Editorial

This week in Russia, Alexei Navalny was sentenced to over two years in prison, partly for violating parole while in a coma from a state-sponsored murder attempt. Following a week of large-scale demonstrations across Russia protesting his arrest, the skilled lawyer and anti-corruption activist stood in court before his sentencing and stated, "I hope very much that people won't look at this trial as a signal that they should be more afraid. This isn't a demonstration of strength—it's a show of weakness. You can't lock up millions and hundreds of thousands of people. I hope very much that people will realize this. And they will. Because you can't lock up the whole country."

In this issue of *e-flux journal*, Ariel Goldberg and Yazan Khalili reflect on photographic images' ties to violence, surveillance, and the state—"the camera that eats all other cameras." In their essay "We Stopped Taking Pictures," the recently appointed cochairs of the photography department at Bard's MFA program explain the irony of their own coincidental decisions to stop taking pictures themselves by identifying a vastly expanded photographic regime that the field must now account for. Today, the two photographers who stopped taking pictures teach their graduate students through photographic media (webcams) about the double-edged sword of surveillance—the CCTV footage from cameras Palestinians install to prevent theft that are also used by the IDF to surveil them, or the cop who kills regardless of his body camera or the bystander filming him. The overabundance of photographic documentation makes harder questions necessary. For example: "How can one photograph laws, these less visual forms of violence that remain the status quo?"

Jace Clayton replays Meriem Bennani's video of a pale crowd at the US Capitol—but the one that sang there in triumph (or in this version, screamed) four years ago, not last month. Despite all that's horrible now, including the fact that "the crumbling nation-state is inhabited by networked communities that no longer share a remotely consensual reality," Sven Lütticken looks deeply into the present (and recent past) for, among searing critiques, signs of emergence and potential possibilities.

Two essays in this issue round out the special miniseries co-commissioned by Katia Krupennikova and Inga Lāce as part of "Survival Kit 11 (Being Safe Is Scary)." In addition to Goldberg and Khalili's text in the series, Imogen Stidworthy, an artist and filmmaker, brings together fragments of her work and relationships with language amongst people on and around the spectrum of nonverbal autism.

Nikolay Smirnov peers into the history of Russia's cultural and religious immanentism—a family of syncretic worldviews rejecting Abrahamic religious transcendence in favor of the immanent physical world of "earth, cosmos, ecumene, material environment, or social relations." Fahim Amir's "Cloudy Swords" encounters a colonial

avant-garde of honeybees spreading with white settlers in America, mosquito armies that recall past colonial panic and present viral dilemmas, and insects determined to colonize the colonizer in the twentieth century.

J.-P. Caron traces world-making and world-unmaking between sci-fi, the philosophers Nelson Goodman and Peter Strawson, and the constitutive dissociations of Henry Flynt. Xenia Benivolski writes on Dora Budor's *The Preserving Machine*, an ongoing installation based on a Phillip K. Dick story about a scientist's desperate attempt to use animals and insects to preserve European music. This is an entryway to tracing human relation to birdsong, which reveals "otherwise invisible political interventions into landscapes and soundscapes."

Sonali Gupta and H. Bolin urge us to understand the coronavirus beyond good and evil, through fugitive mechanics, and on the farther side of the calculus of survival—"in a manner that neither applauds the virus nor remains paralyzed by fear, uncritically accepting state measures of control and austerity in hopes of a return to normal."

X

So let us thank this small insect, the mosquito, which has preserved the land of our ancestors for us.
—Sanja Doyo Onabamiro, Ibadan, Nigeria[1]

Fahim Amir
Cloudy Swords

The honeybee has recently risen to become the "insect mascot of environmental politics"[2] and has outstripped the save the whale and dolphin campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas French environmental activists who publicly placed a beehive on the roof of the Paris Opera were immediately arrested, today it seems there is hardly a major cultural institution in the big cities of the West that doesn't point proudly to an urban beehive on its roof.

The fruit of the labor of the industrious female insects can then usually be purchased onsite in containers smartly designed by local or international artists. In the museum gift shops, the proverbial *busyness* of the bees combines with the creativity of the artists into the effective public relations of a creative industries appeal under the banner of commercialized sustainability and ecological diversity.

The honeybee is a darling animal of ecocapitalists not only because it links worry about survival on the planet with agricultural interests, but also because it carries substantial metaphorical baggage as a hardworking producer, organized on the basis of division of labor, of medically valuable luxury comestibles and nutritious foods, all while connecting big cities with global ecology. Nowadays bees are prized by an increasing number of newcomers to the field of beekeeping "as trendy urban pets to be nurtured and rescued."[3]

The honeybee has little to do with nature in the traditional sense. As a rule, we are talking about breeding lines that are kept in rationalized Langstroth hives named after the American beekeeper and clergyman Lorenzo L. Langstroth. Langstroth had further developed the concept of modern, efficient beekeeping proposed by the Swiss beekeeper François Huber. Not long after Jeremy Bentham had presented his first designs for a panopticon that modernized the visual surveillance of prison inmates, Huber's rationalized beehives made it possible to inspect bees effortlessly. They consisted of square wooden frames with identical dimensions that could be "opened" like the pages of a book.[4] Now, nothing could escape the scrutinizing gaze: what was ready to harvest, what was sick and needed to be culled, and what could be left in place to thrive on its own.

Reading Material for the Road to Hell

Bees are by no means innocent representatives of nature. The commonly known honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) was introduced to North America by European settlers, and spread as quickly as the white settler families. Since bees
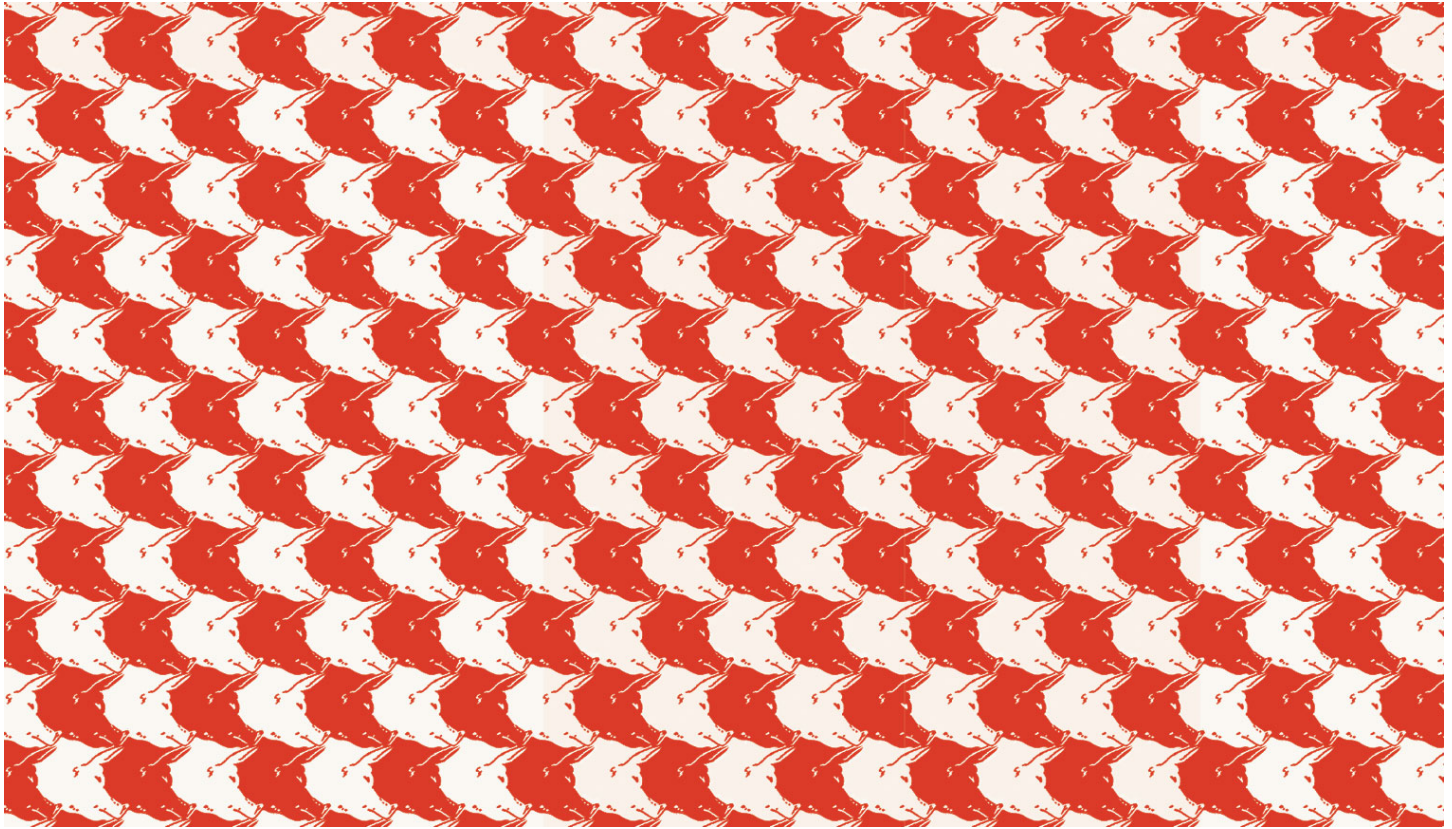
Pattern for the cover of Fahim Amir's book Being and Swine: The End of Nature (As We Knew It) (2020). Illustration: Caleb Mitchell.

swarm out on their own, they formed a colonial avant-garde that flew fifty to a hundred kilometers ahead of the advancing frontier of colonization, which was not lost on the Indigenous nations.[5] It is part of the political poetry of Jim Jarmusch's anti-Western *Dead Man* (1995), probably the most artistically precise reckoning with the historic and cinematic founding myth of the United States, that even this detail is seen more sharply than by most others. In the film's opening sequence, Johnny Depp, playing an accountant from Cleveland called William Blake, is sitting on a train on his way to take up a job offer in a city called Machine. Along with the train (an old symbol of progress and industrialization) he re-enacts the historical expansion westward. During the trip the other passengers become more and more frightening and desolate, appearing "jagged, ragged, disheveled, and uncivilized."[6]

At one point they jump up and shoot wildly out of the window—"murderous fun," killing bison by the hundreds; later a stoker, who seems to have sprung right out of a Kafka novel, sits down by the timid Blake and asks him what motivated him to set off on the road to hell. For a few seconds, hell is visible in the form of a burned-down Indigenous village. Blake quickly turns his attention back to the magazine he has chosen as his traveling companion on his road to hell. The magazine is titled *The Illustrated Bee Journal.* Now, for a few seconds, advertisements for products like "Vandalia" can be seen: civilization and

barbarism switch places. If the Vandals once sacked Rome, it is now the Romans, the real barbarians, who are ransacking the Vandals.

Imperial Insects

Today bees are deliberately incorporated into neocolonial pacification strategies. The US Armed Forces research network is testing the deployment of bees as "six-legged soldiers,"[7] which in the coming wars will be "efficient and effective homeland security detective devices,"[8] designed to detect insurgents' bombs more cheaply and quickly than ever before, at least according to a report from the Stealthy Insect Sensor project team at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.[9]

While the female worker bees perform a variety of jobs in the hive, the male drones are limited to very specific tasks. Mary Kosut and Lisa Jean Moore draw the metaphorical lines of connection between beekeeping and modern military policy in the figure of the "specialized, specific, and covert" work of predator drones as they have been routinely deployed by the US military since the presidency of Barack Obama for the extrajudicial execution of those designated as "enemy combatants": "in both bee culture and military culture, the role of drones is reduced to the performance of a series of 'heroic' duties [, namely,] surveillance, bomb-dropping, and insemination."[10]

But anyone who survives drone attacks is still not spared from metaphorical and real insects, for insects are a part of the "war on terror," as was revealed in 2009 by the publication of CIA memos on permissible torture techniques. Second to last on the list of ten "legitimate" torture techniques, between "sleep deprivation" and "waterboarding," is "insects placed in a detention box."[11] The unredacted part of the memo explains that Abu Zubaydah (who was apprehended in Pakistan in 2002 and then moved through a chain of offshore CIA prisons in Thailand, Poland, and Jordan, until he landed in Guantanamo for an indefinite stay) was physically and mentally so strong that normal interrogation techniques no longer worked. Therefore, his fear of insects was to be instrumentalized in the cause of national defense. According to the memo, the plan was to lock Abu Zubaydah in a cramped box (the eighteen-hour box permits only standing and the two-hour box only sitting) and to tell him that a stinging insect would be placed in it. But the actual plan was to use a harmless caterpillar.[12] Without giving any rationale, the memorandum explains that this specific torture technique was no longer used. Nonetheless, the imaginary insect remained a state secret until 2009.[13]

Neel Ahuja argues that this seemingly subtle technique for producing truth through "bestial touch"[14] follows a liberal logic that measures how humane and civilized torture by "trans-species intimacy" is in terms of the alleged absence of permanent physical and psychological damage.[15] For Ahuja, the meaning of this well-calculated abandonment of an apparently unusual torture method by the highest levels of the US government is only explicable when one considers a broader discursive semantic landscape that comprises the current racialization of the "brown Muslim multitude," colonial rhetoric, the insectoid imagination of terrorist forms of action and communication, as well as gendered bodies and "weaponized affects": "Following the double structure of metaphoric relations of insects to the terrorist psyche, the insect is both the weapon against an enemy and a description of that animalized enemy; the monster-terrorist is an insect that must be squashed, paradoxically by the threat of insectity to his masculine self-image."[16]

Mosquito Army

While bees are currently esteemed as universally valued bringers of life, there is another insect that can't be left off any Buzzfeed listicle of the world's deadliest animals: the mosquito. No other animal accounts for as many human fatalities as this insect. That's why the eradication of mosquitoes is a typical focus of philanthropic initiatives, from the Rockefeller Foundation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. But what if the front lines are not so clear-cut?

The term "differential immunity" describes the

phenomenon that people who have contracted malaria, for instance, early in life and survived have an advantage if reinfected over those who are fighting it for the first time. This influenced colonial entanglements and struggles for national independence, as the historian John McNeill argues.

For example, when the Maroons of Suriname were gripped by revolutionary fever in the 1770s, malarial fever swept away the Dutch punitive force. McNeill waggishly demands a monument to mosquitoes next to the stone presidents on Mount Rushmore, because the American Revolution would also have had a different outcome if the anticolonial forces had not had an advantage over the British pacification troops because of their prior immunity.[17]

In fact, the often fatal fevers known as malaria were recognized as the greatest health hazard for Europeans in tropical areas, and considered a major obstacle to the further colonization of territories beyond the coastal areas of Africa, South America, and Asia. Colonial military analysts regarded malaria "as an already existing enemy resisting imperial expansion."[18] Yet only at the end of the eighteenth century did this battle between malaria and militarism reach its peak, as the anthropologist Diane Nelson explains:

> The creation of transportation infrastructure such as canals and railroads, the deployment of armies, and the clearing of ground to plant tropical products all had to confront (in addition to uprisings, escape, work slowdowns, and other human-level obstacles) an invisible microbial resistance. The French, British, and US raced to find a cure for malaria in order to keep whites alive in their new milieux.[19]

One French colonial official complained in 1908: "fever and dysentery are the 'generals' that defend hot countries against our incursions and prevent us from replacing the aborigines that we have to make use of."[20] While infectious diseases were the generals of the anticolonial resistance, tropical medicine was assigned the role of a "counterinsurgent field."[21]

It comes as little surprise that the most important researchers in this field were officers serving in colonial outposts. In 1897 in Calcutta, this transimperial medical-military network (which was supported by countless local helpers) finally succeeded in scientifically proving the "mosquito theory": mosquitoes were identified as carriers of the malaria pathogen from infected to non-infected persons.[22] The shift toward Pasteur's microbial theory as a key to understanding diseases "structured a powerful imaginary of the colonies as vast laboratories where the enactment of hygienic measures could be tested, and the results compared across time and
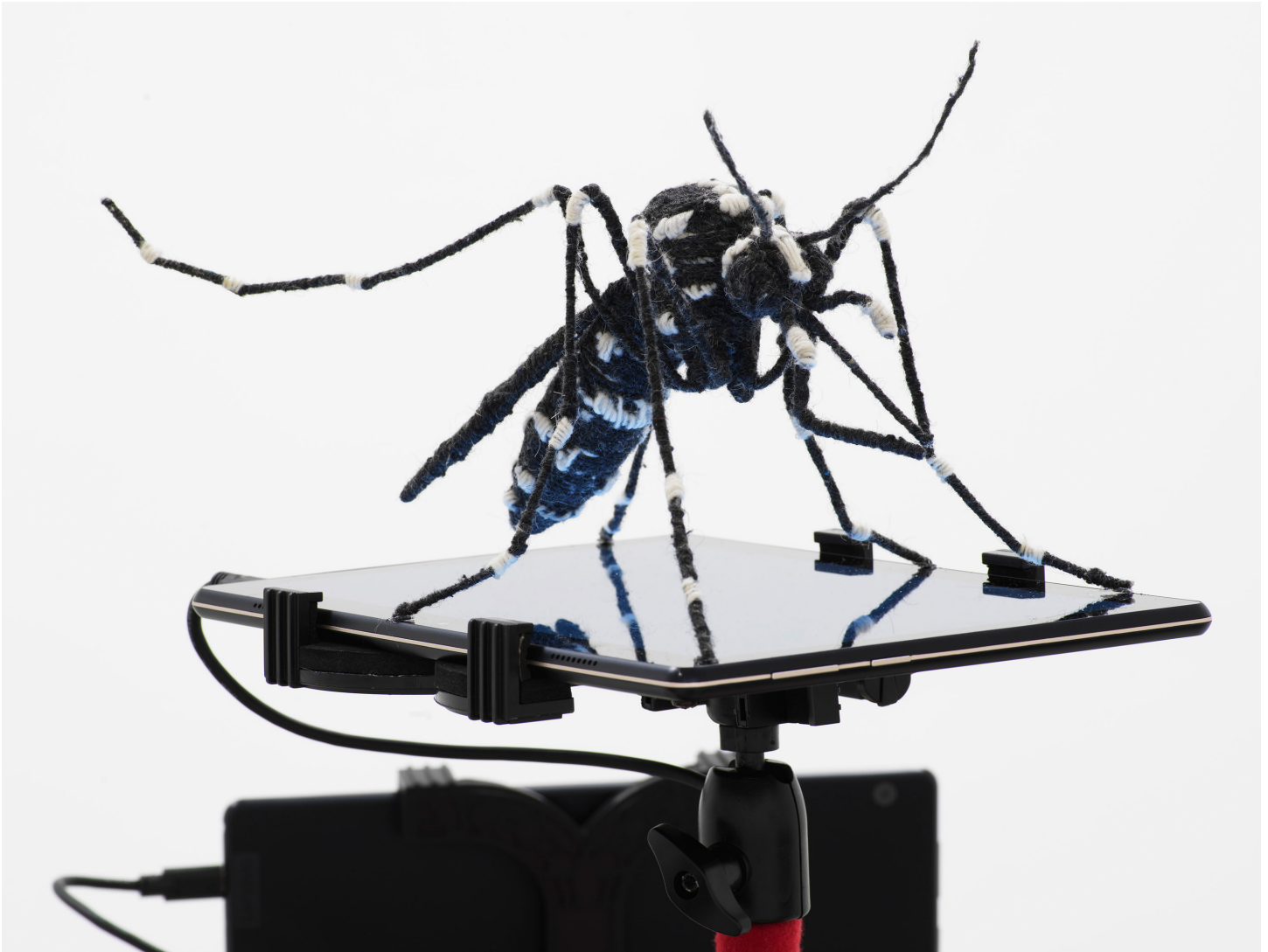
Natascha Sadr Haghighian, passing one loop into another, 2020. Installation view Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

space."[23] Until then, prevailing theories in tropical medicine had attributed the fever to noxious vapors issuing from the ground (hence the name *mal'aria*, "bad air")."Once germ theory was recognized, the idea of 'environment' became internalized and miniaturized in the form of invading entities; the key to medical success was now to exert control over body invaders."[24]

The Birth of Segregation from the Spirit of Mosquito Control

Humans living in imperial spheres of influence were suddenly brought into focus as a medically dangerous part of this environment: the Colonial Office promptly sent an expedition into the most malaria-infested corners of the British Empire. As the main problem, they quickly identified the African child. While adult Africans exhibited only mild malaria symptoms, African children often got seriously ill. Now that colonial medicine had defined them as the main reservoir of pathogenic germs, the expedition concluded its final report with the urgent recommendation to isolate white settlers and officials from African children. The suggestion was accepted. But how wide should the isolation zone be to guarantee that no bloodthirsty female mosquito could overcome it in her search for a drop of blood?

It was agreed that all new European settlements were to be surrounded by an anti-mosquito zone with no dwellings approximately four hundred meters wide, and that no locals were allowed to live within this area, so as to prevent female mosquitoes from feasting on infected children and then biting a European. Secondly, the exclusion belts were intended to provide protection from bush fires, which were allegedly especially common in the locals' neighborhoods, and thirdly they were supposed to protect the Europeans from "having their rest disturbed by drumming or other noises dear to the Natives."[25] Emma

Umana Clasberry points out that this form of segregation was even implemented in regions of Nigeria that were hardly affected by bush fires. Nor was segregation restricted to residential areas: "Even cemeteries were segregated."[26]

Since mosquitoes are nocturnal creatures, segregation had to be most strictly enforced at night. While officials and merchants performed their duties during the day in the city, during the dangerous African nights they were protected from children and mosquitoes in their gated communities. But because Europeans also didn't want to give up the amenities that made the colonies so attractive, i.e., servants, they were permitted to continue housing two servants for personal services in remote rooms at the back of the house, which undermined all of the segregationist health efforts.[27]

The segregationist mosquito doctrine was administered in Africa with varying degrees of strictness: from its most stringent form in the Belgian Congo, where the *cordon sanitaire* included a golf course, a botanical garden, and a zoo; to West Africa, wherein the new city of Dakar, after the malaria outbreak of 1914 all traditional attic houses in the European residential neighborhoods were burned down; to the German colony Cameroon, wherein 1904 the medical authorities published a city map that suggested dividing the city into six areas on the basis of race and race mixture.[28]

In Accra, the capital of Ghana, European merchants were permitted to work near the harbor during the day. But they were legally required to spend the nights half a mile away in a European "reservation"—"a distance that was farther than a mosquito flight."[29]

To gain more precise data about the flight behavior and biting patterns of the mosquitoes, migrant men were quartered in mosquito traps along the protection zone around the airport and prohibited from leaving the traps at night.[30] When it turned out that female mosquitoes could fly about one mile, the village of Nima was suddenly within the protection zone and was relocated, that is, its inhabitants were evacuated—it is not known under what circumstances.[31]

In South Africa, the hill stations became part of the "clean air circuit" that attracted many sick and debilitated Europeans from the overcrowded cities of the old continent to regain their health in the colonies before traveling back to carry out their duties at home. At the same time, hill stations and the European "healthy quarters" finally allowed familial reunification for civil servants who had left their families in their country of origin to work in the colonies—a process that helped end decades of racial mixing and personal relationships on various levels.[32]

The colonial city planning policy of using the range of movement of female mosquitoes to determine where exactly the local population was allowed to live lasted about ten years and had passed its peak by 1920. Responsible for its demise were the local elites, who put pressure on the British colonial officials from Hong Kong to India: "Their arguments against the expropriation of their lands for the health needs of a handful of Europeans—who then proceeded to live with lower-class African servants, mistresses, and sometimes their mistresses' supposedly deadly children—were even persuasive to colonial governors."[33]

The policy of segregation for health reasons was abandoned, at least rhetorically—after all, the cities were already built—but many of the models of segregated urban residential areas that had been implemented persisted well beyond this time.[34] We have the fight against the mosquito to thank for one of the worst ideas in the political history of social relations: segregation. The concept originally arose in the medical field and meant the isolation of "contagious" *individuals*. The first time the expression was used to denote a spatial separation of a general *group* was in a 1904 issue of the *British Medical Journal*: "Manson has also declared segregation to be the first law of hygiene for Europeans in the tropics."[35] As a "class term, it soon became, in South Africa, America, and elsewhere, a keyword in the vocabulary of race relations in the twentieth century."[36]

Women in Panama

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the discovery of mosquitoes as malaria and yellow fever carriers reawakened long-cherished plans such as the construction of the Panama Canal (1904–1914), which was to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Finally, a majority of the workers employed no longer constantly got sick or died.[37]

In 1916, the director of the US Bureau of Entomology and longtime general secretary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science rejoiced at this success as "an object lesson for the sanitarians of the world"—it demonstrated "that it is possible for the white race to live healthfully in the tropics."[38] As Timothy Mitchell writes: "In 1915, the year after the canal's completion, the newly established Rockefeller Foundation took over the mosquito campaign from the U.S. Army and launched a worldwide program to study and control the two mosquito-borne diseases. Thus the global movements of the mosquito gave shape to a transnational corporate philanthropy."[39] Disease was to be defeated not by improving social conditions or through medical intervention, but by the physical elimination of the hostile species. For the first time, war was declared on the mosquito.[40]

The urgency and severity of measures to combat

Alina Kunitsyna, Samting Noting (aus Fahim Amir, 'Schwein und Zeit', S.112), 2020. Oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm. Image courtesy of Galerie Kandlhofer.

dangerous diseases always had the collateral benefit of social pacification. In 1918, George Vincent, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, candidly declared: "For purposes of placating primitive and suspicious peoples, medicine has some decided advantages over machine guns."[41]

The construction of the Panama Canal, as one of the most important "transportation utopias" of the twentieth century, not only allowed commodities to be shipped more efficiently and quickly, but it also advanced the military expansion of the United States in the Caribbean.[42] The US occupation of the Canal Zone had already brought racist Jim Crow laws, which had followed the abolition of slavery in the US, to the spatial structure around the canal. Yet, when the increasing presence of US troops and the flow of

migrant laborers in the Canal Zone during the two world wars heightened fears of sexually transmitted diseases, "a medicalized state of war … attacked environmental space using the model of antimalarial campaigns aimed at controlling mosquitoes."[43]

Analogous to the stagnant waters where mosquito larvae develop, and to the mosquitoes themselves, the female body was now declared to be a reservoir of pathogens. Again and again, this body allegedly first infected US troops, only to spread to the white wives back home: "The spatial imaginary established through control of malarial mosquitoes deeply influenced cartographies" of sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea and syphilis, as well as the attempt to control them.[44] Although US troops themselves were an excellent vehicle for the global spread of disease, the risk was one-sidedly shifted to the local population and migrant workers, "conflating the body of the sex worker with the US occupation itself."[45]

Besides the inspection and closing of brothels and the establishment and expansion of vice squads and prophylaxis stations, during the night women were picked up all over the city and forcibly tested for sexually transmitted diseases—if the results were positive, they were detained in something between a prison and hospital for up to six months. This control over the movement of women in public spaces as potential sex workers and disease reservoirs was carried out just as women's rights activists were increasingly drawing attention to themselves in the 1940s.[46]

Fascism and the Goddess of Fever

At the same time women in Panama were becoming objects of police surveillance by way of combatting malaria, Italian fascism was trying to defeat a nature imagined as female by declaring it a priority to civilize the marshes of the Pontine Plain. The ancient Roman rhetorician Cicero had already described this landscape southeast of Rome as "neither pleasant nor healthy." This had hardly changed in two thousand years. The swampland was still the habitat of the anopheles mosquito and the dominion of the "Goddess of Fever."[47]

In Italian fascism, malaria seemed to be a flaw of a primal, feminine, sterile nature, whose unproductive development was to be prevented through the use of technology and science, chemistry, and propaganda, turning it into a second state of nature: "The mosquito was taken by the fascists to exemplify the evil character of pre-fascist nature in the marshes." The efforts to create "an idyllic rural area consonant with fascist ideals of productivity and activity within the state's interests"[48] included extensive electrification of the region, constructing thousands of kilometres of roads and canals and "large pumping and drainage plants called *impianti idrovori* (drainage pumping stations), in Italian literally 'water-eating'

machinery plants," founding an anti-malaria institute, having war veterans plant the region with water-absorbing eucalyptus trees (these plants performed their job too well, which is why they were later torn out again at great expense—as a consequence, there are about four tornadoes annually in this area), stocking fish to eat mosquito larvae, establishing an anti-mosquito militia, and putting up children's camps whose buildings were wrapped in ten layers of wire to protect them from mosquitoes. "The fascist emphasis on the technical and technological aspects of the land reclamation programme were also characteristic of a positivistic view of science and geographical knowledge, aimed at controlling, rationalizing and ultimately creating an imperium over a previously unknown or 'untamed' area."[49]

Toxic Progress

At the same time in the Pacific, in spite of all countermeasures, malaria was inflicting more fatalities on the Allies than the Japanese forces were. But the discovery of a potent molecule brought new momentum to the anti-malaria campaigns: "From the perspective of medical entomology, the most exciting outcome of World War II was the discovery of DDT."[50]

Dichloro-diphenyl-trichlorethane had already been synthesized in Germany in the 1870s, but it was only in the last years of the war that people became aware of a special quality of DDT. The molecule not only killed mosquito larvae in water, but even months after a surface had been treated with it, it was still lethal to any mosquito that landed on it.

