulfilled transition to market normality in Russia in the early 1990s involves the absence of a special act of "repentance," after which the final nail in the coffin of communism would presumably have been driven in. This act, as far as one can tell, assumes that a single and all-encompassing purge of collective memory at all levels—from monuments and street names to individual consciousness—would be sufficient to exorcize the ghost forever. The enemy is understood to be dangerous precisely because it belongs more to the past than to the future. Its materiality is derivative and contingent. Of course, you can demolish every Lenin monument on Earth, but this doesn't mean that communism has vanished once and for all. Besides, the fewer the external manifestations of this specter, the more powerful it becomes.

The Long Life of a Remnant

The theme of the inner slave, *homo sovieticus*, the "Red Man" who takes his leave but doesn't actually go anywhere, has become a central theme in the work of the 2015 Nobel Laureate for literature, Svetlana Alexievich. In her Nobel Lecture, Alexievich stated: "The 'Red Man' wasn't able to enter the kingdom of freedom he had dreamed of around his kitchen table. Russia was divvied up without him, and he was left with nothing. Humiliated and robbed. Aggressive and dangerous."[1]

This post-Soviet man, in the final analysis, becomes a victim of himself, of his own unvanquished inner slavery, which explains his inability to assume and make use of his own freedom. Market reforms have altered the external conditions of his existence, providing new opportunities, but they have left his corrupted and crippled soul intact. The bitter legacy of this inner corruption has also defined the fate of the emerging generation that, taking advantage of the "inner freedom" of loans and growing rates of consumption, has given their consent to the authoritarian officials who provide them with this earthly bread. The Red Man, deprived of any material explanation, turns into a purely moral problem that refuses any hard and fast resolution, leading to its endless reproduction.

Such a dehistoricization of the Red Man turns him into a new myth, an eternal image, for which Alexievich predictably finds a correlate in the famous Grand

Inquisitor section of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.[2] The Red Man is a natural phenomenon, but one that is false, derivative; it has replaced the authentic man, who is characterized by compassion, kindness, and the ability to live in the world with himself and with others. The clash of these two principles, the inner struggle that wracks anyone who finds themselves in an extreme situation (such as war or catastrophe), represents Alexievich's main theme as a writer.

At the present moment, this struggle is far from over. The final battle still awaits us.

One cannot simply forget about the Red Man. It's not possible to simply absorb him into the new reality. Alexievich is convinced that he will "disappear from the bloodstream" through a process of "suffering and overcoming," and only then will we be able to reacquire our own selves and "finally ... become like everyone else."[3]

The famous Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin has an equally pessimistic outlook: "the post-Soviet man not only doesn't wish to squeeze that Soviet pus out of himself but, on the contrary, recognizes it as fresh blood."[4] The Soviet "zombie" deprives us of the right to be contemporary. Instead, we are doomed to live amidst the putrid remains of the past. A return to normal historical time is not possible through a formal procedure of repentance, but requires something stronger—a chaotic upheaval or a purifying catastrophe. A forced return to normality, comparable to the process of de-Nazification in postwar Germany, would be a difficult but necessary reawakening, not unlike the one that follows "a high fever or an epileptic seizure."[5]

The claim against today's authorities in Russia comes down precisely to this conscious and criminal reluctance to bury the "Soviet corpse."[6] This reluctance is, crucially, not the product of those complex and muddled relationships of the present found in current military conflicts, economic crises, the breakup of the welfare state in Western Europe, or the rise of radical Islam in the Middle East. Instead, the Russian state, as a whole, with its interests, conflicts, divided society, and dependent economy, is declared to be the result of a collective madness and a historical deviation, which it is necessary to remedy with the aid of surgical intervention. The picture of the world acquires a distinctly Manichaean cast as it becomes simplified into a bloody struggle between the future and the past, in which the latter is inevitably doomed.

The trope of the "revived corpse" was itself revived after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Its predecessor can be found in the post-Soviet myth of *homo sovieticus*, a monster developed in the course of a grotesque experiment on human nature. This golem is contrasted with the more natural *homo economicus*, whose rationality is governed by the market and whose life is made viable through the political mechanism of liberal democracy.

In the sociology of Yuri Levada and his followers, the existence of *homo sovieticus* was established scientifically over the course of many studies. According to Levada, the defining features of "Soviet man" are "enforced self-isolation, state paternalism, egalitarian hierarchy, and a postimperial syndrome." This "new man" was artificially developedat the beginning of the 1920s and is "characterized by individual irresponsibility, a tendency to shift the blame for his own situation onto anyone else: the government, parliamentarians, bureaucrats, Western countries, immigrants." Changes in external conditions and, above all, in the socioeconomic bases of Soviet society, have not led to the restitution of human "normality": "the destruction of former models has not been combined with any serious positive work on the understanding of the nature of Soviet society and Soviet man, the formulation of other guiding landmarks and social ideals."[7]

The new society—capitalism—could not be built by noncapitalist man, and so an attempt to change the base of society directly was thwarted by the superstructure, as the remnants of the old way of existence became an obstacle to the new.

Vanquishing the Specters, Stalinist-Style

Just as the shadows of the past appear as obstacles blocking this mythological Red Man's path toward the European future and market normality, the fulfillment and perfection of Stalinist socialism was itself understood to be hindered by similar obstacles, in the form of residual features of capitalist society. The Great Terror was explained in terms of the escalation of the struggle not with any currently exploitative class—these had already lost any power and property long before—but with the physical representatives of "former classes," with their embodied remnants and shadows. These specters of the dead ruling classes turned out to be more cunning and dangerous than those "actually existing" ruling classes who had long since been defeated in open struggle. The tactics of the zombies were rather more complex than the tactics of their living representatives—in particular, their ability to constantly change their appearance, their endless donning of new masks, their ability to infiltrate any crack in the unity of the people and the government.[8]

These ghosts of former classes—who formed ever larger obstacles on the path toward socialism—had no defined place in the system of production. This meant that they could arise at any time in the subconscious of any member of the now-dominant classes of workers or peasants. The captive will of a worker or a peasant was controlled by the specter of an exploiter, forcing him to think, speak, and act

A statue of Lenin in Berlin is removed from its plinth to be demolished on Nov. 13, 1991. Photo: Sygma/Corbis/Regis Bossu.

in his own name against his own interests. Any accidentally spoken word could "objectively" serve the invisible enemy.

Here the past is seen as constantly ambushing the present from behind, jamming its gears and preventing it from reaching its full potential. Any government errors or contradictions fundamental to the new world absolutely can't be analyzed in terms of their own content. The past is guilty of everything. It perpetually attempts to usurp genuine life and replace the future with its own ghosts. The "struggle with remnants" acquires, in this way, a violent and irrational character, given that one can act in a world of shadows only by groping in the dark, and their presence can only be verified with the aid of especially cultivated but unreliable feelings: vigilance, a "nose for" enemies, "a knack for recognizing them," and so forth.

Louis Althusser placed the responsibility for Stalinist crimes squarely on the vulgar Hegelian idea of the "sublation" of the past. Residual elements,transferred from the past, are deprived of the quality of reality and contrasted with a certain "genuine" reality that has not managed to be brought fully into being. In this lies the potential forunbound tyranny, as any existing ties, any differences of opinion or position, can be denied a place in the world of the living and instead be declared remnants in need of elimination. Essential to such a repressive approach is the notion of the integral and impermeable nature of the past, which, as a monolith, obstructs the road ahead. In the same way that personal trauma makes someone a slave to their own past, the past itself is deprived of its own historical drama when it is reduced to a mere obstacle.

Why the Past Isn't Cast Off

The fatal flaw of this model is its attempt to draw a clear line between a healthy present and a toxic past, of which one must be cured. Indeed, "the present can feed on the shades of its past, or even project them before it."[9] This past never becomes something distinct, but is always being projected backwards from the present, always conjuring "that law of interiority which is the destiny of the whole Future of Humanity."

Rebecca Bathory, Soviet Ghosts, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

And so in Russia, owing to the complex relations between base and superstructure, to the specific political and ideological features of the new regime engendered by the Russian Revolution, it became possible to preserve and reproduce elements of the old despotic state and bestow on it an even more terrible and inhuman form. Paradoxically, this reactivation and restoration of the "ethical state" hanging over society was produced under the slogan of the struggle against remnants whose suppression required terror and emergencypowers. The Stalinist declaration of a total rupture with the past, achieved by denying the past any right to be part of contemporary society, led to a complete devaluation of Marxism. From a critical method which can be applied to evaluate its own place in a changing social reality, Marxism degenerated into a deformed and barren scholasticism whose role was reduced to justifying the regime as the "eternal present" that "ended" the history of the country and humankind.

Today, the "struggle with remnants" also strives to displace any explanation of contemporary social and political conflicts, and this leads to a dematerialization of reality. The remnants turn into an elusive and restless spirit, which can just as easily take root in institutions, people, or stones as it can abandon them. The proposed methods for exorcizing this spirit—de-communization (exorcism in relation to state and society) and lustration (the expulsion of the spirit from inanimate objects)—solve only a part of the problem. The specter of communism will come to the rescue of the government every time it needs to explain away its own mistakes or crimes. The remnants turn into authentic life, in relation to which everyday reality is a mirage. Reality is defective and not real enough to evaluate on the basis of its own contradictions.

It is precisely this failure to ask the "basic questions" that permits the proliferation of masquerades and political manipulations which result in living people struggling with the dead and destroying tombs instead of finding real flesh-and-blood opponents. The problem resides in the fact that the past cannot be extinguished and the present is always woven from a mix of different remnants, the unique combination of which also creates the new, whose novelty is always contingent.

Not every transformation has been accompanied by a collective repentance on the part of national communities.

The fall of European colonial empires didn't produce any full-fledged culture of repentance, and consequently there was no transformation in social consciousness. Moreover, the most serious example of full-scale repentance—that of Germany—was the result of an external defeat and was thus impossible to refuse. The reliability of such repentance—as a single, nonrepeated event—and the measure of its sincerity are very difficult to discuss. It involves a huge number of people, each of whom has their own relation to the criminal past. Collective repentance signifies nothing less than the declaration of a rupture with the past as an abstract fetish, as a part of history taken for the whole.

In Germany, the actual supersession of the legacy of Nazism in terms of specific features of the postwar West German state (for example, its concealed cruelty and readiness to use secret reprisalsthanks to the purely abstract nature of repentance) became the business of the radical generation of the 1960s and '70s.

Jürgen Habermas linked the liberal democratic future of Germany with the differentiation between cultural and state politics. Cultural politics corresponds to the ethical choice of the individual and to a community's melancholic relation to the past. State politics corresponds to an allegiance to general constitutional and humanistic principles. The rupture with the criminal past is not merely a question of state politics but—and this is fundamental—creates a new figure of the German citizen, for whom the question of existential responsibility for their own destiny is inseparable from a "a melancholy on account of the victims whose suffering cannot be made good, a melancholy that places us under an obligation." The process of overcoming the past in this way passes through each separate existence and proportions "the continuities and discontinuities in the forms of life we carry on."[10]

In the US, the rituals of repentance and the final break with formal inequality (above all the Civil Rights Act of 1964) didn't lead to the eradication of structural racism, which has so manifestly reappeared in the issue of police violence. The effective supersessionof this racism, linked with social inequality, starts with the refusal to judge racism simply as a prejudice or as false consciousness cured through repentance and education.

What Remains of the Soviet?

Clearly, a Soviet legacy exists in today's Russia under Putin. It lives on at all levels, especially in mass consciousness, in certain distinctive traditions of the state apparatus, and in the vestigial survival of Cold War foreign policies. And it is alive in the trauma of the post-Soviet intelligentsia, which recognizes its historical mission in terms of a struggle with the communist specter. But all

Undead Soviet zombies roam the set of the film Resident Evil 5 (2009).

these elements have been rent apart; they do not form a complete whole that could be separated from the non-Soviet, the post-Soviet, or even the pre-Soviet. Neither on a stand-alone basis nor in simple combination can they represent some kind of central opponent. Nor do they form the fundamental issue of the present, whose solution would definitively mark the irrevocable step from one historical epoch to another.

The growing need for the Red Man myth reflects the nostalgia of the Russian (and the Ukrainian) intelligentsia for an integral picture of reality now lost. The need for moral abstractions and vulgar generalizations is based on a dogmatism of thought, the roots of which can be sought in the Soviet period. The dogmatic post-Soviet intelligentsia outlived not only the demise of its encompassing society, but also its own demise, the loss of its own social and ethical basis in post-Soviet reality. Using the construct of the remnant, designating a contrived communist specter as a primary enemy, the intelligentsia strives to affirm its own existence in this reality by insisting that the specter is other than a shadow.