Once again, the Rockefeller Foundation became active, and together with the World Health Organization, the US Agency for International Development, and the UN, it launched the Global Malaria Eradication Program, which coordinated the worldwide deployment of DDT in the 1950s and 1960s, with the goal of eliminating malaria. This deadly substance became part of a postwar order that organized war and agriculture as affiliated fields: "Tractors and tanks developed side by side. Synthetic nitrogen fertilizers were manufactured cheaply in ammonia plants built mainly to produce nitrate explosives. Modern organic insecticides emerged from gas weapon research between the wars, while aerial spraying owes much to air combat methods and technology initially developed during World War I."[51]

In the Global Malaria Eradication Program, health and chemistry became essential parts of a technocratic vision of modernity that lined up cold warriors and warm habitats on the battlefield. In the context of decolonization movements and nation-building after World War II, the female mosquito was declared an enemy of the state: in Peronist Argentina, a state of emergency was declared in the fight against mosquitoes in order to use violent police

enforcement to fog even the last slum hut with DDT.[52] And probably the first international act of the Egyptian president Nasser, who had just come to power in 1952, was to sign an agreement with the WHO and UNICEF to establish a DDT factory near Kafr Zayat "that would produce two hundred tons a year of finished DDT."[53]

The staging of nation-building and anti-malaria campaigns often had militaristic features: in 1955, a large Indian newspaper reported that the Ahmedabad Corporation had sprayed seven thousand tenements in working-class neighborhoods with DDT on the occasion of World Health Week. In Shillong, in northeastern India, and in southern Hyderabad, mass demonstrations were organized by doctors and nurses who carried posters reading "Lead Healthy Lives and Keep Your Surroundings Clean." Meanwhile, two aircraft from the Indian Air Force rained health brochures down on the population in Hyderabad and Secunderabad—only seven years after Hyderabad had been forcibly incorporated into the new Indian state. This was both a promise of future health and a powerful assurance that come what may, it would happen in the state that had been established.[54]

At the same time, there were increasing reports about the disastrous effects of the global field trials of chemical insecticides. In hindsight, the military policy of eradication turned out not only to be futile and counterproductive (the absolute and relative number of malaria infections is globally higher than before the start of the eradication campaign), but with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which portrayed the effects of the poison on bird populations, it also promoted the emergence of the ecological movement in the West and led to the banning of DDT in the United States. For in spite of initial successes, DDT-resistant mosquitoes quickly developed, first in Sardinia, and then in Greece, where DDT had been widely used. In the 1960s and 1970s, malaria reappeared in many places and the idea that malaria could be eliminated was postponed to some distant future.

"Since the 1990s the post-eradication era has been interpreted as a time of total confusion, even of anarchy,"[55] since opinions on what, if anything, might be learned from this period differ widely. According to the anthropologist David Turnbull, a major reason for this confusion lies in the fact that malaria is a case of *motley*, a patchwork or crazy-quilt, a term historically used to describe the piebald costumes of jesters or "motley fools." To think of malaria as a "motley" means to understand this phenomenon as "a ragbag of different strains of the parasite and of interacting processes"[56]—not as a disease that can be attributed to the mere presence of a foreign species in the human body.

Turnbull enumerates various conceptualizations of malaria during the twentieth century: malaria was seen as a political, administrative, social, technical, economic, or ecological problem, whereas in Papua New Guinea, coastal dwellers reserved the Tok Pisin expression "samting nating" (something nothing) for it, and malariologists in the United States, all attempts at producing a vaccine failed, declared in tautological exasperation that malaria is anything that reacts to anti-malarial drugs.[57]

What exactly reacts to anti-malarial drugs remains indefinite and potentially dangerous, but this doesn't keep armies or pharmaceutical companies from repeatedly promising and administering "safe" preventive drugs. In 2002 there were reports of rampages by four American war veterans who had just returned home to North Carolina from Afghanistan and each independently murdered their wives (one of them had seventy-one knife wounds). All four of them had taken Lariam (mefloquine) to prevent malaria. Lariam was developed jointly by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), the US Army, and the pharmaceutical company F. Hoffmann-La Roche AG. Lariam—it is not known exactly how it works—and is associated with severe neuropsychiatric disorders including manic behavior, acute psychosis with delusions, and aggressive mood swings, and so suspicion quickly fell on the drug.[58] Diane Nelson points out that an official army report cleared the drug of any suspicion just in time for it to be distributed to 200,000 soldiers in Iraq: "Little mention was made of military training itself as a lethal drug or of the way that soldiers' willingness to die has made them excellent guinea pigs in military laboratories, where unapproved drugs are routinely tested."[59]

Imperial, Colonial, National, NGO

The history of the struggle against the female mosquito reads like the history of capitalism in the twentieth century: after imperial, colonial, and nationalistic periods of combatting mosquitoes, we are now in the NGO phase, characterized by shrinking government health care budgets, privatization through structural adjustment programs, and intensified activity on the part of non-governmental organizations and development agencies. The Rockefeller Foundation was once again at the forefront when in 2018 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation declared it was investing $3.4 million in the development of genetically modified male mosquitoes. When they are released in large numbers, all their offspring will die after one mating—at least that's the plan. Mosquitoes don't transmit malaria anymore, they are turned into agents of health: "GM mosquitoes render the mosquitoes themselves as a commercial product; a commercial product in a political economy funded by philanthropic initiatives, shaped by private university spin-offs and characterized through economic inequalities."[60]

It is still unclear what consequences this new strategy of releasing insectoid reproduction bombs will have, but the effects of the latest global campaign of the NGO phase are already making themselves felt. Charitable initiatives committed to the free distribution of insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets have led to an economic redistribution from local producers of traditional mosquito nets to industrial sites in Vietnam and Thailand that are capable of producing huge quantities of insecticide-treated nets.[61]

A study of the effects of these modern mosquito nets in Ghana shows that after an initial improvement, the situation could get considerably worse: the main effect of the impregnated nets is not keeping mosquitoes away from people (traditional nets could do this just as well), but that contact with the net is fatal to the mosquitoes, and also that mosquitoes are deterred from getting near the net, since the chemicals have a repellent effect. In other words: the impregnation with insecticide produces a second biochemical net that is greater than the textile net itself. This results in an immense pressure to adapt: first, normal mosquitoes die in great numbers or are kept from moving near the nets. Within the mosquito population, however, more and more subpopulations emerge that react with altered behavior: largely avoiding interior spaces and swarming out earlier, which means that even non-impregnated nets lose their effectiveness and the number of infections increasingly grows higher than before the distribution of the free nets.

For the anthropologist Uli Beisel, the recalcitrance of mosquitoes toward the charitable efforts to control them shows on the one hand in the mosquitoes' altered behavior described above, and on the other hand physically, in the form of the mosquitoes' increasing tolerance for insecticides. The latter occurs first through mutations in precisely those parts of the insects' nervous systems that are targeted by the toxins, and secondly through metabolic changes that render the toxins harmless before they reach their target, and thirdly by the adaptation of the mosquito's cuticle, through which the toxin is absorbed. Chemical similarities between the indoor anti-mosquito toxins (nets and aerosols) and those used in agriculture lead to cross-immunizations that reinforce the new resistance.[62]

If animals in modernity functioned as the other to humans (nature, instinct, wildness, lack of speech, lack of history, lack of a soul, and so on), insects are the other to animals.[63] Insects seem to possess no form of individuality; they don't even have a face from which we could read expressions of inner life. Declaring humans to be insects is therefore the most radical form of dehumanization.

In Western modernity, dealing with unpleasant and potentially deadly insects has usually taken on the form of a military confrontation bent on annihilation. Uli Beisel's proposal for a ceasefire therefore seems provocative:

"What if managing mosquitoes is not about how to best eliminate them, but about asking how we might find ways to tolerate coexisting with each other?"[64]

The Hamburg Termites

Whereas the battle against mosquitoes was part of colonial expansion strategies, in the twentieth century another insect set out to colonize the colonizers themselves. We are talking about the termite, whose conquest of a northern German city also shook certainties about which animal belongs where.

In the eighteenth century, when Africa was being mapped and explored by an army of scientists, the colonialists were forced to realize—what a surprise!—that Africa had already been colonized: by white ants, as termites were originally called. Later, legions of ethnographic photographs showed seemingly "primitive" people and their huts next to the elaborate architecture of these other Africans, which by comparison resembled high-rises of unimaginable heights, leaving European engineers in a state of perplexed envy.[65]

It was probably shortly after the German Empire had carried out a campaign of racist collective punishment against the Herero and Nama peoples in the colony of German southwest Africa (today Namibia) in the early twentieth century that the colonizers were colonized by termites.[66]

The "destructive, wood-munching creatures"[67] had likely made it to Hamburg with imported wood that was used for the cladding of the city's new heating system. The termites would probably not have survived a single winter in the cold climate of northern Europe, but luckily for them, in 1921 the local electric company had begun to channel waste heat from the generation of electricity through a pipe system to government offices and homes.[68] The implementation of a district heating grid under the city also offered the termites a solution to the problem of the cold northern European climate: "The barely insulated pipes warmed the earth, the wood was delicious—all was well with the termites."[69]

The other problem—that the wood was too dry for the termites' purposes—was solved by the animals themselves: they constructed mud tubes in the ground. This supplied the colony with the moisture necessary to keep their thin skins and soft bodies from drying out. With thousands of hungry mouths, the termite colony henceforth chewed its way through subterranean Hamburg and crisscrossed open spaces in protective tunnels.

In all probability, the termites were living in a thriving colony when they were discovered in 1937. A construction worker had put his jacket on a pile of wood near the

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entrance to the district heating network—only to watch as the pile turned into a heap of sawdust.

The heating ducts were not only an ideal winter home for the termites, they also served as underground guide rails for the colonization of the city: the termites followed the duct grid and worked their way up to the trees of the Karolinenviertel district ("Karoviertel") and the Justice Forum, where they still live to this day.

While the Karoviertel was being overrun by a congenial army of creative types from above, becoming a trendy residential neighborhood with all the well-known problems of gentrification, simultaneously the venerable Justice Forum (consisting of the Higher Regional Court, and the Criminal Justice and Civil Justice buildings) was being attacked from below. One city official reports that the worst nightmare of all property owners became reality when civil servants discovered that termites had started to devour the state registry records—thousands of tiny Bakunins.[70]

It had been the strategic goal of all Bakunin-style anarchist revolts of the 1800s to destroy as many local records of deed registries and bank liabilities as possible before normal class rule could be restored. Ironically, a contemporary anti-termite poison is being marketed by BASF under the brand name Termidor, which unintentionally draws a connection to Leon Trotsky's coinage of the term "Thermidor" to refer to the counterrevolutionary phase of the bureaucratic restoration of power.[71] In the corporate newspeak presented on the Termidor company website, control means killing, design is extermination, and lifetime is a registered trademark: "For the best termite control solution, turn to Termidor® ... as seen on Designing Spaces on Lifetime®."[72]

The files were quickly relocated, but even after a series of

countermeasures over the past ninety years, including the subterranean installation of glass barricades and the massive deployment of heat to dry them out, the termites are still a problem. Even the removal of entire houses and experimental hormone therapy by a research unit of the German armed forces did little to help.[73]

Old tactics like the mass poisoning of entire districts with highly toxic substances and the introduction of all kinds of insecticides into bricks and wood were common into the 1980s, but the latest weapon is intelligent poisoning by means of "homeopathic doses" of lethal substances—in concentrations low enough to be carried back to the colony and fed to the other termites, so that the poison can accumulate over time and unleash its effect. According to official estimates, in certain parts of the city ninty-five percent of Hamburg's termite population was killed; but in the meantime, new areas have been colonized. Children are warned in German teaching materials: "Success is always in danger: sometimes the termites don't like the taste of the bait, sometimes a termite-free zone is re-infested."[74]

Nationalist Echoes of the Habitat

Even though the termites have certainly cost the city and its homeowners a considerable sum of money, termite species have only recently been scientifically defined as "invasive," with only twenty-seven of 2,750 described termite species falling into this category, and trade in goods is the single most important factor in their spread.[75] The invasiveness of biological species only seems obvious; in fact, it not easy to observe. Moreover, the research field of invasion ecology was not established until 1958, and it has the reputation of being especially "jargon-rich."[76] This means that the terms used are often not precisely defined or generally accepted.

The historically controversial problem of invasiveness is closely bound up with the concept of habitat. But what is a habitat? "Habitat" describes a spatial unity between individuals and species: the space that a particular population needs to be able to reproduce. The term was first used in Carl von Linné's *Systema Naturae* (1758). But whereas the Latin word *habitat* simply means "he/she/it lives" or "he/she/it dwells" and was originally used as a verb, and thus for an activity, the term later ossified and took on the meaning of a specific spatial territory. In this new form, it could then be pervaded or conquered by "alien, adventive, exotic, foreign, non-indigenous, non-native and novel"[77] organisms. Habitat became a concept reminiscent of the idea of nations with fixed, stable, and controlled borders.

Precisely the seemingly innocent question of where which animal lives and should live cannot be separated from farther-reaching discourses of political history within which these questions are asked and answered. Science studies scholar Donna Haraway investigated the history of ideas of the immune system in the Cold War era.[78] The parallels between the conceptualization of microscopic and geopolitical models and metaphors are striking. The scientific ideas of the immune system seem to have been lifted from a NATO mission statement: the now passionately pursued definition of inside and outside seems to be as much a part of the self-protection of bodies and associations of states as does the identification and disarming of external infiltrators and internal sources of danger (like sleeper cells) that could mutate at any time from a harmless twilight state into a life-threatening proliferation. Similarly, the rhetoric of natural habitats and invasive species recalls the exiled revolutionary and cultural theorist Leon Trotsky's lament about the "planet without a visa,"[79] a dubious human privilege that is extended to the non-human world.

The dedicated efforts against the Hamburg termites cannot be reduced to purely rational discourses or practices. The problem with Hamburg's termites is that they also invade our dreams.

In his *Insectopedia* (2010), Hugh Raffles remarks that "insects are without number and without end" and the nightmares that they inhabit seem to be as numerous as the insects themselves. There are nightmares of "fertility" and of the "crowd," of "uncontrolled bodies," of "unguarded openings" and "vulnerable places," of "foreign bodies in our bloodstream" and of "foreign bodies in our ears and our eyes and under the surface of our skin." Let us not forget the "nightmare of swarming and the nightmare of crawling," the "nightmare of beings without reason and the nightmare of the inability to communicate," as well as the nightmare of "not seeing the face," and "not having a face"; it is the nightmare "of being overrun," of "being occupied," and of "being alone," of "putting on shoes" and "taking off shoes," the nightmare of "the grotesque," of the "snarled hair" and "the open mouth,"

the nightmare of "randomness and the unguarded moment," the nightmare

> of the military that funds nearly all basic research in insect science, the nightmare of probes into brains and razors into eyes, the nightmare that should any of this reveal the secrets of locusts swarming, of bees navigating, or of ants foraging, the secrets will beget other secrets, the nightmares other nightmares, the pupae other pupae, insects born of microimplants; part-machine, part-insect insects; remote-controlled weaponized surveillance insects; moths on a mission; beetles undercover; not to mention robotic insects, mass-produced, mass-deployed, mass-suicide nightmare insects. These are the nightmares that dream of coming wars … dreams of Osama bin Laden somewhere in a cave.[80]

As real, symbolic, and affective agents, the Hamburg termites cause discomfort that is like a "cloud shaped like a sword" stuck in the heart of the city. If mosquitoes *speak* through the social noise they make, as Timothy Mitchell argues in his analysis of malaria outbreaks in colonial Egypt,[81] and if tsetse flies *scream*, as Clapperton Mavhunga states in connection with the human and non-human entanglements in Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park[82]—then the Hamburg termites *make bambule* (go on a rampage).[83]

Political Salvation in the Termite Gut

When the termites arrived in Hamburg, the discourse around the insect had already morphed from admiration to disgust. Research had shown that termites have two stomachs—one of them being a social stomach that was emptied for other termites in the colonies. Termites that had died were also consumed. On top of that, every fellow member of the species in the colony that asked for it was given excrement to redigest. The termite colony didn't waste anything: "From behind and in front, the food continues to flow through the whole state, the returnee gives it to the one that stays at home, the old give it to the young, in an endless cycle of soup, even if the soup may be a little strange."[84] While nowadays research projects compete in learning from the sophisticated air conditioning systems of termite hills, a look inside the working of the colony offers a glimpse into the nightmare of total recycling.

The Belgian Nobel Prize winner and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck vividly described this astounding social metabolism in his *Life of the Termites* (1926): "You see, this is perfect communism, communism of the pharynx and intestines, driven by the collectivism of shit-eating. Nothing is lost in this dreary and thriving republic, where

the dirty ideal that nature seems to offer us is made real in economic terms."[85]

The forestry scientist and zoologist Karl Escherich, a staunch National Socialist, picked up this thread in his inaugural address as the newly appointed rector of the University of Munich in 1933. His speech, titled "Termite Delusion," contrasted the supposedly good ant colony of the Third Reich with the diabolical termite system of the Soviet Union.[86]

In the same year in which Escherich gave his inaugural speech, another biologist, Jean L. Sutherland, published an article describing a disturbing microorganism that lived in the rectum of the Australian termite species *Mastotermes darwiniensis*.[87] Sutherland called the tiny animal *Mixotricha paradoxa*, which means "strange creature with tousled hair." While Escherich's demonization of termites because of their intestinal tract is now only of historical interest, Sutherland's discovery has been enjoying renewed attention in the past few years. The remarkable thing about *M. paradoxa* is its constitution as an organism combining four other creatures that live in and on it.

You have to picture *M. paradoxa* as a sort of hairy pear with several antennae sticking out of its head—the hair and the antennae each possess their own genome, while inside the cells of *M. paradoxa* there are two further distinct genomes. Therefore *M. paradoxa* does not have one genome, but a total of five.

Donna Haraway summarizes what it means to understand the micro-organism as a living metaphor:

> This little filamentous creature makes a mockery of the notion of the bounded, defended, singular self out to protect its genetic investments…. What constitutes *M. paradoxa*? Where does the protist stop and somebody else start in that insect's teeming hindgut? And what does this paradoxical individuality tell us about beginnings? Finally, how might such forms of life help us imagine a usable language?[88]

Is *Mixotricha paradoxa* one living being, five, or 250,000? Did it start off alone and then assimilate the other beings, or was it the one that was colonized? What was it before it became many, or vice versa: What were they before they became one? In times when social questions are being increasingly racialized and culturalized, "this tiny organism engenders key questions about the autonomy of identity," according to Myra Hird.[89] Of course, there is the danger of a "biological exuberance," of trying to discern too much subversive potential in "nature's rainbow,"[90] but there may still be something to learn here. Microorganisms also account for at least half of the number of all cells in the

human body. In the documentary *Golden Genes* (Konrad/Hansbauer/Stachel, 2016), the microbiologist Christa Schleper explains: "In terms of biomass, that makes up about one and a half kilograms…. Then the question naturally arises: What is the human? Is that *Homo sapiens* plus many bacteria? That's why people like to say that we are some kind of super organism."

Following Haraway, in the play *Das purpurne Muttermal* (The Purple Birthmark, 2006), the German dramatist René Pollesch urges us to look for new answers to problems of nationalism and identity politics in the termite piles of the world, when old answers seem to work less and less.[91] But maybe everything is even more political than we ever thought. We could be unknowingly celebrating microscopic slave labor, as philosopher and author Rupert Glasgow makes us aware:

> Consider the case of the large protozoan *Mixotricha paradoxa*, which is propelled through its environment by the coordinated undulation of what appear to be thousands of "cilia" or hair-like appendages; these appendages have been shown to be hundreds of thousands of tiny spirochaete bacteria, which—like "galley slaves"—are held in place at the cell surface by yet other bacteria.[92]

Bees, mosquitoes, and termites were not only a part of historical and contemporary notions of space, but also instruments of political practice related to spaces. As a part of the colonization of the territory that is now the United States, the honeybee was an invasive species; thanks to the global movement of goods, the termite has recently become one in Germany as well. Mosquitoes, on the other hand, are so closely associated with particular spaces that they almost seem to be a trait of these spaces. Ideas of desired and detested naturalness are embedded in all these spatial ideas and practices. But these historically evolved ideas obstruct our view of other ecologies that surround us.

X

Excerpted from Fahim Amir, *Being and Swine: The End of Nature (As We Knew It)*, trans. Geoffrey C. Howes and Corvin Russell (Between the Lines, 2020).

Fahim Amir is a philosopher and author living in Vienna. He has taught at various universities and art academies in Europe and Latin America. His research explores the thresholds of natures, cultures, and urbanism; art, design,

and utopia; and colonial historicity and modernism. The original German edition of *Being and Swine* [Schwein und Zeit] received the Karl Marx Award 2018, and was listed by *Die Zeit* as one of the top 10 non-fiction books recently published. The book was selected by the Frankfurt Book Fair and Goethe Institute as one of the best books of 2019.

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Paul F. Russell, *Man's Mastery of Malaria* (Oxford University Press, 1955), 244, citing David Turnbull, *Masons, Tricksters, and Cartographers: Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge* (Routledge, 2000), 182n13.

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Mary Kosut and Lisa Jean Moore, "Urban Api-Ethnography: The Matter of Relations between Humans and Honeybees," in *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism*, ed. Victoria Pitts-Taylor (New York University Press, 2016), 245–57, 246.

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Kosut and Moore, "Urban Api-Ethnography," 246. Hegemonic images are always unstable. Although even the behavior of bees is predictable, it is not completely so, as the case of so-called Africanized killer bees shows: escaped from a Brazilian breeding experiment in 1957, which had crossed the European honeybee with African honeybees, many feral swarms developed, ultimately crossing the US border in 1990, where, because of their "mobility and aggressiveness" as well as their "unwillingness to settle into working-class stability," they were considered "threats to the order and efficiency of production." Anna L. Tsing, "Empowering Nature, or: Some Gleanings in Bee Culture," in *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*, ed. S. Yanagisako and C. Delaney (Routledge, 1995), 113–43, 135.

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See also: Juan Antonio Ramírez, *The Beehive Metaphor: From Gaudí to Le Corbusier* (Reaktion, 2000), 25–35.

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Jens Martin Gurr, "The Mass-Slaughter of Native Americans in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man:* A Complex Interplay of Word and Image," in *Word & Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Michael Meyer, Gesellschaft für die Neuen Englischsprachigen Literaturen (Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 354–71, 355.

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Jake Kosek, "New Uses of the Honeybee," in *Global Political Ecology*, ed. Richard Peet, Paul Robbins, and Michael Watts (Routledge, 2011), 227–51.

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Ahuja, "Abu Zubaydah and the Caterpillar," 129.

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John Robert McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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Diane M. Nelson, "A Social Science Fiction of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery: The Calcutta Chromosome, the Colonial Laboratory, and the Postcolonial New Human," *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003), 246–66, 260.

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Nelson, "A Social Science Fiction," 260f.

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Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 141.

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Nelson, "A Social Science Fiction," 247.

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Jeanne Guillemin: "Choosing Scientific Patrimony: Sir Ronald Ross, Alphonse Laveran, and the Mosquito-Vector Hypothesis for Malaria," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 57,4 (2002), 385–409.

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Margaret Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen, *An Anthropology of Biomedicine* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 179.

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Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen, *Anthropology of Biomedicine,* 43f. William B. Cohen sees this critically, at least with regard to French expansion politics. According to Cohen, it was not so much medical knowledge from tropical medicine, which soldiers in battle were often skeptical of, and whose prescriptions, like the taking of quinine, were often only half-heartedly followed, but rather, contrariwise, the political and social stabilization of French colonial areas made possible the increased recruiting of local troops and the construction of mosquito-unfriendly military architecture (buildings made of clay, brick, and stone, instead of tents), which in turn at first led to lower losses due to malaria. William B. Cohen, "Malaria and French Imperialism," *Journal of African History*, no. 24 (1983), 23–36.

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Emma Umana Clasberry, *Culture of Names in Africa: A Search for Cultural Identity* (Xlibris Corp, 2012), 54.

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Clasberry, *Culture of Names in Africa*. See also Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Macmillan, 1987), 65ff.

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Ambe J. Njoh points to the aspect of ideological division, since the segregated part of the local population was ascribed the status of "health threat," while to the other part, who as servants were allowed to live in the healthy, European zones, this could appear as personal gratification and inclusive appreciation. Cf. Ambe J. Njoh, "Urban Planning as a Tool of Power and Social Control in Colonial Africa," *Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 3 (2009), 301–317, 303.

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Roberts explains: "Though there is no record of outright resistance by the migrant workers hired as human bait, it appears that they took measures to preserve their dignity, and, especially, to avoid mosquito bites." "*Korle and the Mosquito*," 358.

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Sutter, "Nature's Agents or Agents of Empire?," 725.

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Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 19–53, 26.

40
At that time, the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease had just finished its successful campaign against a hookworm species called *Necator americanus* (Latin for "American killer") in eleven southern American states, which lasted from 1909 to 1915, and became part of the Rockefeller Foundation International Health Division. The connection between poverty, race, and infections by the murderous hookworm played an important role in the formation of cultural perception and self-image of those affected. See also: Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Duke University Press, 2006), 96–132.

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Wray, *Not Quite White*, 96.

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Ricardo Salvatore, "Imperial Mechanics: South America's Hemispheric Integration in the Machine Age," *American Quarterly* 58,3 (2006), 663–91, 663f.

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Neel Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Duke University Press, 2016), 19.

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Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities*, 77.

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Leo Barney Slater and Margaret Humphreys, "Parasites and Progress: Ethical Decision-Making and the Santee-Cooper Malaria Study, 1944–1949," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 51, no. 1 (2008), 103–120, 107.

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Turnbull, *Masons, Tricksters, and Cartographers* , 168.

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Catherine Lutz and Jon Elliston, "Domestic Terror," *The Nation*, October 14, 2002, 14–16.

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Nelson, "A Social Science Fiction," 263n6.

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Uli Beisel and Christophe Boëte, "The Flying Public Health Tool: Genetically Modified Mosquitoes and Malaria Control," *Science as Culture* 22, no. 1 (2013), 38–60, 58. This is a bioeconomic cake that emerging markets like Brazil also want a piece of. See also: Luisa Reis-Castro and Kim Hendrickx, "Winged Promises: Exploring the Discourse on Transgenic Mosquitoes in Brazil," *Technology in Society* 35 (2013), 118–28.

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Uli Beisel, "Markets and Mutations: Mosquito Nets and the Politics of Disentanglement in Global Health," *Geoforum*, no. 66 (2016), 145–55, 145.

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Beisel, "Markets and Mutations," 150.

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See also Kosek, "Ecologies of the Empire," 653.

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Beisel, "Markets and Mutations," 153.

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Eva Johach, "Termitewerden: Staatenbildende Insekten im Industriezeitalter," *Kultur & Gespenster* 4 (2007), 20–37, 21. See also: Douglas Starr and Felix Driver, "Imagining the Tropical Colony: Henry Smeathman and the Termites of Sierra Leone," in *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* , ed. Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 92–112.

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It was long assumed that it was *Reticulitermes flavipes (Kollar),* the most widespread termite of North America. Current research suggests another conclusion: the Hamburg termite population seems to consist of the southern European "cousins": *Reticulitermes lucifugus* . See Udo Sellenschlo, *Vorratsschädlinge und Hausungeziefer: Bestimmungstabellen für Mitteleuropa* (Springer Verlag, 2010), 49.

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Nel Yomtov, *From Termite Den to Office Building* (Cherry Lake Publishing, 2014), 10.

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According to Abraham Margolis, the chief engineer of the enterprise, the driving force for the project was the high cost of fuel after World War I. But Margolis himself saw much more in electrical heating: social-political, hygienic, medical, and ecological aspects. After he was driven out of the corporation's management by the National Socialists in the 1930s, Margolis settled in the United Kingdom and continued his work with another company, which would bring district heating to Pimlico, a London residential area. Wolfgang Mock, "Margolis, Abraham," *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 16, 1990, 169f. See also: Charlotte Johnson, "District Heating as Heterotopia: Tracing the Social Contract through Domestic Energy Infrastructure in Pimlico," *Economic Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (2016), 94–105.

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"Karoviertel, Termiten-Attacke," *Hamburger Morgenpost* , February 9, 2009.

70
According to expert interviews with various municipal officials in April and May 2013 (together with the architect and researcher Christina Linorter).

71
Thermidor was the eleventh month of the French revolutionary calendar, which lasted from the middle of July to the middle of August and literally means "the

month of heat." Maximilien de Robespierre was toppled in this month of the year 1794.

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According to expert interviews with various municipal officials in April and May 2013 (together with Christina Linorter).

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Evans, "Invasive Termites," 521.

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Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: 'Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), 203–230.

79
The paragraph from the chapter "The Planet without a Visa" in Trotsky's autobiography, *My Life*, reminds us (living in the times of whistleblower Edward Snowden and Sci-Hub founder Alexandra Elbakyan) of the continuities between his and our epoch: "I must admit that the roll-call of the western European democracies on the question of the right of asylum has given me, aside from other things, more than a few merry minutes. At times, it seemed as if I were attending a 'pan-European' performance of a one-act comedy on the theme of principles of democracy. Its text might have been written by Bernard Shaw if the Fabian fluid that runs in his veins had been strengthened by even so much as five percent of Jonathan Swift's blood. But whoever may have written the text, the play remains very instructive: *Europe without a Visa* . There is no need to mention America. The United States is not only the strongest, but also the most terrified country. Hoover recently explained his passion for fishing by pointing out the democratic nature of this pastime. If this be so—although I doubt it—it is at all events one of the few survivals of democracy still existing in the United States. There the right of asylum has been absent for a long time. *Europe and America without a visa* . But these two continents own the other three. This means— *The planet without a visa* ." Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1960 (1930)), 579.

80
Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia* (Pantheon, 2010), 469–73.

81
Mitchell, *Rule of Experts.*

82
Clapperton Changanetsa Mavhunga, *The Mobile Workshop: Mobility, Technology, and Human-Animal Interaction in Gonarezhou (National Park), 1850–Present* , dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008, 7.

83
Bambule was the name of a countercultural trailer park of squatters in the aforesaid Karovierterl, where the Hamburg termites also live. Massive protests against the police clearing of the alternative living project became the subject of international press coverage. While *Bambule machen* (making bambule) is a northern German slang expression for rioting and rampaging, *bamboula* goes back to the name for a big drum and the dance that accompanied this drum—both had their origin in Africa and were brought to the US through the "traffic in human flesh." Particularly after the Haitian revolution, slaves gathered in Congo Square on the edge of the French Quarter in New Orleans to dance the bamboula.

84
Wilhelm Bölsche, "Der Termitenstaat. Schilderung eines geheimnisvollen Volkes (1931)," 52, cited in Johach, "Termitewerden," 31.

85
Bölsche, "Der Termitenstaat," 34.

86
Karl Escherich, inaugural speech at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich on November 25, 1933.

87
Jean L. Sutherland, "Protozoa from Australian Termites," *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* , no. 2 (1933), 145–73, 76.

88
Donna J. Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms," *Science as Culture* 3, no. 1 (1992), 94.

89
Myra Hird, *Sex, Gender and Science* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 68.

90
Nikki Sullivan, "The Somatechnics of Perception and the Matter of the Non/human: A Critical Response to the New Materialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* , no. 19 (2012), 299–313, 306.

91
Das purpurne Muttermal , program (Burgtheater/Akademietheater Wien, 2006).

92
Rupert D.V. Glasgow, *The Minimal Self* (Würzburg University Press, 2017), 358n860.

Jace Clayton
That Singing Crowd

On Saturday, November 7, 2020, at approximately 11:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, a communal yell broke out across the Unites States of America. The pandemic kept me grounded at home in Manhattan for most of this year, and that is where I heard it. Within seconds a few scattered voices gathered to a roar. I went to my open window and howled. It felt humanizing to join the outburst. We didn't need to check the news; for all its noisiness, the meaning of the holler was clear. Major news networks had finally announced that the incumbent president had lost his bid for re-election.

During his time in office, the loser had lethally ignored a global public health emergency, appointed more than five hundred right-wing federal judges to lifelong positions, openly courted violent white supremacists, denied climate change, sacked the heads of multiple government institutions to replace them with loyalist puppets, unlawfully and systematically separated parents from their children, gotten impeached twice, trashed nearly one hundred environmental protection laws, and lied to the public no fewer than twenty-five thousand times. This is a partial list. The damages he unleashed were expansive, deep-seated, and will not soon be undone. Our common scream was heartfelt.

Partly we were screaming in grief—so many awful things had happened. But mostly this was a happy cry. It expressed relief that four increasingly horrific years of American government-led terror were finally drawing to a close. The weary hope crescendoed into spontaneous street parties, where Bob Marley's "Everything's Gonna Be Alright" proved to be a reliably centrist crowd-pleaser. My personal favorite was Snap!'s anthem "I've Got the Power" emerging from a corner boombox that usually blasts Nuyorican salsa.

At its best, music in public crystallizes mood. What defined Saturday's feeling was the chaotic and joyful sound of a yelling crowd. That social noise brought to mind another national scream, one that had begun nearly four years prior, after the previous election. Those yells appeared in a short video that US-based Moroccan artist Meriem Bennani posted to her Instagram feed on January 17, 2017. The piece is only sixteen seconds long, but the Facebook-owned media platform loops—and mutes—video content by default. "Turn on Sound," Bennani wrote, "that singing crowd."

The same day I saw Bennani's video, the forty-fifth president of the United States of America had been sworn into office at the West Front of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. His opponent had gained 2,868,519 more votes than him. Widespread protests blossomed stateside and abroad. Entertainment was hard to find.

Elton John, Celine Dion, Garth Brooks, Kiss, and Andrea Bocelli numbered among the musicians who had refused invitations to perform at the inauspicious gathering. The

Still of a video that artist Meriem Bennani posted to her Instagram feed on January 17, 2017.

only strategic move for any popular entertainer was to stay away.

When the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, official musical ambassadors of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced they were going to sing at the inauguration, the backlash was immediate. In an open letter announcing her resignation, chorister Jan Chamberlin wrote: "I know the goodness of your hearts, and your desire to go out there and show that we are politically neutral and share good will … I also know, looking from the outside in, it will appear that the Choir is endorsing tyranny and fascism by singing for this man."

Dressed in off-white coats with matching turtlenecks and red plaid scarves, 215 members of the choir grunt, yell, holler, and scream. Or at least that's what they do in Bennani's video. Moments after its live broadcast, she spliced together footage of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's performance. Instead of soaring Steadicam footage, we get quick and queasy jump cuts stitching together counterintuitive camera movements. Deftly edited shrieks replace the original audio. It is very funny.

One doesn't need context to realize that this massive, nearly all-white choir arranged so neatly in front of an even more massive neoclassical building should not be howling. The initial gag is something a toddler could enjoy.

Yet behind the slapstick incongruity lies a pitch-perfect evocation of American political discourse in this era of filter bubbles and muddied disinfo whose resonance has only grown in light of the insurrectionist storming of the Capitol nearly four years later.

Screaming means emotional overload. It's the sound of language failing you. But when a crowd screams? That results from collectivized overwhelmedness. It's the sound of language failing *us*. The choir on this particular national stage stands in for Americans talking to each other across divides everywhere: those people who disagree with you—they might look sanctimonious but whatever they are saying *makes no sense at all*. This is a performance of discourse drained of the possibility of communication.

Who didn't want to scream for much of 2020? Ask any noise musician: screams can offer sublime tantrum time-outs, cathartic moments of intermission from the existing social-sonic order. Just not here. For all the chaos the white mob members apparently embody, we cannot lose sight of the fact that they are being conducted. Visually, the choir's staging projects extreme conformity. Their mouths move in unison. However, we hear a disjointed series of mostly individual yelps.

Bennani replaced the singing with canned screams and nothing else. There's no faint rustle of the crowd, as in the

original footage, for example. Nor has she applied any reverb, which would create the effect of the vocalists inhabiting the same acoustic space. All the members of this choir howl in isolation—from the world (there's no diegetic sound) and from each other (there's no reverb). A crowd vocalizing with none of the subtle audio cues that let us know we are in a crowd: Bennani's audio treatments mirror the eerie social alienation that is only possible in digital domains.

Much of Bennani's work rejoices in shaping this staccato digitized reality. Her 2017 solo exhibition, "Siham and Hafida," was ostensibly a video installation, but the viewing experience felt like being in a whimsical and immersive funhouse. The show combined sculpture, customized seating, distorting mirrors, and a thirty-minute, multi-channel video featuring original footage and animation that was projection-mapped across various surfaces. The razor-sharp editing sensibility and inclusive sense of humor in Bennani's Instagram post are very much present in her gallery works such as these, where the constructedness of the physical world is inextricable from the constructedness of her videos and animations.

An unusual glitch animates the thematic and structural center of Bennani's choir clip. About six seconds in, Bennani zooms in on a particular screaming woman. This chorister's red lipstick perfectly matches the plaid scarves of the figures awkwardly cropped around her. As her eyes close in effort or concentration, the webstream glitches out. For a split second the image freezes and the familiar pulsing page-loading graphic appears in the center. The still is striking: the screamer's open mouth, her closed eyes, the page-loading icon, and the wide-open single eye of the chorister above her form a strong diagonal. This diagonal focuses attention on themes of intake, outtake, and disruption.

"Stutters" was Vilém Flusser's term for the quantitative discontinuities that characterize our digitized reality, and this is what one looks like. "Machines are stutterers even if they appear to slide," wrote Flusser. "This becomes clear when cars and film projectors start to go wrong."[1]

As the video feed halts, a sliver of the scream repeats over and over, transforming into a microloop that cycles so fast it forms its own distinct texture and pitch. No audio processing effects or additional noises have been used to create this startling metamorphosis; this new sound is the sound of a scream with narrative removed from it. Even the briefest acoustic event has a start, middle, and end. Human hearing is attuned to extract an extraordinary amount of information from the first few milliseconds of rapidly changing sounds such as sudden noises or the shifting intricacies of speech; without the beginning, we have trouble deciphering the rest. Here the compact narrative of a sound gets interrupted and loops back into

itself. What was an elemental, fundamentally human sound spins out of recognizability to turn machinelike, alien, synthetic. The "story" starts to "sttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt."

When I first experienced this page-loading hiccup, I assumed that my internet connection was to blame. Indeed, the digital is nothing but an interruption in flows, marked as an on/off division. As the video looped and the glitch-moment repeated, I realized that the joke was on me. A fake glitch! Perhaps I had been scrolling IG in a state of distraction. But I like to think that the way Bennani's edit duped my ordinarily skeptical media-consumer eyes speaks to the increasingly subtle derangements of information and interpretation in a social-media ecosystem.

Twenty-four-hour news feeds and ubiquitous social media are a climate we cannot help but inhabit. The weather trends more severe and less predictable each year. Glitches (fake or real) in this system can't offer liberation or enlightenment. They arise from entanglement. (Instagram videos stutter along at a rate of thirty frames per second. Benanni's scream-loop is also one-thirtieth of a second long, equal to the length of a single video frame; Instagram's technical formatting of video content shaped how the screaming voice audio would transform.) However, the sounds created in that strange intermission cannot be determined in advance, and they sidestep the singing/signal—screaming/noise dichotomy.

You can't unplug, but you can resynthesize. In Bennani's scream-loop the human voice operates, briefly, as a synthesizer. This technique was pioneered in 1979, when German engineer Wolfgang Palm published a paper outlining how one could create previously unimagined sounds by looping very short soundwaves. The method, called wavetable synthesis, powers most of the hi-fi growling and alien shapeshifting timbres in contemporary electronic music. Wavetable synthesis is radically unpredictable: you take a known fragment of the world, loop it, and cannot guess what the results will be. Yet once they are there, you can play them as melody.

So Bennani's page-loading moment gives us the scream as a pitched, playable thing. The frozen-yet-tuneable scream is neither human nor machine, neither transcendent music nor worldly noise, neither of the algorithm-governed, ad-saturated timeline nor apart from it. It suggests a new way of navigating—when our subjective voices become indistinguishable from their technical edits we cannot speak freely if at all, and loops, not progress, may be the only available direction.

Watch Meriem Benanni's video here: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/373650/that-singing-crowd/ https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/373650/that-singing-crowd/

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This text is based on an essay commissioned for the book *Intermission*, to be released by Unsound on March 4, 2021.

Jace Clayton is an artist and writer based in Manhattan, also known for his work as DJ /rupture. Clayton uses an interdisciplinary approach to focus on how sound, memory, and public space interact, with an emphasis on low-income communities and non-Western geographies. His book *Uproot: Travels in 21st Century Music and Digital Culture* was published in 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He serves on the Music faculty of Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts and in 2019 taught a seminar on "Interdisciplinary Temporalities in Performance" at Harvard University.

1
Vilém Flusser, "Why Do
Typewriters Go 'Click'?" *The
Shape of Things: A Philosophy of
Design* (Reaktion Books, 1999),
62.

Ariel Goldberg and Yazan Khalili

We Stopped Taking Photos

I.

Every photo is connected to an act of violence that is contained within it.

But what about those photos that circulate as acts of love, as impulses of affection? The photo that one takes of one's beloveds turns into a memory, projecting the photographer's imagination onto them, hoping that they stay as pictured forever. Young and alive. Of course, people can also be seduced by the context of cuteness or joy found in a single image.

But how does one disentangle the picture of a child being a child (or some other emblem of innocence) from the violence of the war machine that has arrived by drone? The device that kills, remotely, is also the recording device. The cop who turns his body camera on still kills. The cop who forgets to turn his camera on will still have a bystander filming over his shoulder, even though this image doesn't change the fact of antiblack state violence embodied by the police.

But how can one photograph laws, these less visual forms of violence that remain the status quo?

A photo hides more than it shows, which is merely the physical and reflective light of the world: bodies in a place, scars on skin, a wall in a landscape, a person holding a
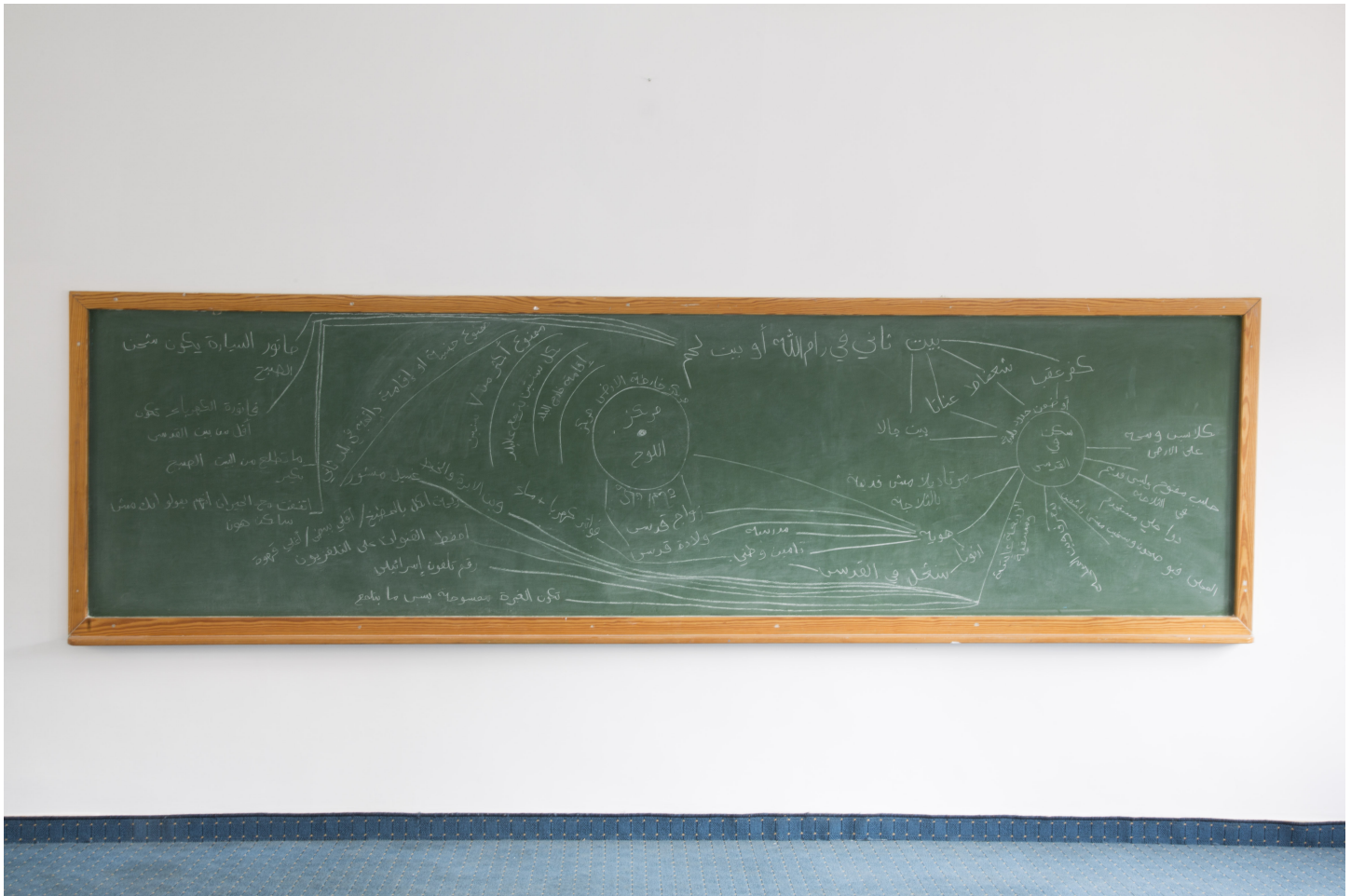
Yazan Khalili, Centre of Life, 2018. Chalk on blackboard. Installation shot of "The Jerusalem Show," 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

book, fireworks at night, trees, four people hugging each other in a joyful moment, a boy looking at his drawing, a policeman shooting at demonstrators. We have seen all of that, we have photographed it, but what about the unphotographable violence that goes through the image without leaving a trace in it, the systematic violence that is normalized within life itself, the pain of the forest, the law that doesn't allow your child to get a birth certificate, the fear of being profiled, of not being allowed to travel, and the bureaucracy of everyday life?

Is there an image without a purpose? An image that leaves no trace? Every image forces itself into the realm of how the world is understood and approached; every image is an image of the world, even if the world disobeys the intention of the image.

But what about the surveillance camera, the one that waits for an event to happen so that it can create a document? We exist in both the world and its image; the latter proves the existence of the former. The camera that is ostensibly intended to prevent an event from happening is also the camera waiting for that event. The CCTV that Palestinians install to monitor their homes against theft has become

another set of eyes for the Israeli Demolition Forces (IDF) that surveil the streets of Palestinian cities and neighborhoods. One story goes that the IDF arrested a man for not having his CCTV working when they wanted to check an event of resistance. They accused him of hiding information from them. Now every CCTV camera that isn't working is a camera hiding information, and every working one is an informant for the IDF.

But someone said that these cameras also show the aggression of the occupier, and that these images can be used in international courts of law. Can we choose the images we want to show and delete the images we want to disappear? Not taking part in recording everyday life is becoming an act of hiding something. Wearing a mask—a pre-Covid mask, let's call it a kufiya—is a duel act of engaging with the world but also a refusal to be captured by its image, or an act of hiding inside the image.

The state is the ultimate camera, the camera that eats all other cameras.

Has an image of oppression used in international courts of law done anything to stop the occupation?

But what about images that attempt to subvert systems of power? Can these images (and the cameras that produce them) escape a dialogue with this originator of violence? Are the reclamation and subversion of tools for self-imaging always already compromised? Is this only the case if photographers continue to protect the image? Can an image ever be kept safe after its intended encounter of affirmation? An honorific portrait of a trans person from the past offers the present a proof of the existence and survival of gender transgression. What about those people who keep this picture tucked in the corner of a mirror at home, looking back at them, affirming the existence of a continuum in the face of a myth of absence? They protect this image from its connection to the larger project of capture.

The image lives a long life of being forgotten and remembered.

Didn't the Israeli investigator show a Palestinian political prisoner an image of himself as a child—an image that he said he'd never seen before—to demonstrate that they knew everything about him?

But what about the footage of the riot used as fodder for the FBI investigation to find those who so easily entered and left after a breach of government property, podium and laptops in hand?

We begin to view the thousands of videos and photos taken by the blur of participants and press in the white-supremacist hunt for lawmakers who betrayed their version of reality. The mob chose to take selfies above all other possible actions. They alleged their entitled presence for the camera and projected an image of peacefulness while the threat of more violence continues to loom. They knew a picture showing how easy and welcome their tour of a legislative building was would be more effective at spreading their white-supremacist propaganda. Journalists processing the events in writing referred inevitably to being mesmerized by the pictures, or to their experience of watching the moving pictures. In *The Atlantic* a headline read: "The Whole Story in a Single Photo."[1] In the *New York Times*: "Images that Shake a Pillar of Freedom."[2] Do the images become the soldiers of their fascist thirst for an authoritarian leader?

Why can the image do that?

If the image is the medium of truth, of rationality, a replica of the world, if this becomes the medium of fakeness (the conspiracy theory always has a photoshopped image in its pocket), then photography is easily infiltrated to promote fake news. This tension, of photography also being its supposed antithesis, is the reckoning we photographers are stuck in. Our focus shifts to the circulation of the image rather than its production.

Can we never trust the image on its own? If we only doubt

images, then do we lose a rational sense of truth? Are there symbols that are irrefutable?

But what type of truth do we mean? The loss of information or the revival of facts?

The image is stuck inside the CCTV.

The role of images in consolidating power could be evidenced by the desire by some to stop the production or circulation of images: no photography at a checkpoint; arresting journalists; a right-wing mob knocks over video cameras, then attacks a whole pile of equipment—the crowd around them cheers, stomping on the idea of information that operates against their delusions.

One might talk about the violence inside an image but no one talks about the violence that contains it, about where the image comes from. Like the Brecht quote about the river: "We often speak of the violence of a river, but never of the violence of the banks that confine it."

Perhaps we can also practice photography by refusing to add to the saturation of images.

II.

We are being encircled by the violence in photography; yet, the world continues to be consumed by making images. At the same time, what other medium critiques itself as much as photography? Is one option to simply stop circulating our photographs but continue taking them? Are we still taking a photograph if we screenshot the news? Because we have not actually stopped taking pictures of what amuses or delights or even terrifies us in daily life. Is it that we do not proclaim the photographs we happen to take as works of art? The idea of the photographer is no longer essential to the image because the photographer is no longer the specialist. Today the photographer more often turns to doubting the medium than defending its purity.