Rejecting the theory of the "struggle with remnants" does not signify a simple reconciliation with reality, or an acknowledgment that the present state of things is normal, reasonable, or legitimate. Indeed, the existing regime, unlike the Soviet one, having no strategy and no dynamism of its own (apart from the dynamics of decay), also attempts to represent Russian society in the form of a Soviet remnant. Thus, since March 2014, one of the main strains of the Kremlin's official propaganda has been the aspiration to legitimize its acts as the beginning of the "rebirth of the USSR," that is, as the first modest steps toward superseding the consequences of the historically unjust demise of the Soviet state. And one must recognize that this propaganda has convinced many. The issue, however, is the fact that the fundamental injustice of the

fall of the Soviet system consisted in the appearance of that ruling class which so self-assuredly dons the suit of the Red Man today.

The alternative to this endless spectral game played by both the authorities and the oppositional exorcists—a mere diversion from oppressive anxieties about the future—can only be the difficult breaking of the "spell" of the Soviet. Refusing to take the Soviet legacy as a remnant that one must either accept or reject wholesale, it is instead important to constantly untangle into its constituent parts: progressive and reactionary, liberating and enslaving, aiding the ruling elites or, on the contrary, throwing into question their right to rule.

Only in this way can one embrace the past, not as a shadow hanging over the living but as a "terribly positive and active structured reality," just like "cold, hunger and the night are for [the] poor worker."[11] This is the only reality that is truly in need of change.

X

Translated from the Russian by Giuliano Vivaldi.

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Svetlana Alexievich, “Время second-hand: Конец красного человека” (Second-hand time: The demise of the Red Man), *Дружба Народов* , August 2013 http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2013/8/2a.html .

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Interview with Svetlana Alexievich, news.tut.by, December 7, 2015 https://web.archive.org/web/20160312084452/http://news.tut.by/society/475829.html .

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Lev Gudkov, Boris Dubin, and Natalia Zorkaya, *Постсоветский человек и гражданское общество* (Post-Soviet man and civil society) (Moscow: Moscow School of Political Research, 2008), 8–11.

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This approach was analyzed in depth by Sheila Fitzpatrick in her well-known book *Tear Off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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Jürgen Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity: Remarks on the Federal Republic’s Orientation to the West,” *Acta Sociologica* , Vol. 31, No. 1 (1988): 10.

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McKenzie Wark

The Vectoralist Class, Part II

Continued from " **The Vectoralist Class** *"*

In the first part of this essay I presented the history of commodity production as passing through three overlapping stages, each of which entailed a bifurcation into two classes, which polarizes the social field. In each stage, that field has a certain definitive quality. The rise of industry, and the struggle between worker and capitalist, produces a more abstract topography, a second nature. The rise of information and the struggle between hacker and vectoralist produces an even more abstract topology, a third nature. This space becomes a global topology in which almost any point can connect to any other, mobilizing resources on a planetary scale.

At each stage, the field of class conflict might have a certain polarity between the principle dominating and dominated classes, but all classes across all three "natures" interact, as if in a game of three-dimensional chess. In many instances the key class conflict may be between different ruling classes. The unity of the three dominated classes can also never be guaranteed. They are not a multitude, but distinct classes with different functions in the production process.

The campaign for a universal basic income (UBI) was launched in Davos, Switzerland this year with the help of a friendly robot that demands UBI for his fellow humans. A referendum is scheduled for June 2016.

With this understanding in place, it is possible to reframe a somewhat confused debate about whether to imagine historical change in terms of a force that would *negate* the relentless drive of commodification, or rather would *accelerate* it towards its end. Neither, as we shall see, offers much in our times by way of renewing the historical

A literally decaying society adorns the poster from the 1989 Brian Yuzna film Society, here shown in a detail.

imagination.

Particularly in the Western or Hegelian Marxist tradition, the proletariat is a force that is supposed to negate capital.[1] The proletariat bursts out from inside the commodity form which traps it as just another thing and realizes its full subjectivity and universal humanity. The particular act of blockage that is the strike is thus either a precursor or a limit on thinking the total blockage to be an act of will of the proletariat as revolutionary subject of history, rising out of, and refusing, its objectification.

With the failure of the revolutions of the late sixties, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, and Negri started to think more in terms of an acceleration of capitalism towards its end.[2] This was really a frank admission of the weakness of labor and the loss of its power to block and stop, let alone to totally negate, the flows of commodified life. The idea was instead to press the development of capitalism to its limit, which is indeed what seemed to have occurred.

To its detractors, acceleration smells too much like the much derided if never clearly spelled-out bad other that is neoliberalism. It seems too close to the ideology of what in our terms is a fraction of the vectoralist class, that which claims to be about "tech," and which wants to pivot and disrupt and generally creatively destroy the world for fun and interest. However, it could be pointed out that in many ways this ideology is just as much about negation. It is just that the vectoralist class ascendancy wants to destroy the last vestiges of the power of *both* capital and labor, and subordinate both to control through information.

The problem is more that both negation and acceleration are limited forms of historical imagination. Negation is a figure that presupposes that there is only second nature. There is only capital and its negation by the proletariat. Acceleration is a figure that presupposed that there is only third nature. There is only the abstraction beyond second nature. It is not a form of historical imagination that has grasped the development of new class relations on this terrain.

Both negation and acceleration neglect the problem of the limits to the transformation of nature by *both* second and third nature. The historical imagination of negation makes a fetish of the social, as if it were not embedded in both nature and techne. The historical imagination of acceleration in its earlier versions makes a fetish of desire, and in its later iterations of a technical rationality. Desire was never thought together with need; rationality was never thought through the property form and hence class relations in which it appears in third nature.

Neither had much to say about the vast *metabolic rifts* opening up through the operation of second and third nature on their natural substrate.[3] The best known of these is molecular flows of carbondioxide and methane into the atmosphere, caused by fossil fuels and livestock. The intensive development of second nature, followed by

the command of any and all of the world's resources that third nature enables, causes entropic feedback into the whole global production and reproduction process.[4] Indeed, the vectoralist class now feeds off the very entropic disorder that it produces. Thus, human, social, and technical history can no longer be imagined independently of natural history.

Only an alliance of all the subordinated classes could ever hope to confront this potentially catastrophic development of third nature under the domination of the vectoralist class. Such an alliance would need to clearly identify new vulnerabilities, given that few of the old choke points of the factory or even the "social factory" of the city can "derail" a power that does not depend on rails but rather on the more flexible topology of the information vector. It may have been symbolically and poetically helpful to say "occupy Wall Street"—but it is rather more difficult to do in practice. How do you occupy an abstraction?