III.

In June 2020 we became cochairs of the photography department at Bard College's MFA program. From our respective homes in New York City and Ramallah, we would teach courses over Zoom. We cowrote a course syllabus—which we're including below—while the Movement for Black Lives organized protests and events every day in cities across the United States. Meanwhile, we were adapting to life under quarantine during the Covid pandemic.

Ironic as it was, we—two photographers who have stopped taking pictures—somehow ended up teaching graduate students of photography together. Deliberating

over the importance of contagious questioning, this is the syllabus we wrote for our students, to guide our work with them online, through webcams and internet connections across countries:

Images Outside of Photography: The Falling Monument, the Mask, and Being with the Edges of Momentous Events

The image is essential for keeping us together and for allowing society to reach consensus.

Even as the image plays a significant role in the production of violence and in the propelling of action, and even as surveillance governs our lives to varying degrees, protestors build nets to capture the drones photographing crowds, and image-scrubbing software enters the feed. We find ways to narrate intimacies that support us and analyze structures of power that can never be photographed. We are making and consuming images with common tools that are vulnerable and contested.

We are meeting in a time of the mobilizing force of images and increased communication and artistic practices. We are meeting in Zoom rectangles, where our composite images (sometimes on, sometimes off) provide a space of connection and accentuate our distance from one another. We are aware of the limitations and want to get to know these personal and collective limits.

How can we think in context and stage trials, confessionals, direct messages to allow the image to speak?

How will images speak to each of us differently? The image is waiting to have a voice, to be given a meaning. In that sense, the image alone does not hold truth; it becomes a fictional material. Forensic Architecture, for example, has attempted to restore or point to truth in the image—they claim to bring a counter-narrative to truth, yet they produce their own fictions that attempt to function as both art and evidence for human rights abuses. But what about events that are not photographed, how are they brought to the attention of the people?

We are working to account for the absence of the image or the failures of visuality in creating a collective narrative. What is not photographed does not disappear. How do images live outside of photography?

Images do not speak on their own, they are utilized by the medium that delivers them. Images are busy circulating and maintaining status quos. One can

argue that the mechanisms for photography are a space for conflict—a space we must negotiate, a space where we must wrestle with these tensions. We work against and within this groundwork, and as artists we enable different narratives to come out, to speak truth to power. The image can still bring us together.

The uprisings demand that we address the possibilities of image-making in times of fighting antiblack state violence and settler colonialism in Palestine and in the US—the possibilities of resisting the spread of images that spectacularize black suffering and death. We will study the Black Audio Film Collective. We decided this after seeing John Akomfrah in conversation with Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun, and Saidiya Hartman, recorded on June 18, 2020 and posted online.[3] This discussion examines the legacy of John Akomfrah's early films, such as *Signs of Empire* (1983) and *Handsworth Songs* (1986) in the context of ongoing Black Lives Matter protests, the destruction of colonial monuments, and the structures of institutional racism. For further context, we will watch Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* (1986) in four parts[4] and then read an essay by Jean Fisher, "In Living Memory: Archive and Testimony in the Films of the Black Audio Film Collective," the first essay in *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective*, edited by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar of the Otolith Group (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, 2007). Finally, we will read "Thoughts of Liberation," a collection of responses "to the present 'moment'" published by *Canadian Art* in June 2020. Edited by Nataleah Hunter-Young and Sarah Mason-Case, the responses come from the following black scholars, activists, and artists: Christina Battle, Dionne Brand, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Chantal Gibson, El Jones, Anique Jordan, Robyn Maynard, Charmaine Nelson, Christina Sharpe, and Kara Springer.[5]

These are texts, events, and links that have been shared between us—that friends recommended to each of us and that we then recommended to each other as we tried to understand more deeply how to study and talk about photography in this present. Having now taught this material, we wish to add one more resource: the virtual teach-in "Art of Collective Care & Responsibility: Handing the Images of Black Suffering & Death," a project of the Black Liberation Center, founded by La Tanya S. Autry, a curator at moCa Cleveland.[6]

IV.

So we have decided to stop taking photos for now, and to think about photography instead.

X

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Yazan Khalili lives and works in and out of Palestine. He is an artist and cultural producer. His works have been shown in several major exhibitions, including "New Photography," MoMA (2018) and the 11th Shanghai Biennial (2016–17), among others. He was the director of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center between 2015 and 2019. Currently, he is the cochair of the photography department in the MFA program at Bard College, NY, and a PhD candidate at ASCA, University of Amsterdam.

1
See https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/confederates-in-the-capitol/617594/ .

2
This headline appeared in the January 8, 2021 print edition of the *New York Times*. For the web edition of the same article, the headline was "A Shattering Blow to America's Troubled Democratic Image"—see https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/world/europe/macron-merkel-trump-capitol-democracy.html .

3
Organized by the Lisson Gallery. See https://www.lissongallery.com/studio/john-akomfrah-tina-campt-saidiya-hartman .

4
See https://ubu.com/film/bafc_handsworth1.html .

5
See https://canadianart.ca/features/thoughts-of-liberation/ .

6
See https://www.artofcollectivecare.com/ .

More possibilities exist than can fit into our
expectations.
—Bilwet/Adilkno[1]

Sven Lütticken

Divergent States of Emergence: Remarks on Potential Possibilities, Against All Odds

The future may be unwritten, as Joe Strummer maintained,
but at times it can seem eerily predetermined. On
September 30, 2016, I sent around a draft for the editorial
of the October issue of *e-flux journal*, which was to be
titled "Perfect Storm." The opening sentence read: "On
November 8, 2016, Donald J. Trump will win the American
presidential election." This phrase met with opposition
and was ultimately axed: his campaign was going
disastrously, Hillary was clearly going to win, and so on.
My line may well be a case of a broken clock being right
twice a day, and in hindsight it is all too easy to fault
American liberals and progressives for their bubble-bound
optimism and ignorance of what was brewing in "flyover
country." If anything, the lack of negative feedback in
liberal echo chambers is an effect of a more fundamental
phenomenon: a *divergence in emergence*.

In the 1970s, the Marxist theorist Raymond Williams
warned against treating "feudal culture" or "bourgeois
culture" as monolithic blocs by focusing exclusively on
their dominant features. He distinguished between
residual, dominant, and emergent social/cultural forms.
Vehemently opposed to a simplistic "superstructural"
definition of culture, Williams discussed social and cultural
forms as profoundly imbricated:

> The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed
> in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process,
> not only and often not at all as an element of the past,
> but as an effective element of the present. Thus
> certain experiences, meanings, and values which
> cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms
> of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and
> practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well
> as social—of some previous social and cultural
> institution or formation.

Beyond the residual and the dominant, "new meanings
and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of
relationship are continually being created."[2] As a Marxist,
Williams's key historical examples of emergence were the
new cultural forms generated by the rise of first the
bourgeoisie and then the working class, but more broadly
he notes that in any given society, "there is always other
social being and consciousness which is neglected and
excluded: alternative perceptions of others, in immediate
relationships; new perceptions and practices of the
material world." Some such perceptions have been
bursting to the surface in recent years, which in turn has

Jeanne van Heeswijk, Training XXII: Kitchen Atlases, Bakudapan Food Study Group, Trainings for the Not-Yet, 2019. BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht. Photo: Tom Janssen.

strengthened a reactionary backlash and a reemergence of fascist tropes and forms. Perhaps the crucial stages precede such public manifestations. Williams argues that emergent culture

> is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a preemergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named.[3]

Historical thought needs to be attuned to such preemergence, as much as this risks lapsing into wishful thinking and projection (to which the annals of operaist and autonomist theory attest).

In the 2016 US primaries, the Sanders movement was an emergent political force that challenged the American two-party system with an alternative from the left from within the system. However, in spite of its grassroots approach the movement remained disconnected from that other merging force, Black Lives Matter, and was ultimately folded back into the Democratic Party as its loyal opposition—in 2016, and then again more swiftly in 2020. While Trumpian fascism took over the Republican Party in its entirety, symptomatically symbolized by the turning of Lindsey Graham, Sanders found himself condemned to embrace Biden, a candidate who once

again trots out the promise of growth. Here Trump, the fascist liar, is the more honest politician than the neoliberal manager Biden—and it is to be feared that the Democrats will pay a heavy price for relying on an unraveling narrative. Today, to promise growth (in the US, in Europe) is to proffer a lie and to spread disaster. The promise of permanent growth and "your children being better off than you" only worked under the specific conditions of the postwar Cold War, when it was squarely aimed at an expanding white middle class in Western states under the Pax Americana, and when the fear of communism made for a strong public sector.[4] To the satisfaction of at least the West's own hegemonic media, this narrative glossed over the fundamental and violent inequities of the "differential inclusion" of minorities and the populations of the global south into this "free market" utopia.[5]

Growth in the West may have faltered, to be replaced by wealth redistribution from bottom and middle to the top, but on the global scale there has indeed been growth—with disastrous ecological consequences. There has never been an energy *transition,* only energy *additions*, and there is no incentive for a true transition under the conditions of actually existing capitalism.[6] Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal is a more radical proposition, focusing on climate justice even if it is still entangled with liberal dreams of "green growth." At the very least, AOC and Sanders stand for a break with the neoliberal version of capitalism, but their emancipatory and egalitarian redistributionism is a hard sell against a more crass product: the white supremacist/fascist version

of redistributionism, which promises to repel and expel migrants and strip minorities of hard-won rights while sabotaging global warming and dismantling environment protections, while exacerbating the neoliberal trickle-up toward the 0.1 percent in the process. That this objectively hurts quite a few of the right's voters goes to prove the pull of this narrative.

Biden was a risky candidate for the same reasons Hillary Clinton was a risky candidate. He was risky because of his swampy record, because he had so little to offer so many people in such deep crisis. It seems he has secured an electoral victory by the skin of his teeth but it was a high risk gamble from the start.[7]

the invisible rudiments
for a vernacular
of possibility.

Tony Cokes, Evil.27: Selma, 2011. Installation view, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, 2019. Courtesy the artist, Greene Naftali, New York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

The present condition is thus marked by divergent and clashing (though occasionally reconverging) forms of emergence on the left and right, with the promises made on the right clearly being the simplest and enticing: too good to be true, better than the nightmare of reality. Against a demagogue who is an expert at racializing popular discontent, the DNC has insisted on nominating establishment figures—a strategy that ended in disaster in 2016, and in a far from resounding rejection of Trumpism in 2020. As Naomi Klein put it, responding to Democratic establishment claims that progressive activism and Black Lives Matter had scared voters away:

The DNC has won this Pyrrhic gamble, but after five years in which the rise of neofascism seemed unstoppable, the question remains: what is (still) possible? Has modern history—that extractivist Western project—exhausted all potentiality?

Potential Possibilities

Having spent a decade or so in the musical wilderness, David Byrne settled into a late-career pattern with the

2008 Brian Eno collaboration *Everything that Happens Will Happen Today*. It was the beginning of a winning formula: working with strong collaborators to produce rather decent albums with a few standout tracks, and touring them with elaborately choreographed stage shows. There is a clear continuity as well as progression from the 2008–9 *Songs of David Byrne and Brian Eno* tour to the 2012–13 *Love This Giant* tour with St. Vincent, and then to the tour that followed Byrne's 2018 album *American Utopia*, which yielded a Spike Lee concert movie in October 2020.

With its completely mobile band performing tight choreography on a stage delineated by metal chain curtains, the latest tour is a culmination of Byrne's theatrical work over the last twelve years (though the reviewers of Lee's film inevitably name-checked the 1984 Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense*). The extraordinary resonance of *David Byrne's American Utopia* can be attributed at least in part to the narrative Byrne introduced to string the songs together. Whereas the 2010 *Songs of David Byrne and Brian Eno* tour documentary *Ride, Rise, Roar* focused on behind-the-scenes rehearsals and the work of the choreographers, *American Utopia* starts with Byrne holding a model of a human brain in his hand, musing on the fact that the number of neural connections decreases rapidly as people grow up, while social connections emerge in their place. In a number of affecting monologues interspersed between the songs, the self-professed autist Byrne muses on what it takes to become human, and to become a better human in a society marked by systemic racism. In the introduction to the closing song—a rousing a cappella rendition of "One Fine Day" followed by the encore of "Road to Nowhere"—Byrne quotes James Baldwin to the effect that it is possible to turn America into "something that has not been done before," and asserts his belief that "there's still possibility, we're work in progress." In the album's press release, he had already spoken of a "longing for possibility."[8]

In 1798, Friedrich Schlegel famously characterized the historian as "a prophet turned backwards," yet the historical culture that emerged around 1800 has always had a forward-looking side.[9] The modern study of history has always wavered between positivism and what one could call potentialism. Whereas the academic discipline of history emerged to reconstruct " *wie es eigentlich gewesen*" ("what actually happened"), in Leopold von Ranke's words, certain philosophers and political radicals sought to side with *potential history*—with history as becoming, and as repository of un-actualized possibility and potentiality.[10]

In the twenty-first century, one can of course hardly theorize "potentiality" without evoking Giorgio Agamben and his political ontology of potentiality. At its core is a rereading of Aristotle's pair of *dunamis* and *energeia*, or

potentiality and actuality. Aristotle had attacked the problem of substance variously by distinguishing between substance and accidents, and between form and matter; in the latter register (that of hylomorphism), form plays the part of substance. *Dunamis* and *energeia*, in turn, can be understood as Aristotle's *temporalization of substance*, as a processual interpretation of substance as contingent upon realization; building materials are a potential building, but the form must be brought out in the process of construction.[11] In the nineteenth century, Schelling latched onto this temporalization of ontology in his attempts to counter Hegelianism by ontologizing Hegel's dialectics. "Late Schelling" critiqued Hegelian dialectics for remaining merely logical; insofar as there was any congruence between this philosophy and reality, this was merely accidental. Strictly speaking—so Schelling avers—*being* was unnecessary for Hegel. All that mattered was thought.[12] By contrast, Schelling obsessively attacked the problem of being, that which precedes any philosophy.

When he was appointed as Hegel's successor in Berlin in 1841, Schelling's much-anticipated lectures turned into a notorious PR disaster, becoming the moment many Left Hegelians—Engels perhaps most harshly—turned against him. However, up to that point there had been a careful rapprochement between Schelling and Left Hegelians such as Ruge and Cieszkowski, and a sense of shared philosophical interests and "objective convergences" irrespective of ideological differences.[13] Schelling and the Young Hegelians both sought an *Aufhebung* of Hegelianism, from the right and from the left, and both wanted to "put Hegel on his feet" by foregrounding the *außerlogische Wirklichkeit*, the *wirkliche Welt*, the *Tat* and *Praxis*. In his 1838 *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, Cieszkowski had sought to create a post-Hegelian philosophy of praxis, of the act, whose echoes can be traced from Marx to Debord.[14] Schelling, meanwhile, was interested not so much in the revolutionary transformation of contemporary reality as he was intent on providing a philosophy of being—of being as an ongoing process of transformation that has its unpromising start in a state that he terms the *unvordenkliches Sein*.

How does such an "unprethinkable" and undifferentiated *being* become *becoming*? When the possibility of being an Other, of being otherwise, reveals itself within this immemorial being, it raises itself to the status of *potentia potentiae*—a potential potency that does not yet pass into actuality.[15] When this finally happens, we are dealing with the first proper potency in Schelling's triad: *das Seinkönnende*, a being (B) that differentiates itself from the inchoate *Ursein* (A). The second potentiality, the *Seinmüssende*, infuses direction and purpose into the potentially equally random and boundless creation that is B. The third potency, the *Seinsollende,* or *selbstbewusstes Können*, is a potentiality to be that never spends itself fully in being, that always maintains an essential freedom in and from being. This is Spirit: a re-potentialization of being, a reopening of creation. In a

Christian register, these three potencies become the personalities of the Trinity: the Father who creates the world by positing a being distinct from Himself, by self-othering (" *Gott ist das Andere*"); the Son who reinjects divine Logos into a fallen world; and Spirit as free subjectivity in a transformed (transfigured) creation.[16] This, to be sure, is a crude CliffsNotes version of the ramshackle system that Schelling develops through a maddening series of iterations and variations.[17]

Though beset by construction problems and neo-Catholic scholastics, Schelling's potentialism (as developed in the *Philosophy of Revelation* and *Philosophy of Mythology*) is nonetheless a crucial moment in modern philosophy. As the "missed encounter" between Schelling and the Left Hegelians suggests, this is a compromised and contorted philosophy of history—a partial historicization of Aristotle that remains trapped in Christian salvation history. Nonetheless, it can be of value precisely in its hesitations and its reluctance to side with a productivism of potentiality, in which any potency only exists in order to pass into actuality. Taking cues both from the Classical philosopher and from the German idealist, and noting that Schelling's attempt to think an immemorial being "that presupposes no potentiality" is a rare attempt "to conceive of being beyond the principle of sovereignty," Agamben emphasizes "the potentiality to not-be," which "can never consist of a simple transition *de potential ad actum*. It is, in other words, a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, a *potentia potentiae*."[18] While Georges Didi-Huberman has rightly taken issue with the chiliastic streak in Agamben's writings, identifying it with his "Debordian" side, Agamben diverges from Debord's neo-Cieskowskian actionism by focusing on *preferring not to*, on destituting power.[19]

For Schelling, potentiality is power over possibility: sovereignty in the strongest possible sense. Potentiality comes into being, manifests itself in being, when the *possibility to be other* is revealed.[20] As one of Schelling's listeners in Berlin noted on January 17, 1842, "The substance of this process is the creation of a world in which all possibilities are actualities. The real God is the Creator."[21] This listener was Kierkegaard, who in his own work on possibility focused not on God the Creator, but on his creature, Adam, and on all individuals since who have lived in sin, reenacting original sin. The protestant Kierkegaard is no less a Christian thinker than the Catholic Schelling, and he repeatedly references the latter (as well as Aristotle on *dunamis*/ *energeia*). However, his focus is on psychology and ethics—on the human individual in a fallen world facing the uncertainty of conflicting or precarious possibilities. "My soul has lost possibility. If I were to wish for something, I would wish not for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye, eternally young, eternally ardent, that sees possibility everywhere. Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not."[22] Among the pathologies of possibility are anxiety, in which possibilities become a disquieting threat, and boredom,

where they are elusive dreams in a humdrum world.[23]

The passion for the possible returns in an anguished form in Byrne's pronouncements. After decades of There Is No Alternative ideology, we see a pathos of the possible that aims to quell fears about empty possibilities without potentiality. But what are the *potential possibilities*—as opposed to largely hypothetical ones? In Peter Osborne's characterization, the space of art is *project space*, and hence the space of the projection of possibilities and the presentation of "practices of anticipation."[24] And indeed, much contemporary aesthetic practice is possibilist—from speculo-accelerationist "we were promised jetpacks" retro-Prometheanisms to various forms of social and political practice seeking to foster and form alternative forms of assembly and cooperation.

Artists organizing training camps, such as Jonas Staal with *Training for the Future* and Jeanne van Heeswijk with *Trainings for the Not-Yet,* sound out and strengthen possibilities for alternate social forms.[25] In the words of the Alabama collective Our Literal Speed—reused by Tony Cokes—à propos of Rosa Parks and the Selma Bus Boycott, such projects seek to "[concretize] possibility in the here and now," and to establish "rudiments for a vernacular of possibility."[26] Which possibilities are—or can be—invested with potentiality? How to foster the "care of the possible," in Isabelle Stengers's words?[27] Such are the central questions of possibilist politics and aesthetics, but in the marketplace of possibilist projects it can be hard to see the forest for the trees.

Emergence and Predictive Management

Kierkegaard's philosophy of possibility, and of anxiety as stemming from the "infinity of possibility," has recently been marshalled by Patricia de Vries to analyze "algorithmic anxiety," as manifested for instance in the fear of being replaced by machines, or in the "Black Box anxiety" triggered by the alleged unknowability of algorithms. Analyzing a number of speculative media art projects, De Vries argues that "it is neither the algorithms nor the infrastructures that cause anxiety, but the experience of a lack of possibility," an "algorithmic determinism."[28] While such determinism may be characteristic for certain narratives (we will all be replaced by robots), it seems that the more productive level of inquiry concerns the role played by the very concepts of possibility and probability in algorithmic culture.

Raymond Williams developed his account of dominant, residual, and emergent social forms in the late 1970s and early 1980s—at the dawn of the neoliberal era, when a different conception of emergence would come to dominate. By 1988, Ronald Reagan was in Moscow, heralding the new age being born in Silicon Valley:

Like a chrysalis, we're emerging from the economy of the Industrial Revolution—an economy confined to and limited by the Earth's physical resources—into, as one economist titled his book, "The Economy in Mind," in which there are no bounds on human imagination and the freedom to create is the most precious natural resource.[29]

Of course, the prerequisite for this conception of a postindustrial economy, and for the widespread belief that new technologies would be inherently liberating, was "the free market," taken as the natural economic life-form of such freedoms. This was freedom without its old corollary, social atomization and alienation; in some ways, it was a lot like Soviet or Chinese collectivism, minus the top-down force. In March 2000, Bill Clinton sarcastically wished China's leaders "good luck" in trying to censor the internet.[30] Oh, how we laughed!

One of the cheerleaders of the new economy, *Wired'*s Kevin Kelly, published a volume that jumpstarted the Silicon Valley–affiliated "hype surrounding emergent behavior," in which notions such as the "hive mind" and "swarm intelligence" were applied to networked human (or human-machinic) behavior.[31] For his book *Out of Control* (1994), he took inspiration from William Morton Wheeler's "bombshell of an essay" from 1911, "The Ant Colony as an Organism" in the *Journal of Morphology*, in which he analyzed the ant colony as an organism in its own right. As Kelly wrote:

> Wheeler saw "emergent properties" within the superorganism superseding the resident properties of the collective ants. Wheeler said the superorganism of the hive "emerges" from the mass of ordinary insect organisms. And he meant emergence as science—a technical, rational explanation—not mysticism or alchemy.[32]

The concept of emergence is part of modern genealogies of vitalism and organicism. In her early book *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* (1976), Donna Haraway distinguishes between the two by noting that vitalists "assert some nonphysical entity—either a nonquantifiable vital force like Driesch's entelechy or some basic difference between 'vital substance' and ordinary matter," whereas organicists "insist that wholeness, directedness, and regulation can be explained fully without such notions."[33] Form comes to the fore precisely because as an emergent property, as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, life is form:

> From an organismic perspective, the central and unavoidable focus of biology is form. Every other

consideration of the biological sciences leads up to the task of at last stating the laws of organic form. Form is more than shape, more than static position of components in a whole. For biology the problem of form implies a study of genesis.[34]

As Andreas Malm has argued, acknowledging the emergent properties of aggregates does not absolve one from trying to analyze the various factors; the fact that the climate is a complex system with emergent properties does not absolve any human, political, or corporate actors of responsibility. However, for all the debates that are still raging between reductionists and emergentists, "there is one sphere into which [reductionism] seems unable to make any inroads: that of society. Properties of society cannot be derived from the atomistic aggregation of its members."[35] Again, however, this does not let anyone off the hook when it comes to the question of how to live together, how to organize society. In this respect, a certain discourse on emergence has, however, done much to muddy the waters. In Jussi Parikka's words, "Being connected in networks or in swarms does not imply an emergence of political formation with common goals, and hence addressing swarms as democratic tools in an overly straightforward way should be avoided."[36]

The point is not to update Gustave Le Bon's conservative nineteenth-century account of the "unruly crowd," seen as dangerous—as a potential mob. Critiquing neoliberal mass events is not to voice some "fear of contagion" à la Le Bon, but to question the means, ends, and forms of contemporary crowd curating.[37] Jodi Dean has noted that what gets called a crowd in "crowd intelligence" may be more properly called a data pool.[38] Here, we are not so much in the realm of Le Bon as in that of Antoine Augustin Cournot, the theorist of chance who introduced probability into economic analysis. Cournot argued that society keeps getting more organized and therefore more predictable until it operates "like a beehive, a virtually geometric pattern."[39] An offline (yet networked) mass event still generates plenty of dirty data for outreach management and fundraising. Being part of a human swarm at a networked event does not necessarily mean that one is part of an emergent force in Williams's sense. One may just be an extra in the theater of dominance.

The rhetoric of digital emergentism naturalizes emergence, and provides ways of monetizing it. Shoshana Zuboff has discussed the proliferation of "prediction products": based on data extraction, future (consumer) behaviors can become transparent. By processing vast quantities of data, algorithms can detect patterns such as "vegetarians miss fewer flights."[40] It is no longer merely a matter of extrapolating on the basis of past data, but of real-time data mining and pattern recognition allowing for instant feedback. Thus "a handful of now measurable personal characteristics, including the 'need for love,'

predict the likelihood of 'liking a brand'"—or voting for a fascist.[41] What pattern of purchases is associated with drinking Diet Coke?[42] Algorithmic culture is thus based on a probabilistic logic. On the macro level, forms of social emergence become probabilistic trend forecasting. However, as Louise Amoore has argued, when it comes to predicting exceptional, "low probability, high consequence events" such as terrorist attacks or pandemics, a statistical and probabilistic approach meets its limitations; blending data mining with the strategic exercises of "scenario planning," an entire post-9/11 industry has emerged around the possibilistic logic of unlikely but disastrous events.[43]

"Atlantic Storm" was a 2005 simulation of a bioterrorist attack that "demonstrated the weakness of international public health and security systems when dealing with a sudden outbreak of highly infectious diseases."[44] Minus the bioterrorism element, there has been no shortage of warning voices concerning the potential for highly contagious zoonotic diseases; after the outbreak of Covid-19, media outlets listed people who "seemingly predicted the coronavirus pandemic," from Bill Gates to Nostradamus.[45] While the threat of terrorism can be big business, the dominant economic and political forces had little immediate to gain from the specter of a pandemic. This, of course, did not prevent the emergence of "Plandemic" and "Great Reset" conspiracy theories; such conspiracism misinterprets the probabilist and possibilist regime in terms derived from reactionary nineteenth-century models about powerful elite cabals, integrating real examples of disaster capitalism into logic-proof paranoid plots.[46]

Algorithmic-financial possibilism seeks to capture the future within the ruling regime. Predictive management seeks to make potential history contiguous with the present. However, some actors have recognized the growth potential of emergent forms of fascism, and the unique suitedness of social media for fostering dark conspiracist parodies of the historicist " *wie es eigentlich gewesen*": fake histories from creationism and flat-eartherism to "the Civil War was about states' rights" and "Hitler was a socialist," and real-time alternate contemporary histories such as anti-vaxxer and 5G conspiracy narratives. Some of the technologies that have been at the forefront of algorithmic population management are now at the center of a battle over minds: outcries on the far right about censorship on Facebook and Twitter indicate that more centrist forces are intent on wresting back the initiative from the Bannons and Trumps of this world. There is, however, always a more accommodating platform waiting in the wings.

For Williams, emergence "depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form."[47] When ecolo-esoteric anti-vaxxers, self-identified leftists and white nationalists become one QAnon-infested unmasked crowd taking over the streets of Berlin, such a *Querfront* ("cross-front") is a

grim parody of Williams's insistence that "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created"—even if this is perhaps best seen as a *re* emergence of fascism with digital means. As with historical fascism, any new forms and relationships created in the progress are a violent reterritorialization of emancipatory movements: a white pseudo-multitude reasserting its sovereignty over possibility and probability, and ultimately over life and death. Wearing masks is an affront to the sovereign white subject, which finds itself humiliated by looking like a veiled woman or a muzzled slave: hence it cannot be admitted that wearing masks might make sense. Global warming would lead to a curbing of consumption and a shrinking of one's options (at least when reasoning within the current paradigm), hence it cannot be admitted as fact. From this perspective, migrants and the BLM movement likewise threaten to impose limits on individual sovereignty.

This is the weaponized possibilism of fascism, whose emergence and growth was all too probable. Are there ways of intervening actively in processes of emergence—in forming them? What of truly new forms and relationships—emancipatory and redistributive forms and relationships? This returns us to the matter of potentiality as power over possibility, and thus to the question of sovereignty. As Wendy Brown has noted, sovereignty is a slippery term in political discourse, which can be identified both with the rule of law and its suspension, and with popular legislative power as well as with decisionist executive action.[48] Brown emphasizes the fundamental tension between sovereignty understood as popular legislative power, as it was conceived by Rousseau and the French Revolution, and sovereignty as decisionist or prerogative state power, as per Carl Schmitt and Agamben. Arguably, modern "popular sovereignty" never overcame the split between the *populus* and the *plebs*, between the *Volk* and the Others, and fascism uses this to wage war on *Volksschädlinge* and *volksfremde Elemente*.[49] Recent right-wing discourse tirelessly invokes the sovereignty both of the white male subject and that of the nation-state; both are seen as being under attack. The nation-state is seen as ultimately rooted in strong, self-reliant white subjects who constitute an organic super-subject, a *Volk*, that is or should be the true sovereign; however, this *Volk* is being marginalized through "population exchange" and "white genocide."[50]

There are, however, also signs of a perverse inclusiveness of neofascism ("Blacks for Trump," "Gays Against Islam," Proud Boys of color), which allows for a more up-to-date image and makes for a better simulacrum of the multitude. The sovereignty of "the people" in turn legitimizes sovereign decisions by the potentate. However, even as neofascism claims to strengthen the nation-state and its borders, the status of the national territory is only becoming more problematic.

Split Nations and Dual Power

At the core of Fredric Jameson's theory of postmodernism was the notion of a "spatial turn" and the waning of historicity, of a modern "experience of temporality." Jameson stressed that "[the] distinction is between two forms of interrelationship between these two inseparable categories themselves," and that spatialization refers to "the will to use and to subject time to the service of space."[51] In this sense, one can discern different regimes of spatialization in the modern era and beyond. The modern nation-state presupposes (and sets about creating) a territorial integrity connected to a more or less homogeneous people. Modern European statecraft is a process of forced homogenization: one sovereign, one language, one territory (through preferably with colonies). As the spatial conduit of Objective Spirit, for Hegel the state is an unavoidable and perhaps unsurpassable outcome of the march of history (which would become the basis for Kojève's myth of the end of History in the form of the Universal and Homogeneous State).[52]

In her prescient 2010 analysis of "walled states," Wendy Brown noted a partial breakdown of the "Westphalian system" of sovereign states that each have their allotted territory. Twenty-first-century states construct costly walls and other barriers that are not so much "iterations of nation-state sovereignty" as they are "part of an ad-hoc global landscape of flows and barriers both inside nation-states and in the surrounding postnational constellations, flows and barriers that divide richer from poorer parts of the globe."[53] In a 2017 preface to a new edition of her book, Brown reflects on Brexit, Trump (and his border wall), and the European response to the "refugee crisis," which "converts whole nations into European borders" and has led to the establishment of "corridors" for semi-managed population flows.[54] A key case in her book is the Israeli border wall—which Eyal Weizman, in a passage quoted by Brown, characterizes as a "discontinuous and fragmented series of self-enclosed barriers that can be better understood as a prevalent 'condition' of segregation."[55]

With Rafi Segal, Weizman addressed this condition in the 2002 exhibition and publication "A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture," which was later reformatted and integrated into the exhibition "Territories" at KW in Berlin and other venues (cocurated by Weizman, Segal, Anselm Franke, and Stefano Boeri). Extrapolating from the Israeli/Palestinian condition, "Territories" brought together Weizman and Segal's work with a number of art projects to address the "massive fragmentation of the landscape and the production of hermetic spaces and territorial and legal islands," ranging from Israeli settlements—often folded into the border wall—to various other kinds of gated communities, camps, and army bases. While Zvi Efrat and Eran Schaerf's installation *Model State* showed projections of 1950s models for the "tabula rasa" designs of Israeli urbanism

and infrastructure in a precarious setting of raised floors and walkways made from pallets, Sean Snyder was represented with his deadpan inventory of the amenities on American military bases, *A Temporary Occupation*. The catalogue also contained his *Shanghai Links*, which connects colonial-era international concessions in Shanghai to a contemporary gated community with a golf course.[56]

Inevitably, in a post-9/11 context, the catalogue analyzed the camp through an Agambenian lens, in terms of the state of exception and its generalization. Antonio Negri has attempted to separate *constituent power* as the perpetual potential of human creative force from actualized *constituted power*; when it becomes formalized and detached from its popular (multitudinous) base, the latter becomes *sovereign power*.[57] Contra Negri, Agamben conceives of sovereign power as "[dividing] itself into constituting and constituted power," and insists that the relation between these two is

> just as complicated as the relation Aristotle establishes between potentiality and act, *dynamis* and *energeia*; and, in the last analysis, the relation between constituting and constituted power (perhaps like every authentic understanding of the problem of sovereignty) depends on how one thinks the existence and autonomy of potentiality.[58]

In Agamben's account of the sovereign ban structure, sovereign power is unleashed in the state of exception when constituted power suspends the law, suspends itself, chooses to not-be.[59]

If Agamben insists on the generalization of the state of exception, beyond the confines of the camp, then the new walls theorized by Brown "would seem to signify a problem usually identified with sovereignty's external face—enmity, rather than order—and run it through the whole of society, producing pockets and islands of walled-in 'friends' amid walled-out 'enemies.'" However, this is anything but a sign of the state's health: Brown diagnoses a "detachment of sovereignty from the nation-state," and argues that beleaguered states are increasingly non-sovereign actors—which raises the question, beyond Agambenian abstractions about the law suspending itself in the sovereign ban, of just where political sovereignty is actually located.[60] Of course, one answer is that *capital* is an "emerging *global* sovereign."[61] If for modern political theory, culminating in Schmitt, sovereignty is identified with the nation-state and is conceptualized as *indivisible*, perhaps it is time to *re*conceptualize sovereignty as constantly contested, renegotiated, parceled up, being *performed* variously by different actors, by various claimants—sometimes successfully and sometimes less so.[62] The notion of a

single sovereign may itself be a theoretical echo of the modern nation-state that needs to be rethought.

Henrike Naumann, Das Reich, 2017. Detail of the installation at Belvedere 21, Vienna, 2019-20. Photo: Johannes Stoll. Courtesy Henrike Naumann and KOW Berlin.

Pockets are proliferating, from camps and corridors to freeports. Of course, from the Paris Commune to later communes and autonomous zones, radical movements have long carved out spaces of alterity from the terrain of the nation-state. So have fascists—see, for one example, the German " *national befreite Zonen*." Meanwhile, one splinter group of the German neo-Nazi scene, the Reichsbürger (Citizens of the Reich), maintain that the postwar Federal German Republic is illegitimate, and does not exist as a sovereign state; it is only the old Reich that still has a valid juridical existence. Held with gnostic fervor, this belief system legitimizes resistance and violence. The subject of Henrike Naumann's installations *Das Reich* (2017) and *Anschluss '90* (2018), in which videos shown in assemblies of chintzy furniture evoke an alternate reality where the movement took over the German state in 1990, the Reichsbürger's fixation on state sovereignty as a conduit for white supremacy make them appear like supercharged Trumpists or Brexiteers. Like them, their reactionary ideology is also enabled by social-media filter bubbles; as with many conspiracy theories, its rise coincides with that of Facebook.

On August 29, 2020, a mob of QAnon-addled Covid denialists, many of them waving the old red-white-black *Reichsflaggen* beloved by the Reichsbürger, tried to storm the Reichstag in Berlin; the storming of the Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021, was a more consequential remake of this event.[63] What happens here is the fascist appropriation of a certain left-wing imaginary. The "Storming of the Winter Palace" during the October Revolution was turned into a proper historical event through its mythifying reenactment in Nikolai Evreinov's

mass spectacle (1920) and Eisenstein's *October* (1927). On the centenary of the "storming" on November 7, 2017, Milo Rau staged a *Storming of the Reichstag* event whose poster used a photo from the 1920 reenactment, and which took the form of a joyous mass sprint right up to the fence in front of the entrance. In conjunction with Rau's *General Assembly* project, this sprinting towards the Reichstag aimed at restoring visibility and agency to those excluded from parliamentary representation (from refugees and migrants to bees and cyborgs, in order to ensure Latouro-Harawayan theoretical street cred).[64] By contrast, the 2020–21 events at the Reichstag and the Capitol were the work of white mobs wanting to "take back our country," which means reversing civil rights gains and intensifying exclusion and disenfranchisement. Of course, this does not prevent Agamben from becoming a farcical Carl Schmitt reenactor by associating himself with a nominally left-wing German *Querfront* weekly that praises the Capitol crowd as brave patriots trying to the back the country from the deep state (apparently, they did not get the "it was antifa" memo).[65]
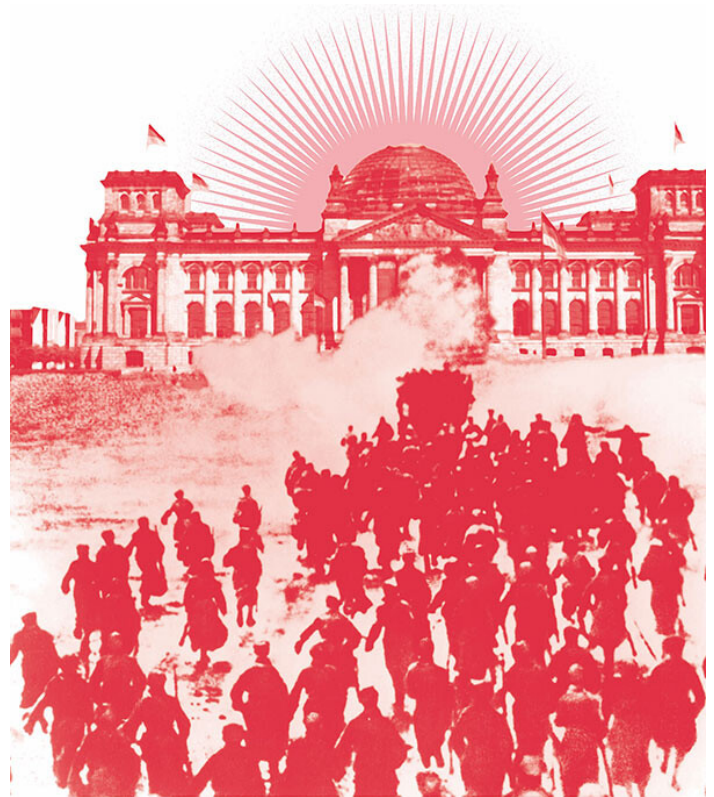
Photomontage announcement for Milo Rau's General Assembly/Storming of the Reichstag, 2017.

While the crowd storming the Capitol was (just) prevented from becoming an actual lynch mob, its theatrical

aspect—with a lot of selfie-taking and posing, and with one protester sporting a striking part-Viking, part-yak look—made it a perfect event for social media, even if the platforms are now belatedly trying to put the genie back in the bottle. The crumbling nation-state is inhabited by networked communities that no longer share a remotely consensual reality. In Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's analysis, social media generate not the "imagined communities" of print nationalism, but "imagined networks" that do not amount to "a collective entity traveling together through time, but instead a series of individuals that (cor)respond in their own time to singular, yet connected, events."[66] The Capitol storming is such an event, and it shows that the space and time of the nation are themselves becoming increasingly divided and fractured.[67] Cases such as the Reichsbürger and QAnon show imagined networks giving rise to communities that reimagine the history of the nation, becoming parallel societies; in the process, the space of networks seeps into physical space, exacerbating the differences between city and countryside, between liberal enclaves and conservative heartlands, between red and blue states. One early Talking Heads track absent from Byrne's *American Utopia* might have occasioned some liberal self-reflection. "The Big Country" sees the narrator literally and figuratively looking down on flyover country from his airplane window seat: "It's not even worth talking / about those people down there."

Certain scenarios disconnect national sovereignty from territorial integrity altogether. Referencing a 2002 interview with Weizman, Brown speculates about a resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict through two "spatially overlapping sovereignties."[68] In his novel *The City & The City*, China Miéville—whose doctoral thesis is on the Marxist theory of international law—creates a detective plot that takes place in two cities, Besźel and Ul Qoma, which occupy the same physical or "grosstopical" territory; children are trained from a young age to "unsee" anything and anyone belonging to the other city.[69] When reading the novel in 2020, it was hard not to think about Besźel and Ul Qoma as different Facebook networks or Telegram groups, ultimately resulting in different affective nations inhabiting the same terrain—which is literalized in American fears of a new Civil War. As there is only one state per territory, in contrast to Miéville's fabula, the different "nations" struggle for control of the state apparatus. Many who would have preferred a Sanders/AOC ticket were forced to vote for Biden; progressives appear to have little choice but to back the status quo and its institutions, while the conservatives-turned-neofascists aim to infiltrate or take over and undermine these very institutions.

This situation complicates progressive notions of dual power. In Murray Bookchin's definition, dual power is "a strategy for creating precisely those libertarian institutions of directly democratic assemblies that would oppose and replace the State. It intends to create a situation in which the two powers—the municipal confederations and the nation-state—cannot coexist, and one must sooner or later displace the other."[70] Here, then, the state is the power to be opposed and ultimately replaced; however, the second step has proven a rather big hurdle—and at the moment, under the right-wing onslaught, it is often a matter of *defending* the state's institutions even while building up popular, assemblist power.

Dual power is often discussed with reference to Rojava or Chiapas, the Zone à Défendre near Nantes in France, and various temporary autonomous zones that emerge from urban confrontations. Emancipatory "liberated zones" carved out of the territory of the globalist empire are attempts to build up bases within the heartlands of empire. In the wake of May '68, movements such as the Dutch Kabouters and the German Spontis attempted to create counterpower from below by creating forms of self-organization and self-government. Their spectacular and mediatized exploits—the Kabouters' declaration of Amsterdam as an "Orange Free State," as in "free from the House of Orange," or the Spontis' squatting and urban warfare in Frankfurt—proved predictably short-lived under the conditions of actually existing capitalism, but for decades autonomists have been creating pockets and zones of opacity. Such desertions, however, should not be fetishized and identified with counterpower as such. They have their necessary counterpoint in activist uses of the infrastructure of the state and of the legal forms that structure relations in the decomposing states of capitalism.

Even while Agamben is busy discrediting himself, there may be residual use-value in (a critical reading of) his writings on destituent power and inoperativity—specifically, in his insistence on opening existing forms of work and activity to "a new possible use."[71] In other words, it is not so much about a *creatio ex nihilo* as it is about adaptation, modification, through habits. An example is a feast, where eating is not primarily about feeding oneself, and where dance liberates the body from "utilitarian movements," instead unfolding "gestures in their pure inoperativity."[72] Building on but going beyond the concept of "destituent power" as developed by the Argentinian autonomist left, where it referred to inchoate and disruptive popular power preceding the constituent moment,[73] Agamben refuses to posit a linear sequence of destituting–constituting–constituted power. He advocates a habitual use of the power to not-be or not-do, against the sovereign ban and its instrumentalism: a new "ontology of potentiality" needs to replace "the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality," and this means exploring forms of *destituent* power that resist being captured and constituted. This points beyond Agamben's own rather abstract calls for a "renunciation of the law" as "a form and a way of life," and to an *immanent desertion* that uses the rights-form against the state of exception.[74]

These may be the master's tools (the tools of sovereignty), but rather than thinking of renunciation as a single

dramatic gesture, it should be reconceptualized in terms of long and patient work with the legal form—including the forms of cultural and political institutions, such as parties and parliament. Forms have affordances and limitations. A decentralized network to which David Graeber belonged found out that it was legally impossible for them to collectively own a car.[75] However, depending on national legal frameworks, forms such as cooperatives may provide means for an immanent opting-out. Fernando Garcia-Dory's INLAND cooperative would be one example that is of particular interest for the connections—the smooth space—it establishes between the metropolis and the agricultural Hinterland. Meanwhile, official trials are offset by activist tribunals that use legal protocols against the state, and groups of refugees and "illegals" who are only physically (grosstopically) in the same space as Western cultural workers, but not legally, use cultural spaces to break through into visibility.

The renunciation of the law thus leads to deeper immersion that may be a higher form of desertion. In practical terms, this ranges from work with refugees to challenging the organizational structure and modus operandi of museums, from creating cooperatives to joining unions to creating parties, and indeed to carving out spaces between and against known legal forms. At stake is indeed "the care of the possible." Emergence may take on unspectacular forms, barely perceptible—a slight shift, an undercommoning of institutional structures, an unforeseen use, a covert abuse of dominant forms.

X

The final section of this text is related to an editorial project for BAK's online platform *Prospections*, to be released later this year.

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1
Adilkno, *Cracking the Movement: Squatting Beyond the Media,* trans. Laura Martz (Autonomedia, 1994), 230.

2
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 122, 123.

3
Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.

4
On a related note, see Bini Adamczak, "The Promises of the Present," in *Deserting from the Culture Wars*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Sven Lütticken (BAK/MIT Press, 2020), 95–105.

5
On differential inclusion, see Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 34–37, 132–33.

6
Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, trans. David Fernbach (Verso, 2016), 101.

7
Naomi Klein, "We Were Told Joe Biden Was the 'Safe Choice.' But It Was Risky to Offer So Little," *The Guardian,* November 8, 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/08/joe-biden-risky-candidate-us-election .

8
See http://davidbyrne.com/explore/american-utopia/about .

9
"Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet." Friedrich Schlegel, "Fragmente," in *Athenäum,* vol. I.1 (1798), 20.

10
Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, vol. I (Reimer, 1824), vi. "Potential history" is of course also the title of Ariella Azoulay's magisterial recent study. While Azoulay drives home the importance of "unlearning imperialism" with great force, I have some issues with her notion of historical reversibility, as well as her unwillingness to consider that within the culture of Western imperialism, there may be forms of difference and dissensus worth taking seriously. This is not, however, the place for the kind of extensive discussion that Azoulay's work deserves.

11
It should be noted, however, that Aristotle's terms have proven ambiguous, with *dunamis* having been interpreted variously as logical possibility and as capacity. Both Schelling and Agamben fall into the latter camp. See Kevin Attell, "Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power," in *Diacritics* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 39.

12
F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. Manfred Frank (Suhrkamp, 1977), 127–35. The majority of this volume consists of the so-called Paulus-Nachschrift, a transcript of the lectures published (against Schelling's will) in 1843. An official version of Schelling's "positive philosophy," as manifested in the *Philosophie der Mythologie* and *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, would only be published posthumously by his sons.

13
Manfred Frank, "Einleitung des Herausgebers," in Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 22.

14
Gérard Lebovici's Champ Libre published Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1838) in a French translation in 1973, the book having been recommended by Debord. See Debord's letter to Lebovici, April 16, 1976 http://www.notbored.org/debord-16April1972.html .

15
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 156–64.

16
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 165–83, 194–96.

17
In this respect, the posthumous 1858 version of the *Philosophie der Offenbarung* is arguably worse than the pirated Paulus-Nachschrift, which I'm following here.

18
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Raezen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 48; Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby," chap. 9 in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 35–36.

19
Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*, trans. Lia Swope Mitchell (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 33–45.

20
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 162.

21
"Der Inhalt des Prozesses ist die Hervorbringung von einer Welt, wo alle Möglichkeiten Wirklichkeiten seien. Der wirkliche Gott ist der, der Schöpfer ist." Kierkegaard's transcript of Schelling's lecture of January 17, 1842, in *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 440, my translation.

22
Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I* (1843), in *Kierkegaard's Writings,* III, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1987), 41.

23
See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin* (1844), in *Kierkegaard's Writings,* VIII, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton University Press, 1980).

24
Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (Verso, 2013), 175–76.

25
See https://trainingforthefuture.org/ and https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/trainings-for-the-not-yet/ .

26
Our Literal Speed, "Notes from Selma: On Non-Visibility" http://ourliteralspeed.com/about ; text used by Tony Cokes in his work *Evil.27: Selma* (2011).

27
Isabelle Stengers, "The Care of the Possible," interviewed by Erik Bordeleau, *Scapegoat,* no. 1 (2011): 12–17, 27. In 2019, this interview provided the point of departure and title for the exhibition "Le Soin des Possibles/The Care of the Possible" at 1.1 in Basel.

28
Patricia de Vries, *Algorithmic Anxiety in Contemporary Art: A*

Kierkegaardian Inquiry into the Imaginary of Possibility (Institute of Network Cultures, 2019), 33, 92.

29
Ronald Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University" (May 31, 1988), in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 24, no. 22 (June 6, 1988), 704.

30
Bill Clinton, "Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies" (March 8, 2000), in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 36, no. 10 (March 13, 2000), 492.

31
Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 51.

32
Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems, and the Economic World* (Basic Books, 1994). Quoted from the updated 2009 edition, 11, 14. Available at https://kk.org/books/other-editions-of-out-of-control .

33
Donna Jean Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* : *Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology* (Yale University Press, 1976), 34.

34
Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 39.

35
Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (Verso, 2018), 69.

36
Parikka, *Insect Media*, 56.

37
Nor, indeed, is it a matter of arguing that "performance is in the wrong place when it's in the museum, it would seem, because there are lots of people there"—which is the bizarre position that Catherine Wood ascribes to me in "From the Institution of Performance to the Performance of Institutions," in *The Methuen Companion to Performance Art*, ed. Bertie Feldman and Jovana Stokic (Methuen, 2020), 223. It is never about performance as such, or *the* mass, *the* crowd, or *the*

41

museum, but about specific crowds and performances and museums. Tate Modern is not *the* museum, nor do its practices always manage to be both "responsively heteronomous and responsibly autonomous."

38
Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (Verso, 2016), 11.

39
Antoine Augustin Cournot, *Traité de l'enchaînement des idées fondamentales dans les sciences et dans l'histoire* , vol. 2 (Hachette, 1861), 342. Quoted and discussed in Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (Verso, 1992), 300–301.

40
Elena Esposito, "Blindness and the Power of Algorithmic Prediction," lecture at Maerzmusik in Berlin, 2016 https://voicerepublic.com/talks/blindness-and-power-of-algorithmic-prediction .

41
Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile Books, 2019), 277.

42
Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability* (Duke University Press, 2013), 40.

43
Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility,* 8–10.

44
Daniel S. Hamilton and Bradley T. Smith, "Atlantic Storm," *EMBO Reports* , no. 7 (2006) https://www.embopress.org/doi/full/10.1038/sj.embor.7400606 . For video documentation of the exercise, see https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/events-archive/2005_atlantic_storm/flash/index.htm .

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Hillary Hoffower, "Bill Gates Has Been Warning of a Global Health Threat for Years. Here Are 12 People Who Seemingly Predicted the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Business Insider* , December 15, 2020 https://www.businessinsider.com/people-who-seemingly-predicted-the-coronavirus-pandemic-2020-3 .

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Naomi Klein, "The Great Reset Conspiracy Smoothie," in *The Inte*

rcept, December 8, 2020 https://theintercept.com/2020/12/08/great-reset-conspiracy/ .

47
Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.

48
Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, 2010/2017), 60.

49
Mikael Spång, *Constituent Power and Constitutional Order: Above, Within and Beside the Constitution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 128.

50
See my essays "Abdicating Sovereignty," in *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living: Tentative and Urgent* , ed. Maria Hlavajova and Wietske Maas (BAK/MIT Press, 2019), 81–94, and "Performing Culture Otherwise," in *Deserting from the Culture Wars* , 21–52.

51
Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 154.

52
See also my essay "Posthuman Prehistory," in *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy* (Sternberg Press, 2017), 115–46.

53
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* , 36.

54
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* , 13. See also Krystian Woznicki, *Undeclared Movements* (b_books, 2020).

55
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty,* 42.

56
Territories , ed. Klaus Biesenbach, Anselm Franke, Rafi Segal, and Eyal Weizman (KW/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003), 38–41.

57
Summarized in Attell, "Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power," 45.

58
Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 41, 44.

59
Attell, "Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power," 45–46.

60
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* , 59–64, 98.

61
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* , 76. On capital as sovereign, see also Joshua Clover, "The Rise and Fall of Biopolitics: A Response to Bruno Latour," *Critical Inquiry* blog, March 29, 2020 https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/03/29/the-rise-and-fall-of-biopolitics-a-response-to-bruno-latour/ .

62
Tellingly, Brown likens Schmitt to the "quintessential owl of Minerva flying at dusk." *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* , 95.

63
See (in German) https://www.rbb24.de/politik/thema/2020/coronavirus/beitraege_neu/2020/08/berlin-reaktionen-reichsflaggen-absperrungen-durchbrochen-reichs.html .

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See Milo Rau/IIPM, *General Assembly* (Merve Verlag, 2017). On the "Storming of the Winter Palace," see *Nikolai Evreinov & andere: "Sturm auf den Winterpalast ,"* ed. Inke Arns, Igor Chubarov, and Sylvia Sasse (Diaphanes, 2017). This publication accompanied an exhibition in the Hartware MedienKunstVerein Dortmund that included documentation of Rau's *Storming*.

65
The weekly in question is *Demokratischer Widerstand* , which to this day lists "Prof. Giorgio Agamben" as the copublisher on its front page. The editors stage themselves as an antifascist resistance movement that is the equivalent of Star Wars' Rebel Alliance, systematically turning a blind eye to the far-right elements in *Querdenker* and *Querfront* milieus, and collaborating with the conspiracist publicist Ken Jebsen and his KenFM platform. *Demokratischer Widerstand* published one of Agamben's Corona screeds in issue no. 15 (August 8, 2020), and an interview in which the Covid state of exception is characterized as the most dreadful totalitarian apparatus ever created in no. 23 (October 17). Issues no. 32 (January 9, 2021), 32 (January 16), and 34 (January 32) contain obscurantist justifications for the attack on the Capitol—with Agamben's name still on the

masthead.