Thinking about history in terms of either negation of acceleration leaves out too much of the picture. These are views which not only neglect certain key features of third nature, they miss what is crucial in our times about nature itself. The era of third nature is one that commands not only all of second nature as a resource, but all of nature as well. Moreover, all of nature becomes the exhaust, the heat sink, the dumping ground, for all of the entropic waste products of a now planetary scale of abstract social production.

What if history can be neither negated nor accelerated? Perhaps second and third nature have been built so broad and so deep that there's no getting around this infrastructure. Thus while the commodity economy keeps plodding along, at its own relentless pace, it forms agents of any class in its own image and obliges them to work in the forms it determines. What if even the vectoralist class had little power anymore over its own creation?

This would be to think then about the *inertia* of history. Jean-Paul Sartre offers a brilliant account of this, in his own distinctive language, here translated into the language of this text.[5] Collective social endeavor, first in agriculture, then industry, then information, built an infrastructure over and against itself, which then shapes those ongoing efforts to its calcified forms. All that is solid might melt into air, but it precipitates back out of the gaseous into the solid state again as more of the same.

The commodity form drives labor to create not only the product of the moment but an infrastructure that endures and that has the commodity form embedded in itself. Thus it shapes action on and in and through it into its own form, stripping collective effort of its social character and robbing it of the capacity to change it. Action becomes, even as action, a form of *passivity*, in which each action appears separated from all others, as mere individual action, for which there can be only individual rewards.

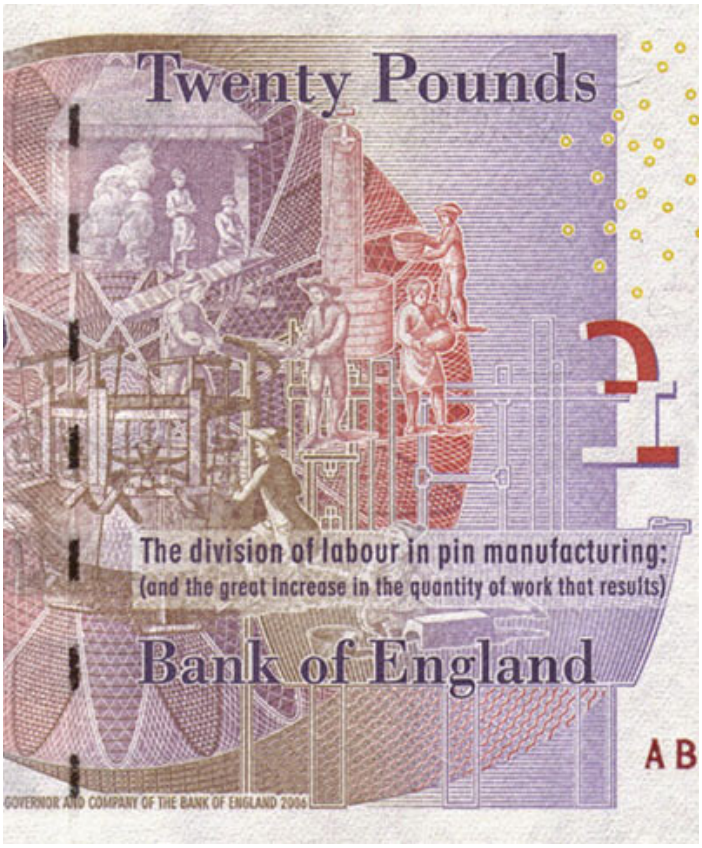
An illustration retrieved from googling "hacker." The keyboard is a weapon.

Hence there is no negation, as the infrastructure itself does not afford much by way of action that could confront it with a qualitative break in its form. And hence there is no acceleration, as the infrastructure of second and third nature alike determine the pace at which change is to happen, and moreover shape change as simply more of the same. Acceleration is no more capable of rendering a qualitative break than negation.

This paraphrase of Sartre is as bleak as the original, if not quite in the same rich language. Sartre held out some hope for a kind of action that would fuse individual wills and get them out of the solipsistic and unrelated separation from each other. In Sartre this is the *fused group*—an idea that shows up in modified form as Guattari's subjective moment or Badiou's subject-forming event.

In any case, this line of thought about historical action still bets heavily on a collective human action, or even a posthuman rationality in and against an infrastructure whose very form absorbs and renders inert such activity. The paradox of third nature is thus that it does indeed accelerate and proliferate transactions of a commodified type, but always of the same type. The flexibility and precarity it generates on the surface is the effect of a deep and wide infrastructural immobility.

This is where the disruptive capacity of collective endeavor, whether the farmer's riot, the worker's strike, or the hacker's exploit, has to be acknowledged to be a limited and one-sided view of historical action.[6] Which brings us to a fourth term, implied as a gap left over in the matrix of the other three. If the attempt to negate or accelerate history runs up against the inertia of the infrastructure on which it runs, then perhaps it's a question not of braking or speeding that infrastructure, but of *designing a different one.*



The British twenty-pound note glorifies Adam Smith's considerations on the increase of productivity with the introduction of the division of labor.

The infrastructures of second and third nature have taken on the form of commodity exchange and embedded it into every aspect of everyday life. The design of a different one has to look elsewhere. Perhaps the natural history of forms can here come to the rescue of the social history of forms, now that the latter have come to be endless clones and servants of the one form, just of an ever more abstract nature.

This is a perilous path, as it is almost impossible to avoid projecting backwards onto natural forms the habits of thought of second nature and now third nature. In the industrial era, liberal capitalism and the steam engine shaped an image of nature as a Darwinian free market. In our own time, neoliberal vectoralism and the computer shape a different image of nature, but one no less a matter of substituting images from the world of production onto nature itself as a petit-bourgeois struggle of "selfish genes."

What would it mean, then, to understand nature from the points of view not of the dominant classes but of the dominated? To think nature as the farmer or the worker or the hacker might, as symbiotic practices of transforming, respectively, matter, energy, and information? Might it be possible to use the collective struggles of three stages of the commodity economy to critique the dominant worldviews that have emerged about nature, but not to stop there? The task for the historical imagination is to move on, and attempt to *extrapolate* from what can be known about natural forms the possible morphologies for the design of a new infrastructure.[7]

So, the bad news: the juggernaut that is third nature cannot be negated, as its very form is dedicated to routing around any specific points at which action could be effective. Nor can it be accelerated. There is no subordinate class in a position to push it further or faster than it goes of its own accord. Thinking history from the point of view of the product rather than the producers flips the picture around and shows that the cumulative heft of what collective endeavor has built is what stands in the way of its own transformation.