66
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New* Media (MIT Press, 2016), 27.

67
Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Methods, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013), 158–59.

68
Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty,* 40. Brown references Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najafi, and Eyal Weizman, "The Wall and the Eye," in *Cabinet*, no. 9 (Winter 2002–03): 31, though I see no direct source for her remark in the online version at https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/9/kastner_najafi.php .

69
China Miéville, *The City & The City* (Pan Macmillan, 2009).

70
Murray Bookchin, "Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism," 1999 https://social-ecology.org/wp/1999/08/thoughts-on-libertarian-municipalism/ .

71
Giorgio Agamben, "What Is a Destituent Power?" trans. Stephanie Wakefield, in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* , no. 32 (2014): 69.

72
Agamben, "What Is a Destituent Power?" 69–70.

73
Verónica Gago, "Intellectuals, Experiences, and Militant Investigation: Avatars of a Tense Relation," *Viewpoint Magazine*, June 6, 2017 https://viewpointmag.com/2017/06/06/intellectuals-experiences-and-militant-investigation/ . For the early articulation of this notion by Colectivo Situaciones (of which Gago was a member), see *19 & 20: Notes for a New Social Protagonism* , trans. Nate Holdren and Sebastián Touza (Minor Compositions, 2011), 51–53.

74
Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* , trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford University Press, 2013), 142.

75
David Graeber, *Revolutions in
Reverse: Essays on Politics,
Violence, Art, and Imagination*
(Minor Compositions, 2011),
43–44.

Sonali Gupta and H. Bolin

Virality: Against a Standard Unit of Life

Coronavirus Beyond Good and Evil

Viruses have been challenging our evolutionary fate since we crawled on this earth as single-celled organisms. The virus inserts its genes into the cells it infects, confusing the genealogy of every organism it encounters. It both ruptures the body to propagate its own spread and simultaneously encodes the body with the means for developing immunity. This ongoing dance is how viruses have driven the evolution of every species on earth. The Covid-19 pandemic is a unique challenge to the form and function of our continued existence on this planet. Covid-19 has besieged the greater body of global empire with as much tenacity as it attacks our lungs, hearts, and immune systems. Supply chains—the circulatory system of global trade and capitalism—continue to falter. The isolation, paranoia, and seemingly endless waiting that characterizes the quarantine is reflective of a deep metabolic fatigue on a global scale.

In the face of this threat, can we come to understand the virus *beyond good and evil*, that is to say, in a manner that neither applauds the virus (as eugenicist or misanthropic approaches would do) nor remains paralyzed by fear, uncritically accepting state measures of control and austerity in hopes of a return to normal? The former attempts to dictate what gets to live, while the latter reflects a flawed disavowal of death. Taken together, these two poles effectively produce the logic of biopolitical governance—to make live, and let die. We are made to live by adhering to the politics of health, where measures such as military-enforced lockdowns and curfews, threats of mandatory vaccinations, state fines imposed on social gatherings, and privacy-encroaching measures such as contact tracing and location tracking are justified because they are believed to administer the well-being of a portion of the population. This rapid expansion of state control further into the biopolitical sphere is only countered by fanatics who indulge in Covid-19 denialism, conspiracy theories, anti-mask rhetoric, and even austerity measures that are, in essence, eugenicist, as they choose simply to let people die. We seek a mode of existence that escapes biopolitics, one that confronts the facticity of the virus to manifest new forms of life even in the midst of the sixth mass extinction.

Quarantined on a Sinking Ship

Deaths due to a virus are considered acceptable casualties as long as the crisis does not threaten the relations of global capital. Internationally coordinated state responses have not been seen for viruses such as dengue or yellow fever, even though they still cause mass deaths in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa.[1] In contrast, the Covid-19 pandemic has spread through China, the US, and Western Europe, those places that make up the core of the global capitalist empire. If we accept that Covid-19
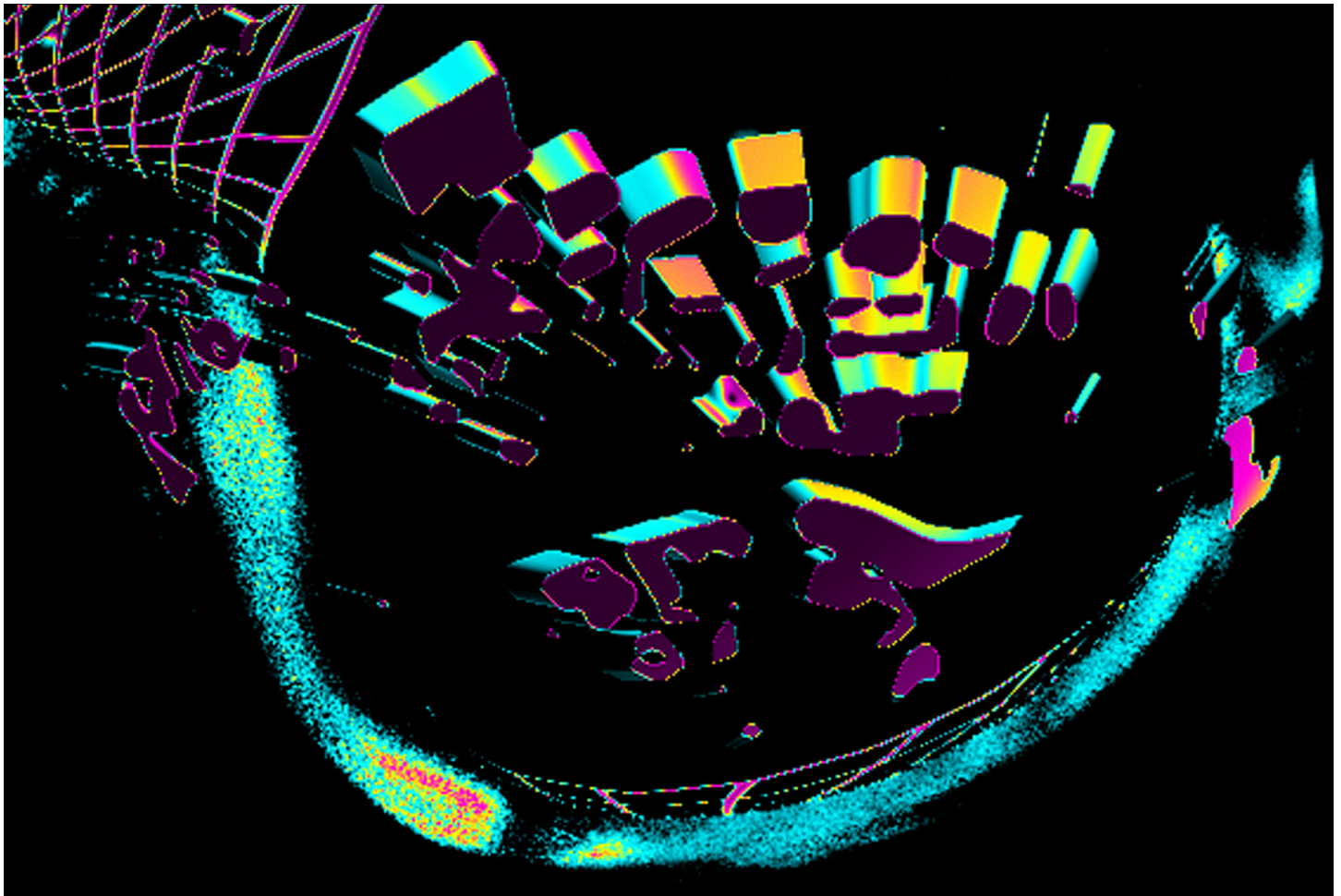
was indeed caused by a spillover event due to habitat fragmentation resulting from the endless growth of capital,[2] then we can say that state-administered responses to the pandemic preserve rather than alter the conditions that got us into this situation. From this perspective, new methods of biopolitical control do not respond to the causes of the virus; they keep the species fixed in a state of decay. The virus festers in meat factories, cubicle farms, and jails—places that were already feeding off the heinous expendability of life. The loss of life due to Covid-19 is thus not a bug in the system, but a design feature. As Covid-19 reveals the infected core of an empire only capable of replicating sickness, a sweeping reorganization of life on a global scale becomes an absolute imperative. The question of revolution is now a matter of evolution.

What are we to make of the fact that this pandemic arrived in the midst of an unprecedented wave of insurrections all over the globe?[3] Is it possible to read the virus and the insurrections as two expressions of a unified impetus to escape the global empire of capital and economic governance? We make this comparison not for the sake of analogy, but rather in a bid to access, as Idris Robinson writes, "a hidden partisan knowledge to be uncovered surrounding the novel coronavirus pandemic that also can

be exploited and weaponized against established power."[4] It is not lost on us that biopolitical measures of control have failed to adequately address our collective situation, which continues to oscillate between the next wave of the pandemic and the next wave of the rebellion. However, we see these as a unified phenomenon that operates according to its own logic, and creates its own temporality. The machinations of virality provide us with figures of thought and movement to create new horizons in the face of an untenable situation on an increasingly uninhabitable planet.

Life beyond the Calculus of Survival

Perhaps God is a virus that inhabits us.
—Heiner Müller

In a brilliant essay on the politics of life, David Cayley writes that "the measures mandated by 'the greatest health care crisis in our history' have involved a remarkable curtailing of civil liberty ... to protect life and,
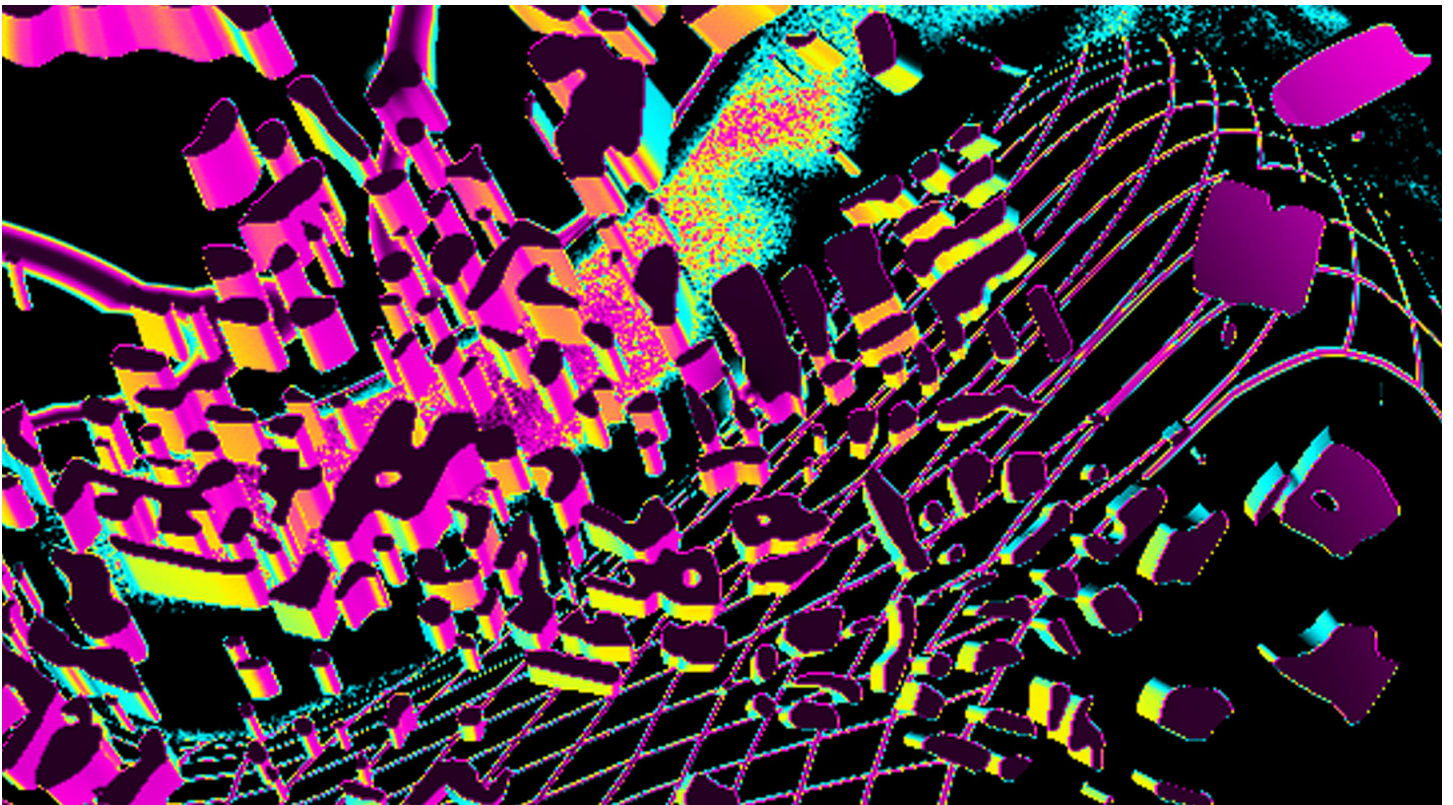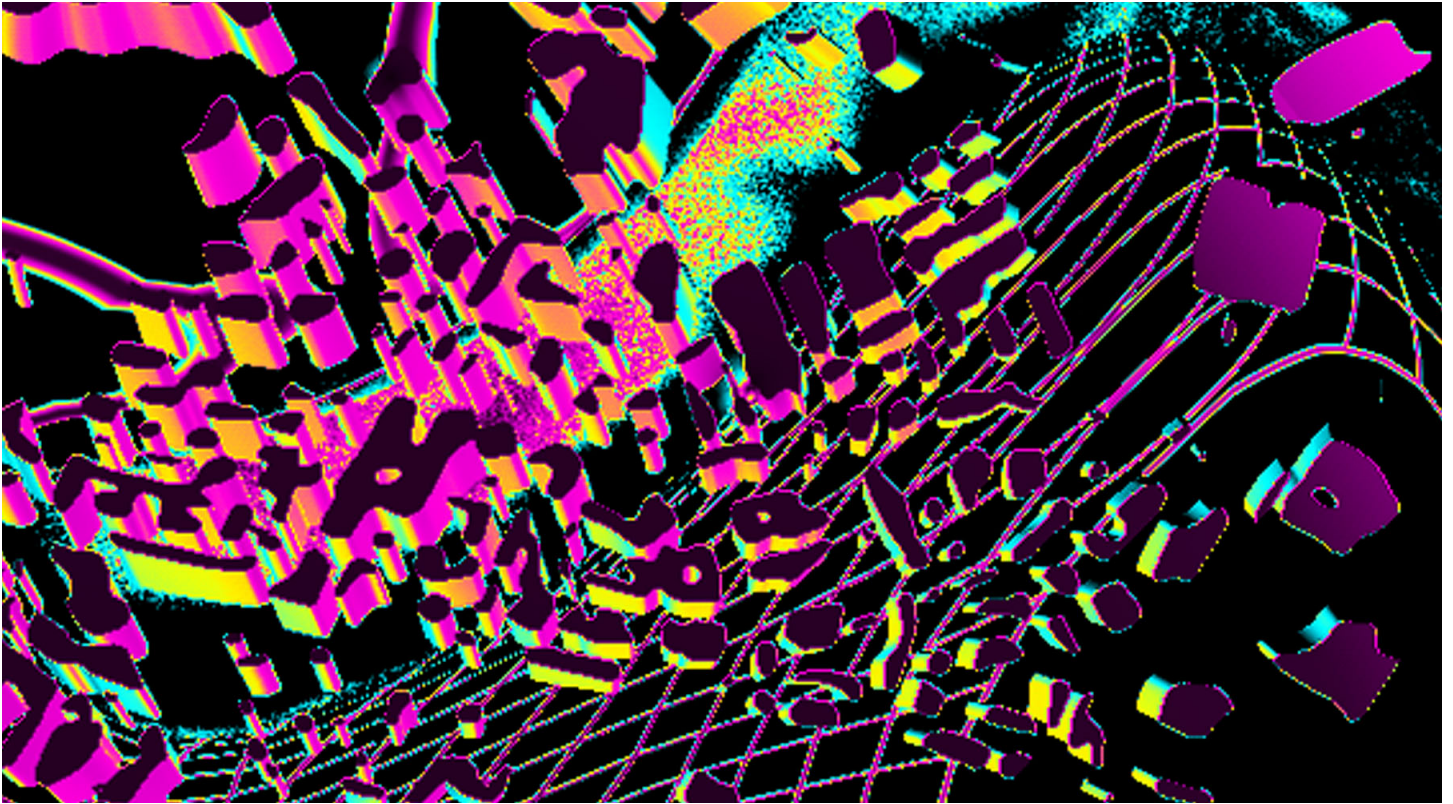
by the same token, to avoid death."[5] The terrain of governance takes life itself as its object, attempting to

force it to adapt to—and importantly, not to transform in the face of—the selective pressure put on the species. If

this is the case, can a politics of life help us combat the governance of life? How do we insert asymmetry into this confrontation? Only that which comes from beyond life or between its interstices can do so. Rather than cling to the immanent categories of life, nature, and history to guide our political imaginaries, the virus inoculates us with an alien knowledge that restores the theological question of what is beyond these givens.

The virus exists in the liminal space between life and nonlife. A small amount of genetic material contained within a perfectly geometric molecular envelope is somehow able to self-propagate, manipulate its environment, adapt, and evolve—all features we might find evocative of life. And yet, a virus does not breathe. Whether you call it prana, qi, or basic biochemistry, respiration is simply a metabolic process of energy transduction. The smallest entity capable of breath is the cell—perhaps why we designate it as the "fundamental unit of life." The final utterances of Eric Garner and George Floyd, "I can't breathe," reflect the singular experience of blackness in America. Yet, these words also echo within us like a phantom pain as a global pandemic chokes the life out of millions and uncontrollable wildfires decimate forests—the lungs of the earth. In this planetary asphyxiation, we look to that which does not breathe but nevertheless remains animated—the virus.

Fugitive Mechanics

A. The New Information Episteme

From epidemiological models to communications networks, systems of governance seek to map sources of information, constructing a genealogy of sorts, in order to constrain and direct the flow of information. In contrast, a viral mode of information propagation is one that is fundamentally unbounded and anti-genealogical.

The source of an outbreak is often unknown and as transient as a single cough. Without any central logic dictating its spread, the virus simply multiplies where it finds itself through any medium available, like wildfire. The virus cares not whether its host lives in a prison or in the White House, cutting across the classes and orders produced by the economy and maintained by the state. Existing sites of encounter—the workplace, the church, the nightclub, the courts, etc.—are all suspended as our relations come to be defined foremost by our relation to the virus. As an immediate response to the pandemic, mutual aid and housing defense networks sprung up across the US, as people intuited the state's inability to contain the crisis. This vast rearrangement of resource and communications networks produces a different plane of connectivity—a rich medium for political contagion.

In biological terms, viral information propagation proceeds through horizontal gene transfer. A virus will transport the genes of one of its hosts into another, allowing genes to be shared laterally across species, classes, orders, and even kingdoms.[6] Thus, if species are individuated on the basis of their genetics, if DNA is a barcode for the biological subject, then the virus is nature's de-subjectivizing machine. The synchronizers of ecosystems, viruses promote coevolution by entangling the genetic trajectory of all forms of life they encounter. The virus is a stranger to the arboreal order given to life through genealogical categorization. Instead, the virus acts as a connective element that unravels this tree of life, encountering each body as if it exists on its own plane beyond the genus or the kingdom.

Today we see this very mode of virality begin to undo existing political genealogies. If revolutionary processes in the twentieth century were commanded by specific constituted groups, whether the party, unions, or classes, in today's uprisings these forces are replaced by memes, infographics, and Instagram stories. Flows of information break through their cybernetic constraints and help leaderless groups coordinate actions with complete strangers. Revolts become the only connective element of an increasingly fragmented socius, calling into question pre-codified alliances and identities without ever congealing into a constituent body or coherent revolutionary subject. Virality designates a mode of contagion that destabilizes the way constituted groups interface with one another, confusing their position within the established order, which prepares the ground on which destituent powers can emerge.

B. Silent Reconfigurations and Memory: The Lysogenic Phase

The virus contains a biological switch between two modes of viral replication, the lysogenic and lytic, which correspond to two distinct temporalities and functions. The lysogenic consists of long, slow, invisible reconstitution, whereas the lytic phase is characterized by speed and sabotage. In the lysogenic mode, viral genes are integrated into the host genome and propagated through the regular replication of host cells. When this switch is flipped from lysogenic to lytic, the host cell is turned into a biological factory for the exponential production of more viruses. It is only at this point that the host becomes symptomatic; the virus makes itself visible only once the latent infection has progressed beyond a critical point.

Just as a virus inserts its genes to transform the genome of the host, altering the body even as it continues its regular functions, so too a process of covert reconstitution (or destitution) precedes social rupture. If Covid-19 has a lysogenic phase of two to fourteen days, the George Floyd Rebellion had a lysogenic phase on the timescale of years. The lysogenic phase could be seen as a period of "social peace," being asymptomatic with no visible displays of upheaval. These periods are an opportunity for a process

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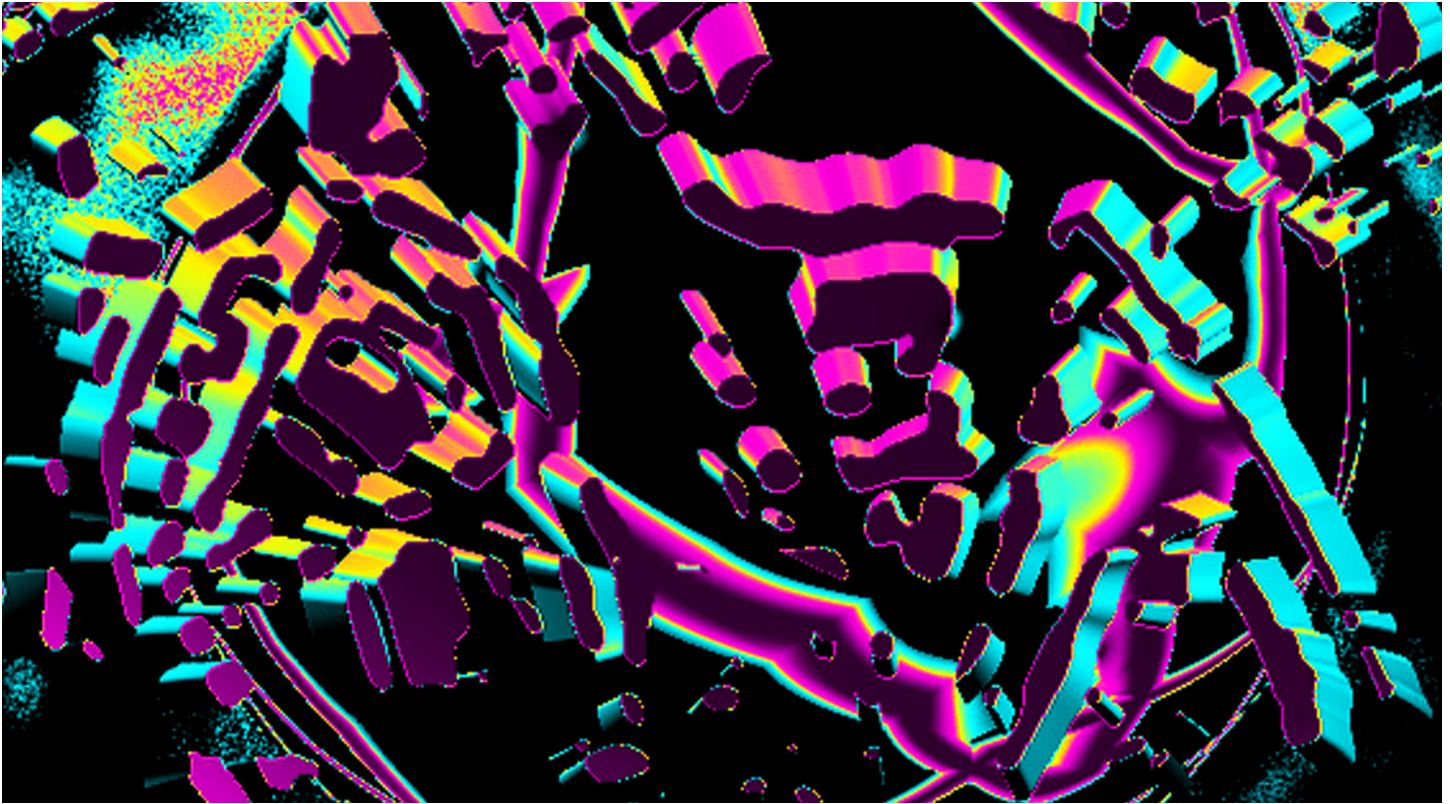
of incubation, in which partisans of the real have time to infect the social body with encoded sets of instructions and frameworks, so that when the lytic phase kicks in (always unpredictably), we have formulas to refer to as the physics that hold our world together break down. In 2019, as insurrections spread to every corner of the globe, we all knew this wave would come crashing on the shores of the US sooner or later. We took note of the uprisings, and looked for the tools and tactics used to coordinate the unrest. This knowledge was activated as lasers, umbrellas, and techniques for dealing with tear gas were imported and iterated upon night after night in many cities across the US. When the George Floyd uprising kicked off on May 26, 2020, Telegram groups formed in the initial phases of the pandemic to coordinate rent strikes were transfigured to help crowds of rebels outmaneuver the police with real-time information from police scanners. Transforming a time of social peace into a lysogenic phase means looking for ways to unravel the existing functions of constituted forms and subjectivities and instead turn them into vectors of escape.

It is notable that viruses do not necessarily produce rupture to affect the functioning of the host. In fact, 8 percent of our DNA is composed of remnants of ancient viruses.[7] These viral genetic sequences were initially thought to constitute "junk DNA" since their expression was silent or noisy compared to genes which mapped onto a clear function within the cell. Now we know that these viral elements in our DNA regulate our native genes and are critical for basic functions such as pregnancy and

immunity.[8] Thus when viral latency lasts long enough, it becomes embodied memory. A professor of philosophy lamented last year that not a single student in his freshman college course even remembered the Occupy movement. Without a knowledge of this history, he contended, no truly emancipatory horizon could be forged. A year later, we find teenagers and those fresh out of high school participate in some of the bravest and most innovative actions on the streets. We need not remember Occupy to know how to act when the time is right. Such a thread of embodied memory may seem silent, but will nevertheless express itself on its own timescale. We look to political genealogies for our history, when in fact history is made by the very elements that corrupt existing genealogies.

C. Sabotage and Speed: The Lytic Phase

In the rapid transition from lysogenic to lytic, viral genes begin to systematically repurpose the machinery of the cell to exponentially produce new viruses, which burst forth from the ruptured cell. When the social body ruptures, tactics, forms, and ideas self-replicate. We see the body of civilization become the medium for memesis, just as the cell becomes a site of pure propagation. The goal is no longer to block the flows of capital; instead, capital is arrested as a natural consequence of the free-flowing proliferation of desire. As Fanon said, "I shall attempt a complete lysis of this morbid body."[9]

Viruses are the fastest evolving organisms on the planet.

Their evolutionary speed can be attributed to their exponential replication—the more copies of a single entity, the more probable that it gains adaptive mutations. Each mutation adds to the possibility of evasion and makes viral spread difficult to control. For instance, the flu evolves so rapidly that some years the vaccine is only 10 percent effective.[10] What is instructive here is the concept that redundancies within systems create new vectors of escape. The LAPD chief of police recently stated that a crowd of ten thousand is easier to control than ten crowds of a thousand people.[11] These redundancies each retain the capacity to differentiate into new threats and spread thin the resources of the system to contain the evolving contagion.

This dynamic was evident in the George Floyd Rebellion, where social contagion on a national scale was disorienting for a coordinated federal response. In Minneapolis, the story goes that protestors were frequently warned by someone in the crowd, often after an explosive event, that the National Guard was just ten minutes away! This empty warning was repeated so many times that it became a running joke. In reality, the National Guard would arrive at a site of rebellion after it subsided locally and began to peak in another city, leaving the Guard to take care of cleanup duty and whatever managerial tasks were left in the wake of the chaos. The speed of lysis on a national scale reflected that the crowds were able to "observe, orient, decide, and act"[12] before the state apparatus, corporations, leftist organizations, and nonprofits, leaving them all to conduct autopsies of their lysed bodies—the charred remains of a precinct or a smashed and looted store.

The switch between the lysogenic and lytic phase is not deterministic, but rather probabilistic. Viral genes form complex assemblages within the biological context of the host, such that various environmental stimuli, transient perturbations to the systems, and the ongoing background noise of living organisms all contribute to the probability that the threshold to the lytic phase is crossed.[13] Similarly, there is no algorithm that prescribes the specific conditions that produce social rupture; there is no such thing as an engineered riot. The predictions and punditry surrounding possible reactions to a given election or the not-guilty verdict of a murderous cop continuously fall flat because the rapid transition to rupture is subject only to the continuous compounding of internal stochasticities. The inherently statistical nature of this phase transition is a necessary feature of escape; if the process were deterministic it could be precluded. Escape only occurs to the degree that it surprises itself.

In the End Was the Beginning

The advent of the coronavirus pandemic has solidified a destabilization of the categories that uphold the Western political order, and the state-administered and popular

responses reflect this destabilization in their confusion: right-wingers appear to carry the torch of freedom as they protest against lockdowns, while the left clings to rules and regulations and reacts to the right-wing. Though the political poles seem to have momentarily been inverted, it is no surprise that neither pole, nor any established political power, has produced a response that addresses the root of our collective malady. Only the global wave of insurrections point to a horizon, still vague, beyond new forms of economic control that hold all life on earth hostage. While these uprisings seem to trespass the political categories of the twentieth century, the absence (or perhaps obsolescence) of party, class, and program also subjects them to a similar confusion as that which plagues the parties of order. This demands that we clarify new figures of thought for our time. Only by learning the language of the virus—its undoing of political genealogies, its latent reconfiguration of the social body, and the ancient speed at which it moves—can we begin to intuit these new figures.

Viruses are the undercommons of the biological world. With no traceable origin, the virus is at once a prehistoric entity and also at the very frontier of evolution. Always a fugitive, the virus never "belongs" to the organism in which it resides—a stranger to the body at best, an infection at worst. The virus is fundamentally impure; it has been touched by everything and yet incorrigibly seeks further contact. Never static, the virus oscillates between the vast temporality of memory and the ultrafast timescales of microbiological replication. Often it remains silent but, as Fred Moten said of certain musical moments, "What is mistaken for silence, becomes all at once, transubstantial."[14] Forever incomplete, continuously rewritten, the viral genome corrupts the very language of life—an electrified conduit between what was and what could yet be. A dazzling repertoire of geometries, the virus takes on innumerable forms but cannot be called a life-form. Always lesser than the fundamental unit of life, the virus exists in the liminal space between life and nonlife, nothing but not absent, bloodstained and, precisely because of this, able to give birth.

X

All images courtesy of Peter Polack. For more information .

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Hear us, you who are no more than leaves always falling, you mortals benighted by nature,
You enfeebled and powerless creatures of earth always haunting a world of mere shadows,
Entities without wings, insubstantial as dreams, you ephemeral things, you human beings:
Turn your minds to our words, our ethereal words, for the words of the birds last forever!

—Aristophanes, *The Birds*[1]

Xenia Benivolski

You Can't Trust Music

1. The Preserving Machine [2]

Set in mid-1950s Europe, Philip K. Dick's fable "The Preserving Machine" describes the pursuits of a scientist named Doc Labyrinth. In the aftermath of the two world wars, Labyrinth is contemplating the possibility of a human-made disaster that could wipe out civilization. While working in his lab, he ponders the possible loss of classical European music should the apocalypse occur. Inspired by a vision of a resilient beetle crawling out of the rubble, he decides to create a "preserving machine" that could encapsulate classical compositions in the bodies of animals. If the beetle is the only thing to rise from the ashes, he thinks, let it carry the world's greatest symphonies.

Labyrinth successfully creates the preserving machine. He feeds musical score sheets into the machine, and each produces a different animal: "Mozart emerges in the body of a small bird, Beethoven comes out as a beetle, Schubert is a sheep and so on." The doctor creates several animals, each one unique, each embodying a composer's work, and releases them into a forested grove behind his lab. The hope is that when the animals are someday fed *back* into the machine they will release the music they have preserved in their bodies. However, sometime later, he finds that the animals in the forest have died, mutated, or become feral. "He had forgotten the lesson of the Garden of Eden: that once a thing has been fashioned it begins to exist on its own, and thus ceases to be the property of its creator to mold and direct as he wishes … he had ensured their survival, but erased their meaning." Finally, he captures a beetle and feeds it back into the preserving machine, expecting to hear Bach. Instead, the sound that emerges is wild and hideous.[3]

Dick's fable is one of morality: nature will not submit to human will. Faced with the violence of war, Labyrinth comforts himself with European symbols of civility and resilience, despite the fact that the Second World War was

Dora Budor, The Preserving Machine, 2018-19. Installation detail from the exhibition, I am Gong, 2019, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel.

clearly driven by racial cleansing. Besides the loss of music, he fantasizes about the destruction of museums: the institutions that affirm Europe as the pinnacle of advanced civilization. Following his failed experiment he remarks, "Perhaps nothing can be done, then, to save those manners and morals," as if unaware, or unwilling to consider, that most of the artifacts in museums are violent acquisitions from other lands.[4] The satirical story has many such aspects that reek of white supremacy: the binary reflection between "mannered" and "wild," the nod to biological purism, and the idea that for culture to survive we must prevent mixing or intermingling. In his desire to keep things as they are, Labyrinth overlooks the obvious: that things need to change, evolve, and adapt in order to survive. His vision of exceptionalism, consistent with European values at the time, shows that purity and selective breeding leads to death, disease, and stagnation. In the story, the machine itself does no preserving whatsoever: the animal stores the music—and then transforms it. But animals cannot be expected to preserve information perfectly; they are not machines. Or are they?

Artist Dora Budor's *The Preserving Machine*

(2018–present) is an art installation based on Dick's short story. In Budor's version, the machine is a robotic flying apparatus made to look like a bird. Its flight pattern is designed in accordance with a musical score that the viewer can't hear; its movements are programmed in biomimetic patterns that correspond to a site-specific sound composition. Her bird seemingly adapts to different scenarios: At the 2018 Baltic Triennial in Vilnius, Lithuania, organized around the theme "Give up the Ghost," the bird flew around the central courtyard of the Contemporary Art Centre. The courtyard's glass walls were tinted acid yellow, giving the impression from within the building that the air outside was yellow. Looking out, one could imagine an abandoned environment where a single bird aimlessly flaps around a deserted landscape. At Budor's 2019 solo show at Kunsthalle Basel, entitled "I am Gong," the bird was kept inside, in a yellow plastic enclosure that brought to mind containment structures on toxic or radioactive land sites in science fiction films.

In Vilnius, the viewer was in a position of confinement, with the artwork in the wild; in Basel the work was confined, with the viewer looking in. In both cases, the

floor of the exhibition space was covered with diatomaceous earth—essentially fossil dust—and construction materials from nearby sites. The flapping mechanical animal was contextualized by both ancient dust and contemporary relics. In 1921 Walter Benjamin wrote of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, the famous monoprint that depicts an angel backing away from the viewer: "This is how one pictures the angel of history. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."[5] Likewise, Budor's bird is flung back and forth through space and time, seemingly oblivious to the destruction around it or the fact that it is contained or not. However, unlike the "angel of history," the bird's path is not linear but repetitive.

The composers chosen by Doc Labyrinth represent a political web of entanglements that helped form contemporary European identity. The continent's ideological underpinnings are clearly audible in the celebrated compositions of eighteenth-century Western Europe. Bach, for example, occupies such a historical position. A German, he was influenced by both Italian opera and French absolutism. His task was to reconcile the somber tones of German repertory with French dance and Italian drama for a growing Europe that embraced convergence, along with continental philosophy and the rise of Prussia. German art and music has always had a certain reverence for nature, but ongoing tensions with the Holy Roman Empire complicated that relationship by counterposing the Christian against the natural. Music reflects changes in the world: its mechanism relies on making noise palatable by means of subjectively defined order. The dialectic between order and violence mirrors another dialectic between music and pure noise: each reveals hidden physical and social architectures. By examining degrees of deviation from order, one can decipher the social code of a society at a particular time.

Budor's machine-bird preserves the symphony-code through its flight pattern, marking a territorial soundscape—translating sound into movement for the viewer to see but not hear. Its programmed behavior raises questions around "coding" as a cultural and biological instrument. Unlike literature or art, music appears to be nonrepresentational, at least at first. "But music also *is* a place of sorts," says musicologist Holly Watkins, who has written extensively on the subject of acoustic bio-entanglement.[6] Human and animal utterances articulate distance, texture, and intent. They respond to the acoustics of landscapes; they are amplified in some spaces and dampened in others. The quality, cadence, and rhythm of uttered sounds serve different purposes of survival and movement. They can document changes in landscape through their evolution. Through instances of human relation to birdsong and other natural sounds, and the way they have been transcribed, adapted, and memorialized by humans throughout millennia, we

can trace otherwise invisible political interventions into landscapes and soundscapes.
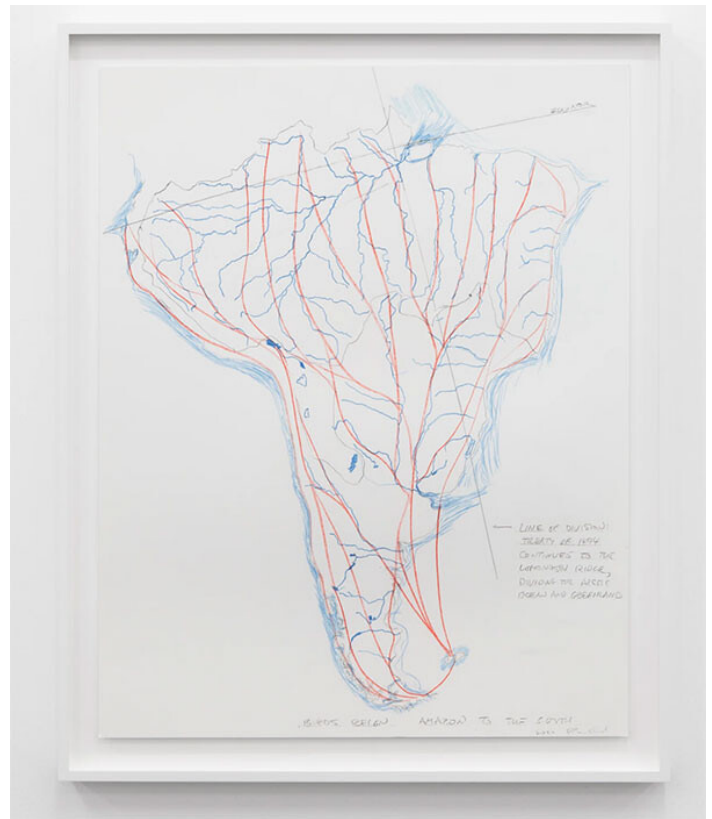
Peter Fend, Birds Reign—Amazon to the South, 2020. Pencil and colored pencil on paper. 60.96 × 45.72 cm / 24 × 18. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin.

2. Guided by Voices

The term "bird *song*" is contested by musicologists. There is much potential slippage between the melodic sounds produced by a bird and songs composed by humans, but *song* has long been thought to be the purview of the human creator: "That which makes music an art is that which separates it from nature and the natural voices of birds," writes Elizabeth Leach.[7] There is a pervasive philosophical and musicological reluctance to accept birdsong as music: to imbue it with artistic intent would seem to interrupt its natural authenticity. Throughout history, meaning has nonetheless been ascribed to birdsong by humans. Birds are known for their talent of mimicry, but the reverse is also true. While Kant, for instance, insists that birdsong cannot be *imitated*, bird sounds have often been the subject of musical investigation and improvisation.[8] Schumann, Messiaen, Handel, Dvorak, and other composers worked with birds. The integration of birdsong into musical compositions has been part of Western classical music at least since the

fourteenth century, and early recordings of birdsong also inspired biomimetic interventions into species.

For instance, the canary bird was selectively bred across Russia and Germany for its ability to imitate the sounds of birds who were more difficult to domesticate, such as the nightingale. The canary genus "has a remarkable ability to transform and imitate virtually any sequence of pitches, whether produced by humans or other birds."[9] Russian and German trainers had distinctly different approaches to training the bird, each tailored to their respective understandings of what's *natural*. While the German canary produced "the peaceful, evening tones of the nightingale," the Russian birds evoked the "wild birds of the forest."[10] Human trainers have influenced the "natural" occurrence of birdsong not despite, but precisely because of, the technical capacities of the particular bird that allow it to be trained.

Budor's machine-bird preserves a sonic composition through its flight pattern, marking a territory. According to Deleuze, "The bird sings its territory, or rather, the territory as a relational rhythmic act sings itself through the bird, as the refrain actualizes musical points of order, circles of control and lines of flight."[11] For Deleuze and Guattari, birds are artists, and birdsongs are expressions of the territorial milieu of the bird's landscape: deterritorialized and removed from context, "they become part of autonomous "rhythmic characters" and "melodic landscapes" that tend beyond the territory toward the cosmos as a whole."[12] The bird tells the story of its landscape through song, and a species of bird that migrates might be able to pass on these songs through generations, providing a territorial context for future generations of birds. This can continue for millions of years. Reports from Australia's Great Dividing Range in southern Queensland describe how the recent bushfires of 2019 potentially wiped out entire species of birds: birds that have been singing the same songs for millions of years. According to one news report, "It is said that all the birdsongs in the world go back to these birds."[13] If birdsong describes a territory, then these songs are the only living record of landscapes that no longer exist. This constitutes a major loss not just for biodiversity but for the potential in accessing these sonic records. The complexity of belonging to a geographical area feeds and inspires ways of remembering, for humans as well as birds. As Deleuze writes: "As birds sing their territory, so do humans speak or sing theirs."[14]

Moscow, the city of my childhood, is marked by brutal concrete buildings. The spaces create acoustic conditions that require a low, conspiratorial speaking voice that reduces the possibility of an echo. However, conspiratorial voices lead to conspiratorial identities that "affect our minds and our body."[15] When an outsider from a radically different geography, for example a desert, visits Moscow,

their voice, trained to roll across dry, expansive distances, bounces around the wet concrete structures, breeding discomfort and xenophobia in the locals. The outsider brings a public disturbance, but furthermore, the outsider brings the knowledge of a different, non-conspiring world. In this vein, Watkins says that "music constitutes a virtual environment related in subtle or overt ways to actual environments."[16] Examples include music that patently engages in the imagination of place. "From the nationalistic compositions of the late-nineteenth century to contemporary popular music, from Bedřich Smetana's *Ma Vlast (My Country)* to John Denver's 'Take Me Home, Country Roads,'" composers and performing artists have forged "'narratives of locality' using manifold poetic and musical means."[17] Architectural, textural, and geographical features affect the way that sound travels in space, and humans inhabiting different landscapes have developed musical methodologies to commune with their environments, and sometimes to preserve place-based heritage—even when this heritage perpetuates xenophobia, colonialism, and violence.[18]

If both human music and birdsong respond to space—by articulating a relation between memories, sound, and place—then by altering, imitating, and reproducing melodies, humans alter landscapes too. Song is a species-specific document of and a map *to* a history of geological, political, biological, and industrial change. Watkins asserts that "musical fictionalizations of place encode historically shifting attitudes about humanity, nature, and their interaction—attitudes that demand and deserve careful study."[19] Relying on assumptions and metaphors about sound reaffirms the mythical status of nature through rhetorical means. Revising this metaphorical structure allows us to reevaluate the technological relation between humans and nature, and reexamine the human relationship to history.

3. Imagine All the People

Steven Feld is an ethnomusicologist working with the Kaluli people in the Bosavi region of Papua New Guinea. In his book *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, he describes a group of people living in a rainforest, surrounded by birds. Their daily lives, writes Feld, are greatly influenced by their interactions with these animals. He believes these interactions inspire

a set of beliefs that organizes the interpretation of everyday living in a world that is full of birds and alive with their sounds. Myths, seasons, colors, gender, taboos, curses, spells, time, space, and naming are systematically patterned; all of these are grounded in the perception of birds, as indicated foremost by the presence of sound.[20]

Steven Feld, Voices of the Rainforest: A Day in the Life of Bosavi, 2019. 70 minutes, 7.1 surround sound film, Distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, www.der.org. In Feld's film, "This image appears at the beginning of the section with the performance of the mouth harp. The bird superimposed on the landscape looking south to Mt. Bosavi is the Papuan hornbill, Rhyticeros plicatus, (obei, in the Bosavi language) which is locally a prominent male spirit symbol and thus the bird local consultants suggested frame this very male afternoon forest activity."

Many of the birds represent dead ancestors, and their songs are understood as weeping, grieving sounds, mediating between the spiritual and the practical world. Feld claims that the Kaluli people try to imitate the sounds of birds when they want to evoke a sense of reminiscence and nostalgia: the tones prepares an audience for a certain kind of remembering.[21] And so when composing these songs, the Kaluli try to vocalize in a "bird language" which, unlike practical everyday language, evokes memories, events, and most of all, places. "Re-membering is a bodily activity of re-turning."[22] In his description of the songs, Feld says that "all songs are sung from the point of view of movement through lands. The composer's craft is not to tell people about places but to suspend them into those places."[23]

As musicologist Susan McClary has written, "Music enters through the ear, that most vulnerable organ of perception that cannot be opened or closed selectively. And especially in Western culture, where the visual is a privileged source of knowledge, it tends to slip around and surprise us."[24] Music is a powerful mnemonic device when it comes to language as well as place: the human

brain uses phonology to memorize certain parts of language.[25] Studies show that it is a song's structure that helps us remember other information about it. In other words: the melody helps us recall the lyrics. This is why a sentence heard repeatedly starts to acquire a rhythm. Tones can resonate inside the body, specifically in the ears, creating independent sounds based on internal acoustics and associations.[26] "Behavioural experiments with songbirds help to throw light not only on how and why humans recognize and learn to manipulate melodies and language, but also on how the human brain functions more generally," according to philosophers Olga Petri and Peter Howell.[27] For instance, studies of canaries were some of the first to suggest brain plasticity in humans.

In 2019 artist Byungseo Yoo explained to me that his exploration of minimalist techno music was an experiment in memory. While listening to a repetitive beat, he said, one constructs a unique melody hinging on one's perspective and personal associations. So while a group of people appear to be dancing together to a repetitive beat in a club, each person is dancing to their own internal song. The song is created by memories, associations, and familiarities, but it is also formed by the body. The bodies of other dancers dampen and absorb sounds too, creating

Etching by Henry Gillard Glindoni (1852— 1913) of the 1883 Birds at the University of Cambridge, reproduced by courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. A performance of the play Birds by Aristophanes: a man is performing on a stage attended by a man with wings and a young boy, other people dressed in bird costume are gathered around the front of the stage. Image: Wellcome Library / CC BY 4.0

other acoustics that resonate in the space. The repetitive beat mediates between the collective experience and the song inside.

At the Banff Centre in 2017, I attended a concert performance of *A Song for Margrit*, a composition by the late composer Pauline Oliveros in which the players make sounds in response to any sound they hear in the room, which can also come from the audience. The session was guided by the Toronto experimental musician Anne Bourne. Oliveros's works, often performed communally, allude to de-skilling and a form of performance that functions "without the mediating code of musical performance history."[28] When the group of improvisors started playing, it felt like the sounds were articulating some already existing social dynamic among the musicians: hierarchies audibly and visibly emerged as the performers exchanged glances and took turns, some yielding and some interrupting. After the first set, they performed a second iteration of the improvisation, in

which half of the performers were blindfolded. Without the visual communication they had relied on before, the melody changed into a softer, more collaborative rhythm. Bill Dietz and Gavin Steingo write in their article "Experiments in Civility" that "within the performing collective, the literal relations between musicians, their perception of each other's cues and coordinations, describe an indeterminate geography in which sound becomes secondary to the intersubjective, collective execution of it."[29]

At the 2016 Montreal Biennale, I watched Marina Rosenfeld stage a second iteration of her experimental *Free Exercise* performance (first performed in 2014). A hybrid orchestra made up of both civilian and military participants carried out a series of musical "exercises." This sixty-minute version was a collaboration between a military orchestra (wearing full camouflage) and local musicians, held at the armory of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal. As the orchestra began performing, a crowd of exhausted

but giddy art viewers, journalists, and locals trickled into the decorated hall. Each audience member had their own preconceptions about the setting and the performers: the majority of the crowd had likely never set foot in an armory. The different sensibilities of the two groups of performers contributed to a sense of gentle conflict between a group that wanted to retain control over the score, and a group of disrupting bodies.[30] The dynamic between the groups illuminated a social tension that already existed in the room, a kind of orchestrated resistance that has been so central to the landscape of political performance art.[31]

to speculate   what it would be like to fly around in total darkness, guided by echolocation, to hang upside down and eat bugs—but this projection is distinctly separate from actually being a bat.[32] Even if we suddenly somehow did become bats, Nagel believes that our human consciousness would prevent us from fully experiencing it. He proclaims that "our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience" and that every projection is connected to a single point of view.[33] If you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. But if you're a nail, does everything look like a hammer?

"We all know that people have politics, not things," writes

The Birds of Aristophanes as Performed by Members of the University at the Theatre Royal: Cambridge, November, 1883.

4. Signal

In his 1974 essay "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" philosopher Thomas Nagel makes a clear distinction between being something and being "like" something. He describes this as the difference between being and pretending. Of course humans are able to *imagine* being bats—it's fun

Langdon Winner in his text "Do Artefacts Have Politics?" "Technological change expresses a panoply of human motives, not the least of which is the desire of some to have dominion over others."[34] Ultimately, Philip K. Dick's story is that of a man who wants to have absolute power over history by creating a mini-cosmos in his own backyard. Like a melody you keep coming back to, an

infectious song stuck in your head that absorbs or excludes all extraneous voices, the human domain perpetuates itself through the imagining and reimagining of civilities.[35] In reality, the nature-culture structure is an illusion of convenience: waking life is not a grove full of domesticated monsters behind the master's house but a vast and unpredictable landscape.

Listening to Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, one can grasp much about the cultural and political alliances of eighteenth-century Western Europe. But taken out of context, the symphonies that Doc Labyrinth longs to preserve lose much of their meaning. What a listener can glean from music relies on individual and collective beliefs about history and politics. By bringing to life the Mozart bird, Budor's installation awakens in the viewer a new perspective on Dick's story, exposing the pillars of the author's imaginary space. Outside the realm of the fable, Labyrinth's grove of engineered creatures is not so much a Garden of Eden as a certain type of Noah's Ark. It is the scientist's rationalized, self-contained vessel, where pre-selected binaries await to populate a new world.

Winner challenges us to uncover new kinds of biases that are inherent to imaginary political spaces. "In doing so," writes Martha Kenney, "[Winner] addresses his reader, implicates us, and insists that we pay attention"; he "renders us responsible" for the production of those spaces. [36] It's not music itself that guides us: as Dietz and Steingo write: "You can't trust music."[37]. Music itself is uncertain, avoidant, nonpartisan: it renders a flexible terrain. In fact, "it is not, as the reactionaries accuse, that it is decadent, individualistic, or a-social. It is that it is those things too little."[38] Animal music, and music created in collaboration with animals, offers a glimpse into alternative histories that prioritize other perspectives. Could the space of projection that opens when humans assign meaning to birdsong offer a mixed perspective, a shared opportunity to navigate the future? From Noah's dove to canaries in the coalmine, birds are sentinel species. Their songs preserve a history of geopolitics, and simultaneously, a warning about a future history of human intervention.

the Encampment Support Network, a collective of 150 artists, musicians, and frontline workers who have been supporting the outdoor encampments established in Toronto during Covid-19. Her independent research is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.

X

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1
Aristophanes, *Aristophanes: The Birds and Other Plays* , trans. David Barrett and Alan Sommerstein (Penguin Classics, 1978).

2
The title of this essay, "You can't trust music," is a quotation from Bill Dietz and Gavin Steingo, "Experiments in Civility," *boundary 2* 43, no. 1 (2016): 43.

3
Philip K. Dick, "The Preserving Machine," *Science Fiction Studies* 2, no. 1 (1975): 22–23.

4
Dick, "The Preserving Machine," 23.

5
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* , trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1969), 249. Allen Dunn explains that Benjamin purchased *Angelus Novus* from Klee immediately after its completion in 1920 and tried on several occasions to peddle the image as a starting point for a number of ventures, including a namesake publication. "Through repeated references to the painting, Benjamin often balances his own moral economy by creating a rhetorical narrative that relies on the linearity of history told from a single perspective." Allen Dunn, "The Pleasures of the Text: *Angelus Novus* ," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 84, no. 1–2 (2001): 3.

6
Holly Watkins, "Musical Ecologies of Place and Placelessness," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 405.