Which leaves only the option of redesigning it on the fly. This would require collaborative action among the subordinated classes. The differences among such classes cannot be wished away by branding it the multitude or by imposing by fiat a kind of philosophical universalism. It means an approach to coalition building that is more about economic agents than merely political ones, as in most versions of radical democracy.[8] It is time to build a new infrastructure within the ruins of the old.

X

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1
See, for example, Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972) and Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994). Interestingly, the latter is only partly a theory of history as negation. The last chapter, on détournement, rather points in other directions.

2
Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014); *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* , eds. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomics, 2014).

3
On metabolic rift, see: John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); John Bellamy Foster et al., *The Ecological Rift* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010).

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See Robert Biel, *The Entropy of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).

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Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol. 1* (London: Verso, 2004).

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On precapitalist forms of revolt, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (London: Norton, 1965). On forms of revolt of the hacker class, see Alex Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007) and Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2014).

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I take the concept of extrapolation from Joseph Needham, *Time: The Refreshing River* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1948).

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For the classic statement of radical democracy, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2014).

Charles Tonderai Mudede

The Equalizer

Continued from “”

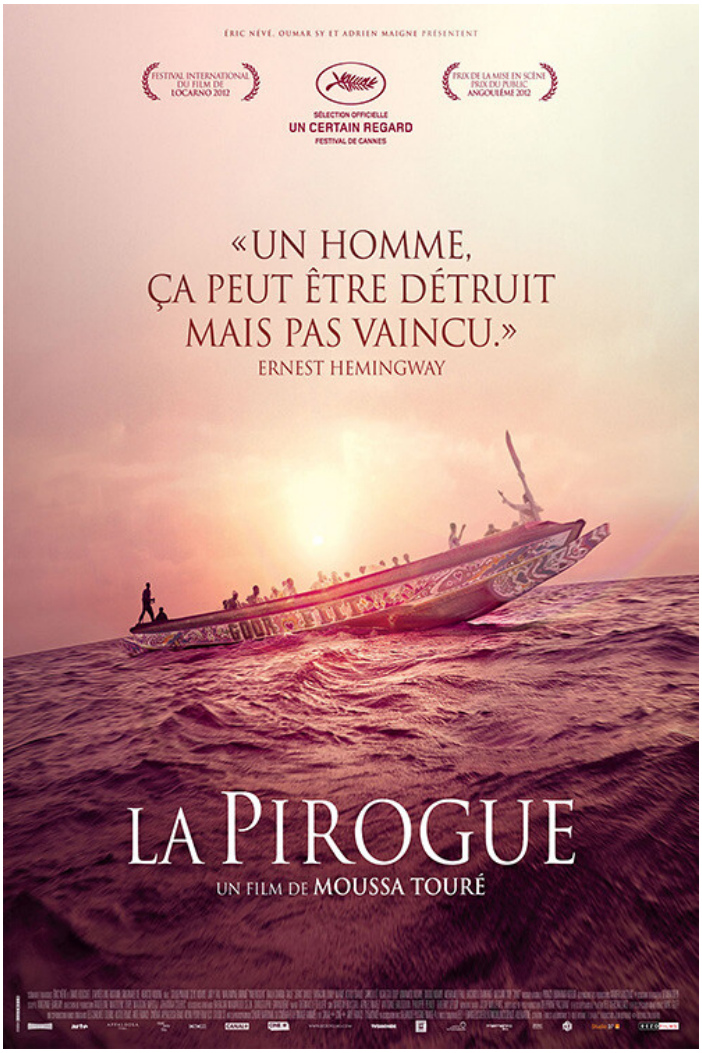
Let’s return to this galaxy, this solar system, this planet—indeed, the continent, Africa, that gave birth to an animal that can reflect on planets, solar systems, galaxies, and even the possibility of multi-verses. The movie is *The Pirogue*. It’s directed by Moussa Touré. It begins in Senegal, and has a young fisherman, Baye Laye (played by Souleymane Seye Ndiaye), as its central character. Baye’s life is not bad, but clearly more money would make things easier. One day, a local entrepreneur offers him lots of what he lacks, cash, to transport thirty black Africans to Spain. The trip is estimated to take seven days.

Baye’s boat is not tiny but is by no means big enough to guarantee anything like a safe journey across a major body of water. But the bleakness of the economic conditions of post-postcolonial Senegal—or rather neoliberal, post-Fanon, afro-pessimist Senegal (which I previously described as being inaugurated by Diop Mambéty’s film *Hyènes*) — make these very poor odds of success and the high risk involved acceptable to the imagination.

Those attempting this very dangerous trip are not insane, nor are they terribly poor. Their minds are in fine working order, and, more importantly, they are wealthy enough to make the massive thousand-euro bet against the unknown between the shores of the continents, and the greater unknown beyond the walls of Fortress Europe and into the lands of the inhabitant.[1] The people on the boat leave Africa as citizens, and if they are lucky, they will enter Europe and become inhabitants.

What is an inhabitant? He or she issues from the citizen. What is a citizen? He or she is the ultimate unit of a state, and he or she has obligations to this state, and the state has obligations to this he or she—the one who has made an agreement with many others to imagine the nation’s borders, order, and laws. The citizen emerged from the premodern (feudal) *subject*, and from the *citizen* emerges the *inhabitant*, who lives inside a nation but outside its democratic or governing institutions.

Whereas the citizen subject is a body and a state, the inhabitant is just his/her land and body—a will, a unit not of a state but of organs and the plain moral right to maintain the health of those organs. By not being committed to democracy in its national form, the inhabitant occupies a space—a very open space—that does not construct a radically new kind of subjectivity so much as expose what is most human in humans. It is at this moment of exposure that the inhabitant encounters and passes through its opposite: the stateless cosmopolitanism of the global managerial class.



The poster for Moussa Touré's The Pirogue (2012) shows the vessel in which most of the film takes place.

One of Baye's passengers cracks almost immediately after the ship leaves the coast of Africa. When the land vanishes, he realizes that reasoning on solid ground (I cross the sea, I reach Europe, I get a job, I send money back home, I save money, I maybe open a shop) is not the same as reasoning on the sea (this water will take us nowhere but more water and will not end until everything is water). He suddenly understands the true scale of the danger and wants to go back home, back to land. But there is no turning back. It's now Europe or death.

Another passenger explains that he dreams of becoming a musician in Paris. Another hopes to get a new leg in Spain (he lost his real one in another boat that crashed while attempting to cross the same sea). Another passenger wants to be just like his brother, who has his papers in order and is doing well as a mechanic in France. This is a ship of dreams that can be dashed by just one powerful wave.

But this story as a story is already old hat. We read about these kinds of journeys in the papers and on the web all the time. They provide a steady living for hundreds of European journalists. Even the story as a movie is hardly exceptional, as it's one among several feature films on the subject. There is even a romantic comedy, *Paris*, that assumes the crisis to have become so routine that it can be romanticized—the fragile boat, the dreamy lover, the dangerous Mediterranean, the deepening twilight. So on its own, *The Pirogue*'s scenario really adds nothing new to what other movies and mainstream media have already narrated or reported over and over again. And it would have already slipped from its place on the screen to merge with all those eye-grabbing headlines ("From Africa to Europe: A Surprisingly Dangerous Journey for Migrants," "Sea of Chaos and Despair for African Refugees," "Europe Brings Risk and Heartbreak") if it weren't for one important sequence. It is brief, yet it means everything, and it occurs not long after the journey begins.

While cutting across a sea whose calm becomes unsettling, the boat encounters another boat. The other boat looks just like the first one, and, indeed, had the same purpose until its engine died. The people on the other boat have been drifting for days and are desperate for water and food. The sea is another kind of desert. They scream for help, they wave their hands wildly, some dive into the sea and splash-swim towards their last chance in the world.

But this other boat poses many problems for the Senegalese fisherman and his passengers. Is there enough food to feed those who want to come aboard, in addition to those already aboard? The Senegalese fisherman didn't calculate the extra weight and trouble of the others into the trip, into the size and the estimated resilience of the fishing vessel, which has only two engines: one in use, and another as backup. The most rational thing for the most rational animal to do would be to not stop to rescue the other migrants, and to continue on as if nothing happened. This decision is clearly correct because it makes perfect sense. Better for some to survive than for all to go under. Reason deals with facts, which are often indifferent to or divorced from precisely what appeals to the emotions: the present moment. Reason weighs events in the past and makes calculations about what is likely to happen in the future. The extreme version of this is called Laplace's demon. This demon is not about how you feel about things, but the hard laws of matter in the universe.

But here is the heart of Touré's *The Pirogue*, and if you miss it, you have missed the movie. This is not, it turns out, a dramatization of the headline horrors of watery mass graves, wave-dashed dreams, sinking pregnant women in crepuscular water, and dead babies common to those of the myth of Drexciya. This is a very direct statement about the nature of our humanity.

Still from The Pirogue.

When the fisherman and his passengers decide not to help the others, they decisively break with something profoundly human. And such a break must have serious spiritual consequences. The animal we are is human, and that is our nature, our being, our species spirit. A heavy silence falls on the boat. Each traveler has turned inward and must now confront the question: What kind of animal have you become when you no longer behave like a human? What is your spirit? This question also appears in Mambéty's *Hyènes*. But that film asks a question and provides an answer that is deeply pessimistic. In *The Pirogue*, the characters ask themselves this question, and soon they fear the terrible answer that faces them.

The headlines exit. The moral universe enters.

Things start going wrong after making this defining decision. The engine dies, but there is another one. Then that engine dies. We might accept this as some serious bad luck (the engines never looked reliable to begin with), but then a storm erupts out of nowhere. The clouds explode. The wind screams. Thunder cracks. The waves crash. The boat is tossed about. Some passengers are thrown overboard. We realize that the storm is not natural but supernatural.

But why has a film that's been so realistic, so meticulous in its descriptions of characters, their backgrounds, their hopes, the money they paid for the trip, the distance they have to travel to reach the good life, the sea-worthiness of the boat they are on, suddenly take a turn toward the fantastic?

Indeed, the real events leading to the tragedy of a Libyan fishing trawler in April 2015 (the headlines: "700 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean shipwreck," "Hundreds of Migrants Are Feared Dead as Ship Capsizes Off Libyan Coast," "EU leaders call for emergency talks after 700 migrants drown off Libya") almost match those in the movie *The Pirogue:* entrepreneurs want a trained fisherman to "pilot the voyage,"[2] the fisherman reluctantly agrees to do the job, people pay lots of money to reach Europe, and so on. But whereas the Libyan fishing journey ended with a banal miscalculation by the ship's captain, the journey in *The Pirogue* ends biblically.

But why, after the incident with the stranded ship, did the director of *The Pirogue*, Touré, depart from realism and

Still from Terraferma, a 2011 Italian film directed by Emanuele Crialese in which, similar to The Pirogue, a fisherman is confronted with the moral dilemma of rescuing migrants lost at sea.

enter the paranormal universe of: "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken"?[3] Why did he not just make it a matter of an error or poor judgment by the captain? True, a storm is much more cinematic, but there is much more to it than that.

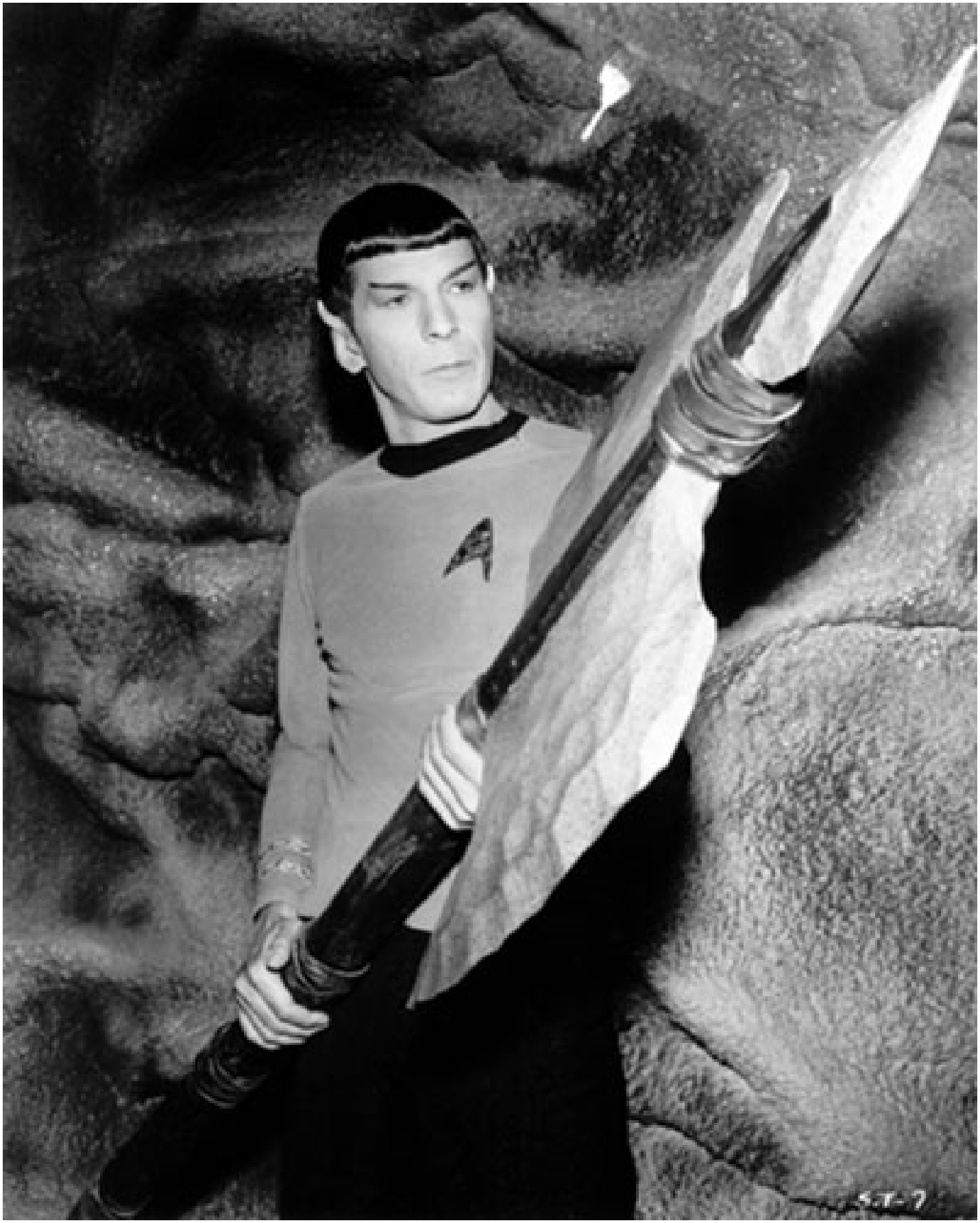
The decision not to rescue the other humans provokes moral outrage. And this outrage takes the form of a storm that destroys the boat and kills several would-be migrants. Had they done the moral thing, the right thing (helped the stranded humans), the weather and the outcome of the trip would have been different. The director would not, like an angry god, have punished his characters.[4]

But the god of *The Pirogue* seems to be a touch unreasonable; after all, the fisherman and passengers were not cruel or evil. On the surface of things, it seems a bit unfair. They made a tough decision that was in essence rational. How can they be punished for this? Why did the director not sympathize with the difficulty of his characters' circumstances? Is this maybe a cultural thing—are Africans just superstitious people who don't understand that we must make rational decisions in a secular and scientific world?[5]

No, the reason for the film's fantastic god-mad storm has its roots in basic biology, in the human body, the genes. We are moral not because of supernatural reasons but because of how we evolved over thousands of years. We are no more the rational animal than the moral one. A space ape like *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock is a rational animal. But Earth apes like us evolve in a completely different direction. A very basic but important question then presents itself: What is morality?

The answer is simple: morality is the maintenance of equality between humans. What is right and what is wrong always involves situations that either increase or decrease a group's equality. Truly moral actions are always equalizers. They rebalance a situation that has broken with this equilibrium. This is all morality can really mean. Anything beyond this definition is a distortion, distraction, or pure nonsense.[6]

What must not be forgotten or missed is that moral behavior thrives best in social contexts that are egalitarian, in societies committed to equality. A moral animal is not just social (most ant colonies are social without having morality) but rather practices a form of sociality in which one maintains his/her equality with all members of his/her group. Other social formations can be hierarchical, and this may lead to complicated political arrangements, but not to morality. Politics does not lead to morality, but the rupture in a moral order can regress into politics.



Dr. Spock getting ready for a prehistoric attack.

Still from The Pirogue.

In an egalitarian order, one does not follow rules out of fear of those above them but out of an innate sense of responsibility to those around them. Politics is about alliances that grab for power or attempt to redistribute power. Egalitarianism does not so much distribute power as keep it in constant check. Chimpanzees are more political, and therefore less egalitarian, and therefore less moral, than humans.[7]

So what did the fisherman and his passengers do that was so immoral? And why were they punished by God? Because they did not restore to a state of equality the humans from the other boat who pleaded for their help. They entered an unequal situation and left it as just that: unequal. And this is precisely what the plea for help is: make me equal to you. If it is in your power to restore equality (meaning, if your position is better than that of the one who needs and wants help), and you do not, this is sin in its original sense. We have only this apple in the human garden.

The forms of equalization: from a person who is hungry to a person who has food to eat; from a person who is sick to a person in good health[8]; from a person who is stranded at sea to a person on a functioning boat. To not help is to break with the essence of human morality, which is to either reinforce or reinstate equality. And this break is felt so powerfully that its force can disrupt the order of nature: all the stars fall at once, birds fall out of the sky, lions appear on downtown streets.

But where did these egalitarian feelings come from? And why are they so powerful that, as in the mythical themes of films such as *Star Wars*, many believe that they structure not only our minds and our lives, but the entirety of the universe?[9] As there is a negative charge and positive charge, antimatter and matter, forces of attraction and repulsion, there is good and evil.[10] And what is good is equality, and what is bad is inequality. What made us this kind of animal? The answer is simple: We are not a strong animal; we are essentially weak. Our closest relative, the chimpanzee, is, according to evolutionary biologist Alan Walker, four times stronger than the average human. We don't even have sharp teeth. Our development is terribly slow. Our big brains take twenty-one years to fully develop. Our babies are completely useless. Unlike chimpanzees and gorillas, our women need assistance during childbirth. They need help.[11] Humans are even terrible sprinters, as

much as we admire Usain Bolt. Few things in nature are more doomed than a human who is alone and left to fend for him- or herself.

Our survival has depended on dependency.[12] "To man … there is nothing more useful than man."[13] From this dependency arose our cooperative behavior. We did not become a hypersocial animal because it was a good idea, but because we had no other choice. Strong individuals would have led us to our extinction, which is why we used to punish them, to keep them in check. (I refer you to my previous essay on *Hyènes*, because egalitarian justice is where dependency and cooperative behavior make their most important link.) As these prosocial behaviors shaped the world around us, this reshaped world began to shape us culturally and physically. And also genetically.

The rising and falling of the sun is reflected in our genes, which is why we have good reason to worship the sun.[14] So it comes as no surprise that our genetic morality captured our galactic imagination.[15] That's *Star Wars*. That's the force. That's the biblical struggle between Heaven and Hell, and that's what transforms the calm seas of *The Pirogue* into a raging storm.

X

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1
The per-capita income of Senegal in the year *The Pirogue* was made (2012) was 1,700 euros, and trips across the sea on a fishing skiff can cost up to 2,600 euros.

2
A Reuters story posted on April 25, 2015 reported that the brother of the ship's captain claimed that the latter was forced by a greedy gang to take the dangerous job: "My brother was recruited by Libyans to work in a cafe in Libya a few weeks ago, but afterwards he was forced under threat by smugglers to pilot the voyage because he knows a little about the sea and worked with our father fishing" http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-captain-exclsuive-idUSKBN0NG0M620150425

3
Jonah 4, King James Bible.

4
Here is a crucial scene from the excellent Italian film *Terraferma*: Three Italian fishermen spot a large number of black Africans stranded on a flimsy lifeboat in the open sea. The black Africans wave and yell for help. The owner of the fishing boat, Ernesto (Mimmo Cuticchio), radios the coast guard and gives them information about the situation. The coast guard orders the fisherman not to go near the Africans but also not to leave the area until their patrol boat arrives. Suddenly, one by one, some of the desperate Africans jump into the sea and attempt to swim toward the fishing boat. Ernesto then decides to move closer to the Africans and help them out of the dangerous sea. But another fisherman reminds him that it is against the law to help illegal immigrants. (This is the rational thing to do.) But the owner of the boat responds: "I've never left people on the sea." (This is not the rational thing to do.) It is that moral code, however, that moral certainty, that is at the heart of *Terraferma* : these are not Africans, stateless illegals, or whatever; these are humans. *The Pirogue* , of course, has the exact same situation: sea-stranded black Africans calling for help from a passing boat. But this time the captain of the passing boat is a black African who is transporting black Africans to Europe. This captain does not make the same decision as Ernesto, and so empties his entire trip and trade of all moral substance. (I use "substance" here in a Spinozistic sense—the moral is the all of our species being.)

5
Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Reality Poem": Dis is di age af science an teknalagy / but some a wi a deal wid mitalagy / dis is di age af science an' teknalagy / dis is di age af reality / but some a wi a deal wid mitalagy / dis is di age af science an' teknalagy / but some a wi check fi antiquity.

6
I must turn to Wikipedia because I do not have the time or energy to write about this and related nonsense about morality: "The Moral Majority was a prominent American political organization associated with the Christian right and Republican Party. It was founded in 1979 by Baptist minister Jerry Falwell and associates, and dissolved in the late 1980s. It played a key role in the mobilization of conservative Christians as a political force and particularly in Republican presidential victories throughout the 1980s" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_Majority

7
The path to this conclusion begins with Frans de Waal's *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes* .

8
In his book *The Rise of Christianity* , sociologist Rodney Stark indeed links the expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire with the success of the social services the community provided during devastating plagues: "The second (reason for the rise of Christianity) is to be found in an Easter letter by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria. Christian values of love and charity had, from the beginning, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity. When disasters struck, the Christians were better able to cope, and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival. This meant that in the aftermath of each epidemic, Christians made up a larger percentage of the population even without new converts. Moreover, their noticeably better survival rate would have seemed a 'miracle' to Christians and pagans alive, and this ought to have influenced conversion."

9
When I saw the first *Star Wars* movie in 1977 at the age of eight, I entered the theater a Christian but walked out an atheist. Before seeing the movie, I understood the war of good against evil to be an entirely Christian one: God vs. Satan. Imagine my shock when I saw on the screen a whole different order, a whole different war between the forces of good and the forces of evil—a war, furthermore, that made no mention of Jesus, or Lucifer, or the Last Supper. Yet, in the absence of any Christian codes of goodness, I still sided with that faraway galaxy's own codes of goodness. As I walked out of the theater, I realized that God was limited, and what was infinite was the good itself, and that the good could take on many different shapes (Obi-Wan Kenobi, John the Baptist, Luke Skywalker, Jesus, Princess Leia, Mary).

10
What else is the first section of Spinoza's *Ethics* but an effort to provide an anthropological account for morality? He wants to liberate God from human morality, recognizing how limited it is. What is good or bad according to us is not what is good or bad according to the universe. Indeed, the universe is cold to such anthropocentric values. The universe is just the universe.

11
It's almost impossible for a human female to safely give birth without assistance, a fact that the sociobiolgist Sarah Hrdy places at the center of human sociality in her book *Mothers and Others*. According to this view, the absence of, say, extensive and moral elaboration in gorilla sociality, can be explained by the absence of helpers during the birth of a gorilla. Human sociality is bonded at and by this crucial moment, by the help that's needed to birth and raise new humans. And why do human females need help? Because human bodies are weak and human babies have huge heads. As Jared Diamond points out in his short book *Why Is Sex Fun*: "A one-hundred-pound woman typically gives birth to a six-pound infant, while a female gorilla twice that size (two hundred pounds) gives birth to an infant only half as large (three pounds). As a result, human mothers often died in childbirth before the advent of modern medical care, and women are still attended at birth by helpers (obstetricians and nurses in modern first-world societies, midwives or older women in traditional societies), whereas female gorillas give birth unattended and have never been recorded as dying in childbirth."

12
The work of cultural theorist Nancy Fraser and historian Linda Gordon convincingly shows that until the emergence of seventeenth-century European individualism, which also marked the emergence of modern capitalism, the concept of dependency was not negative. Among other things, it structured feudal society: the king depended on God, landlords on the king, peasants on landlords. With neoliberalism, the negative interpretation of dependency has gained ascendance.

13
Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVP18S.

14
My favorite passage in Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* : "I will speak briefly about the most general conditions of life, dwelling on one crucially important fact: Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy—wealth—without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving. Men were conscious of this long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless prodigality; they saw it ripen the harvests and they associated its splendor with the act of someone who gives." This, in essence, is sun worship.

15
As Spinoza knew all too well, the God in the scriptures, the God who created the universe, was essentially human, the moral animal. But this misconception is to be expected. It's as natural as the wind. "If a triangle could speak, it would say, in like manner, that God is eminently triangular, while a circle would say that the divine nature is eminently circular. Thus each would ascribe to God its own attributes, would assume itself to be like God."