7
Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 3. Leach elaborates: The "performer of music is under an obligation not just to make musical sounds but to understand them as music, that is, as proportions that are rational. The listener is also under an obligation to understand sounds in this way, whether or not their performing agent does so" (3).

8
Kant says that "a bird's song, which we can reduce to no musical rule, seems to have more

freedom in it, and thus to offer more for taste, than the human voice singing in accordance with all the rules that the art of music prescribes." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* , ed. Nicholas Walker, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford University Press, 2008), 73.

9
Luis F. Baptista and Sandra L. L. Gaunt. "Advances in Studies of Avian Sound Communication," *The Condor* 96, no. 3 (1994): 820.

10
Jacob Smith, *Eco-Sonic Media* (University of California Press, 2015), 50.

11
Quoted in Ronald Bogue, "Minority, Territory, Music," in *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (Routledge, 2007), 20.

12
Bogue, "Minority, Territory, Music," 29.

13
Ann Arnold, "Bushfires Devastate Rare and Enchanting Wildlife as 'Permanently Wet' Forests Burn for First Time," ABC News, November 26, 2019 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-27/bushfires-devastate-ancient-forests-and-rare-wildlife/11733956 .

14
Bogue, "Minority, Territory, Music," 32.

15
Maryanne Amacher, "Psychoacoustic Phenomena in Musical Composition: Some Features of a 'Perceptual Geography,'" *FO(A)RM*, no. 3 (2004): 16.

16
"The vocabulary of virtuality overlaps with semiotic studies that frame musical experience as an encounter with virtual agents." Watkins, "Musical Ecologies," 405.

17
Watkins, "Musical Ecologies," 405.

18
Coralie Hancock-Barnett, "Colonial Resettlement and Cultural Resistance: The Mbira Music of Zimbabwe," *Social and Cultural Geography* 13, no. 1 (2012): 11–27.

19
Watkins, "Musical Ecologies," 405.

20
Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Duke University Press, 2012), 84.

21
Karen Barad speaks of "an embodied re-membering of the past which, against the colonialist practices of erasure and avoidance and the related desire to set time aright, calls for thinking a certain undoing of time; a work of mourning more accountable to, and doing justice to, the victims of ecological destruction and of racist, colonialist, and nationalist violence, human and otherwise—those victims who are no longer there, and those yet to come." Karen Barad, "Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-turning, Re-membering, and Facing the Incalculable," *new formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics* , vol. 92 (2018): 59.

22
Barad, "Troubling Time/s," 60

23
Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, 135.

24
Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* , ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge, 1987), 13–62.

25
W. T. Wallace, N. Siddiqua, and A. K. M. Harun-ar-Rashid, "Memory for Music: Effects of Melody on Recall of Text," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 20, no. 6 (1994): 1477.

26
Amacher, "Psychoacoustic Phenomena," 10.

27
Olga Petri and Peter Howell, "From the Dawn Chorus to the Canary Choir: Notes on the Unnatural History of Birdsong," *Humanimalia* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 168.

28
Bill Dietz and Gavin Steingo, "Experiments in Civility,"

boundary 2 43, no. 1 (2016): 70.

29
Dietz and Steingo, "Experiments in Civility," 70.

30
"Adorno extolls the anti-choreography of postwar music—music to which (in theory) no one could bob one's head, sing along, or march in step—to be a reaction to war-time orchestras." Dietz and Steingo, "Experiments in Civility," 45.

31
Even "Marx knew only too well (that) simply uncovering the social relations and necessary labor time behind commodities through analysis does not lead to the end of capitalism." Dietz and Gavin Steingo, "Experiments in Civility," 58.

32
In Feld's studies, the Kaluli make a distinction between birds and bats, despite their obvious similarities as flying creatures. Kaluli will openly discuss the avian nature of bats, but if asked directly, "Are bats birds?" the answer is a fairly immediate "no," followed by, "It has no voice." Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, 84.

33
Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 438.

34
Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" in *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 20, 24.

35
John Lennon's famous anti-war plea starts and stops at asking listeners to "Imagine" a better world. It amounts to a rather apathetic call for action: to dream about a better world, without really doing anything about it. "You may say I'm a dreamer / But I'm not the only one / I hope someday you'll join us / And the world will live as one." Lennon sings about a privileged refusal to act—dreaming, sleeping, and being photographed in bed while the world burns. By contrast, Kendrick Lamar sings about why he can't get any rest in his 2012 song "Sing About Me, I'm Dyin' of Thirst": "Maybe 'cause I'm a dreamer and sleep is the cousin of death / Really stuck in the scheme of wondering when I'ma

rest." To dream can be fatal, if you aren't rich.

36
Martha Kenney, "Fables of Response-ability: Feminist Science Studies as Didactic Literature," *Catalyst* 5, no. 1 (2019): 6.

37
Dietz and Steingo, "Experiments in Civility," 43.

38
Adorno, as quoted in Heinz-Klaus Metzger, "John Cage oder Die freigelassene Musik," in *Die freig elassene Musik: Schriften zu John Cage* , ed. Rainer Riehn and Florian Neuener (Klever Verlag, 2012), 10. Trans. Bill Dietz.

Three Holy Families

Numerous phenomena of Russian culture can be understood as manifestations of immanentism. In this context, immanentism describes an extensive family of syncretic worldviews that reject the principle of transcendence common to the Abrahamic religions and focus all their attention on the "world below," i.e., earth, cosmos, ecumene, the material environment, or social relations. In its extreme form, immanentism either wholly denies the existence of any reality beyond the boundaries of the physical world or asserts that this reality is verified exclusively by and through human beings. In its most general form, metaphysical immanentism posits humans and the environment immediately accessible to their senses, reason, and action as the center of existence. Political immanentism, in turn, considers human beings in the context of an existing sociopolitical order, even when it is the subject's aim to effect change in this order. Finally, religious immanentism posits the highest being as present and acting in this world. In his 1917 work *Unfading Light*, theologian Sergei Bulgakov applies the label of immanentism to a whole range of religious, philosophical, and social currents, from Protestantism and mystic sectarianism on the one hand to Kantianism and Marxism on the other. Bulgakov saw them all as mere variations of "Arianist Monophysitism" or "Khlystism," i.e., heresies and sects within Christianity which deny, like Arians, the predetermined, divine character of Christ's nature (-the consubstantiality of the Son and the Father) and therefore believe, like members of the Khlyst sect, that every person can become divine or Christlike in the course of his life.

In what follows, I will examine three fragments of Russian immanentism, which I have called the "three holy families." These three instances do not exhaust the full range of immanentism found in Russian culture. At the same time, they can be seen as "building blocks" that have been arranged in a variety of combinations at various junctures. In this regard, the "three families" and their subsequent evolution and hybridization play a key role in an integral field of syncretic immanentism.

I. Double Belief and the Religious Life of the People

The first "holy family" of Russian immanentism is a distinctive vernacular religiosity or *double belief* wherein elements of Christianity always coexist—and at times are synthesized—with elements of paganism. There are religions that tend more toward immanentism than others, and some, like animism and pantheism, may even embody it in its pure form. A religious paradigm may have a weak transcendent principle or lack it altogether. For example, the animist and his divinities inhabit the same world. For many centuries, "popular belief" in Russia incorporated marked features of paganism, such as the deification of

Nikolay Smirnov
Elements of Immanentism in Russia: Double Belief, Cosmism, and Marx

Gnezdo Collective, The Fertilization of the Earth, 1976. Documentation of a performance. Photo: Igor Palmin. Collection State Museum and Exhibition Center ROSIZO.

the forces of nature. In terms of social organization, this hybrid religiosity coexisted with official Orthodoxy, but also found outlets in various sects and religious communes.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a Romanticist "discovery of the people" fueled an interest in the peculiarities of vernacular belief in Russia.[1] In 1847, the Slavophile Stepan Shevyrev discovered a collection of documents—the so-called Paisievsky Sbornik—in the library of the Cyril-Belozersk monastery. Many of these texts, dating back to the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, were directed at the eradication of pagan superstitions among the people. The subsequent study and analysis of these texts yielded the concept of "double belief" in Christianity and paganism, which came to be adopted, however paradoxically, by a vast group including Slavophiles, Westernizers, liberals, the Narodniki (Populist) movement, socialists, canonical church historians, and Orthodox theologians, as well as secular historians.[2]

According to this conception, Orthodoxy coexisted seamlessly with paganism in Russian religious life, in practice as well as in worldview. So, in his late-nineteenth-century analysis of early Russian Christianity, historian of the church Evgeny Golubinsky speaks of village priests who, being close to the people, shared their belief in the sacred character of the material world.[3] According to Golubinsky, the Christianity of the aristocracy was radically transcendent, and strove rather to reject, overcome, and displace anything material (profane, bodily, sensuous), while aspiring to a supermundane spirituality (a transcendent God). Popular religion, on the other hand, gravitated toward immanentism. In this regard, the schism between the immanent and the transcendent took hold within the Russian Orthodox Church itself, corresponding with the already existing divide between the "white" and "black" clergy.[4]

Remarkably, the people's religious connection to the

material world, symbolized by the earth, was construed in familial terms, and even sexualized in certain instances. As the source of living, nurturing matter and a receptacle of dead matter, the earth held a sacred status, hearkening back to Slavic mythology, but taking on new overtones with the evolution of Russian religious life. In his *Power of the Land* (1882), writer Gleb Uspensky recalls the fable of Svyatogor and Mikula Selyanovich. The giant Svyatogor cannot lift a satchel dropped by the plowman Mikula, which the latter proceeds to do with one hand, explaining the source of his strength as follows: "I am Mikula, a *muzhik* [peasant], I am Selyanovich. I am Mikula—beloved of the damp mother earth."[5] Another late-nineteenth-century historian of the church, Sergey Smirnov, describes the custom observed by certain sects, like the Strigolniki, of "confessing to the earth."[6] Damp mother earth nourishes and gives strength, hears confessions and pleas for help; the plowman cultivates her body, sowing it with seed to bring forth grain. In more recent times, this orgiastic religiosity would be parodied by the Moscow conceptualists in such works as *The Fertilization of the Earth* (by the Gnezdo Collective, 1976), or in the form of a patriotic sect, the Earthfuckers, in Vladimir Sorokin's 1999 novel *Blue Lard*.[7]

Needless to say, from the normative institutional viewpoint of the church, keeper of the Orthodox canon, such religious practices appeared suspicious at best. As early as the eleventh century, monasteries were issuing "sermons" directed against pagan beliefs and rites practiced among the people and parish clergy.[8] By the nineteenth century, however, the Romantic nationalism of the Slavophiles had recast double belief in a positive light, as a distinctive feature of Russian vernacular culture. At the same time, champions of the church canon continued their attacks on double belief. In his 1909 article "Loathsome Women," Sergey Smirnov links the practice of natural magic, animism, and pantheism with the activities of sorceresses, who have slipped from the grip of the proper patriarchal-dogmatic paradigm.

The Slavophiles' rediscovery of double belief went hand in hand with the government-sponsored religious surveys of the mid-nineteenth century. The findings showed that at least a third of the population adhered to a noncanonical, anti-hierarchical religiosity. At the same time, the commissions conducting the surveys were staffed in large part by Slavophile ideologues, such as Ivan Aksakov, among others. Here the Slavophiles' enthusiasm for the idiosyncratic vernacular faith came into conflict with the official interests of Nicholas I's government. The tsar, while favorably disposed toward certain proponents of Slavophilia, considered popular belief to be a threat analogous to socialism. Indeed, the religious schism between the "elites" (aristocracy and the "black" clergy) and the "people" (principally the peasantry and the "white" clergy) would be exploited by various revolutionary projects of the people's liberation.[9]

Some Soviet historians, in turn, were interested in

Saint Sophia, The Wisdom of God, 1700. Collection: St. Sophia of Kiev. Copyright: Unknown, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

portraying the religious and social schism as a contributing factor to the success of the revolution of 1917. To this end, they worked to develop the theory of double belief on a new level.[10] In his *Paganism of Ancient Rus* (1987), historian Boris Rybakov devotes an entire section to double belief, linking paganism and animism with many elements of vernacular culture: anthropomorphic and solar motifs in carvings found on peasant cottages, talismans, ritual embroidery, ornamentation of household objects, elements of clothing, and the majority of popular holidays and rites. It was widely believed that to ward off the evil spirits that inundate the world, one must arrange one's dwelling in a specific manner, shielding it with a "whole system of 'embodied spells.'" Nor were these "isolated symbols, but a system, reproducing the macrocosm."[11] Thus, according to Rybakov, as late as the nineteenth century, the typical Russian peasant was still largely an animist.
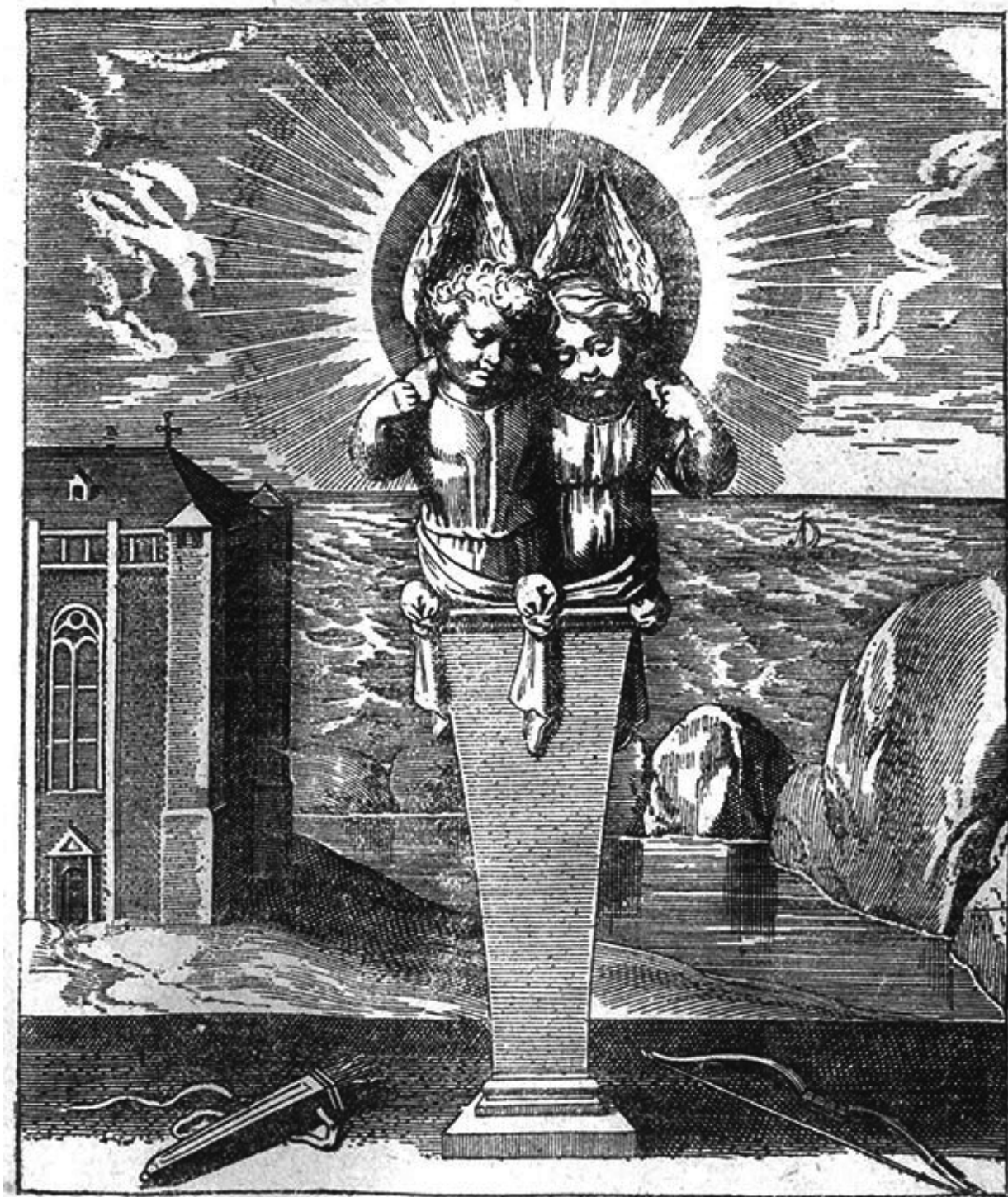
FINIS AMORIS, UT DUO UNUM FIANT.
ПРЕДѢЛЪ ЛЮБВИ—ДА ДВОЕ ЕДИНО БУДУТЪ.

Otto Vaenius, Finis amoris ut duo unum fiant (The end of love is that two become one), 1615. This image was also used in the original edition of the book The Pillar and Ground of the Truth by Pavel Florensky (1914).

II. Russian Cosmism and Sophiology: From the Redemption of Matter to Heresy

The second "holy family" of Russian immanentism comprises Russian cosmism and its near relation, Sophiology. Grounded in Eastern Christianity, these two systems incorporate certain elements of gnosticism and reinterpretations of popular belief, making them not merely noncanonical, but heretical. Influential among the Russian intellectual class, cosmism and Sophiology posit the transformation of the created world as humanity's chief task, instilled by God himself. The adherents of these systems believe in the redemption of matter and subscribe to the ideas of the modern project, thereby either attenuating the transcendent principle or nearly immanentizing it outright. Thus, the founder of Russian cosmism, Nikolai Fedorov, believed in the pan-Christian doctrine of a transcendent origin, yet grounded his entire project in the practice—both religious and technological—of transforming the created world. Subsequent exponents of so-called "scientific cosmism," such as Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Vladimir Vernadsky, wholly dispensed with Orthodox views on the transcendent. In elaborating their versions of a universal materialistic monism, they believed in the total animacy of the cosmos and the reasonableness of matter, respectively. Tsiolkovsky, a pan-psychist, saw the sensate atom as a spiritual prime element of matter, while the vitalist Vernadsky argued for the existence of a cosmic intellect, hailing its chief exponent—humankind, inasmuch as human technological and economic activity are aimed at a progressive intelligibility of the world.

Sophiology, in turn, belongs to the realm of Russian religious thought, while also incorporating certain elements of Fedorov's cosmism. Of all the members of this "family," it hews closest to canonical Orthodoxy, which is why Sophiological immanentism demands careful study. In its most general form, Sophiology comprises a religious metaphysics of the transformation of the created world and an ethics of the redemption of matter through human action. Sophiology is centered on the doctrine of Sophia, or the Wisdom of God—a female representation of the divine ideal. On the one hand, Sophia is construed as a kind of guardian angel of matter, the ideal toward which the world is striving. On the other hand, Sophia is the world in its given state, fallen and untransfigured, yet bearing within itself the potentialities or "sparks" of a future transformation. Consequently, Sophia is divided into two: the Heavenly and the Earthly, the Ideal and the Fallen. In the course of the transformation—or "Sophia-ization"—of the world, the schism inherent within Sophia is to be resolved.

Vladimir Soloviev is widely recognized as the principal ideologue of the original doctrine of Sophia in Russia. For all its originality, however, Soloviev's Sophiology presents a distinctive synthesis of gnosticism, kabbala, the hermetic tradition, Renaissance humanism, and German idealism
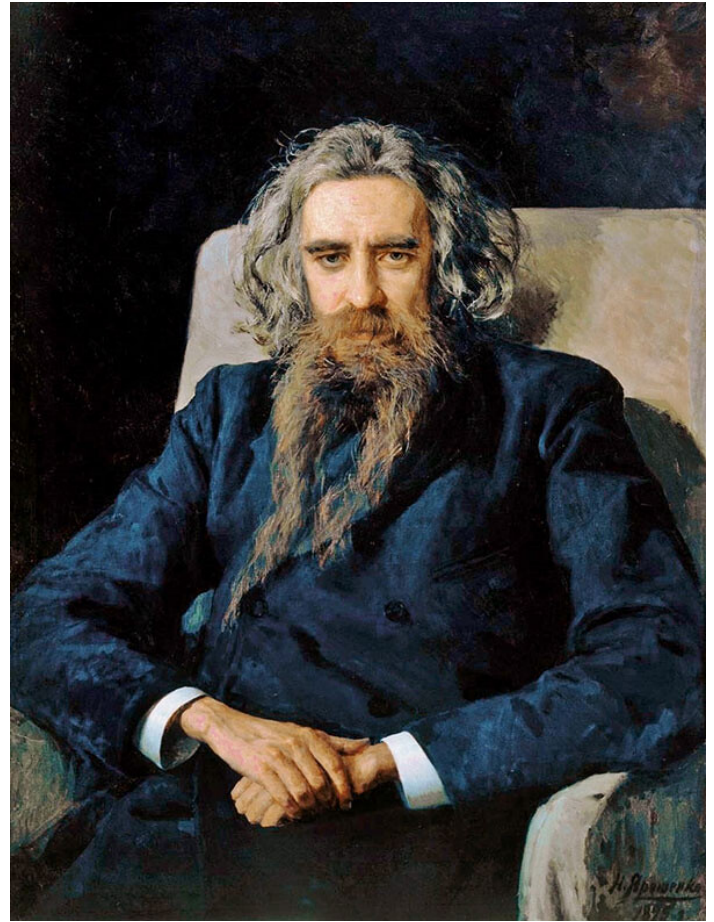
Nikolai Yaroshenko, Vladimir Solovyov, 1892. Oil on canvas. Collection Tretyakov Gallery. Photo: Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons.

(mainly that of Schelling), bound up with the mystical intuitions of Jacob Boehme and the mystical-philosophical epiphanies of the eighteenth-century philosopher Grigoriy Skovoroda. According to Soloviev, Sophia is an intermediary between God and man, a *nima mundi,* and a future universal humankind. The apophatic divinity reveals itself to man in the form of Sophia: the love he feels toward her is at once his yearning for God and the engine of the historical process. This love is inseparable from human goals of attaining *vseedinstvo* (all-encompassing unity) and establishing a *bogochelovechestvo* (Godmanhood, or the humanity of God), i.e., the ideal humanity. (Soloviev's idea of *vseedinstvo* implies an organic unity of world being, while preserving the individuality of all its elements.) *Vseedinstvo*, like the dialectic of the Heavenly and Earthly Sophia, is already present in the world as potentiality, but action is required for its discovery and universal attainment. Through conscious effort, a human being is able to realize the potentiality of the highest creative principle contained in the world, to transform himself and the world. This effort culminates in the establishment of a universal gnostic syzygy: the marriage of, in Soloviev's words, "the active (individual) human principle and the all-one idea,

embodied in the social spiritual-physical organism."[12] There are evident alchemical overtones in Sophiology. Debased earthly matter is purified into subtle matter and ultimately transformed into pure *materia prima*. In this light, Soloviev's philosophy can be seen as a variety of "religious materialism," wherein (per the philosopher Aleksei Losev) the divinity is construed in material terms, yet the Christian dogma is preserved in its entirety.[13]

The doctrine of Sophia was further elaborated by Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov. Florensky, a priest, gave a series of lectures at Vkhutemas (the avant-garde art school, established in the wake of the revolution), emphasizing the aesthetic component of Sophiology, connecting it to the creative act and to praxis. "Sophia—the true Creature, or creature-in-Truth—appears first as an intimation of a transfigured, inspired world, as a vision, invisible to others, of the heavenly on earth."[14] Those who seek to transform the world are granted visions of Sophia—through their love of her—thus obtaining "blueprints" for such a transformation. Since these blueprints are visual, musical, plastic, etc. in nature, the artist's role as visionary and his subsequent actions in realizing his visions acquire marked significance. "In translating the name $\Sigma o\varphi \acute{\iota}\alpha$ into our own language," Florensky writes, "we would do well to say Creatrix, Artisan, Artist, etc."[15] Florensky conceives of Sophia as a patroness, an angel, and the subject of any transformational act. Heeding Soloviev's call for a "universal" or ecumenical religion, Florensky asserts that Sophia is united in marriage with beauty, truth, and goodness (aesthetics, knowledge, and ethics): thus art, science, and practice are fused into one. Soloviev's dichotomy of the ideal and fallen Sophia is transformed into a distinction between a "pre-world entity" and a "quantity constructed in the world," i.e., the blueprint for a transformation and the world being transformed.

In his post-Marxist, idealist phase, Sergei Bulgakov follows Florensky's lead into Sophiology (another key figure in Russian religious thought, Nikolai Berdyaev, underwent a similar transformation). Bulgakov's ideological transformation reveals him as a thinker sympathetic to the worldview of vernacular belief, yet one who at a certain point finds himself at the crossroads of two systems: Marxist political immanentism and Sophiology as religious-social thought. In consequence, the progression of Bulgakov's thought traces the very trajectory of the three families of immanentism examined in this essay. What, then, is this thought, and how is its transformation effected?

At the outset of his shift "from Marxism to idealism," Bulgakov proclaims the unity of purpose of practical idealism and the theory of progress, expressing contempt for "anyone, who in our own time is incapable of seeing the radiance of the absolute moral ideal in the hearts of men, who sacrifice themselves for the cause of the proletariat in its struggle for human dignity, men who

Pavel Florensky with his wife Anna (née Giatzintova), 1911.

know how to live and die for the cause of freedom."[16] Soon, however, Bulgakov reconsiders the Marxist dialectic of freedom and necessity in terms of theology: intrapersonal potentialities lead a human being to God, and consequently to freedom from worldly need. According to Bulgakov, the path toward the ideal coincides with the one toward God, but it is only possible as an immanent passive-active act: simultaneous internal contemplation and external transformation of the material world. Bulgakov gradually begins to distinguish between "theanthropic" and "anthropotheic" processes, interpreting the former as the "deification of humankind" on its way toward God, and denouncing the latter as a Luciferic lapse from the former.[17] Indeed, he ultimately comes to brand the philosophical systems of Feuerbach and Marx as anthropotheic, accusing the latter in particular of ignoring personal individuality and drowning it in the generic being.[18] In *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov sums up his critique of Marx and German philosophy generally, asserting that as immanentism it "draws fatally close to cosmotheism and anthropotheism of various shades and manifestations."[19] Ironically, in 1935 the Orthodox church condemned Bulgakov's Sophiology as a pantheistic and gnostic heresy, thus falling under his own

rubric of immanentism and satanic anthropotheism.

Abandoning Marxism and practical idealism for Sophiology, late Bulgakov conceives Sophia as the ideal *materia prima*, the world of ideas, the noumenal cosmos, whereby the apophatic divinity creates being from nothingness. At the same time, Sophia is damp mother earth, physical matter-mother, i.e., at once the womb and the tomb of every creature—the Magna Mater venerated by the ancients. Sophia is the dual foundation of the world, its ideal entelechy and potentiality for such a transformation contained in both physical matter and in *anima mundi*, "the universal organizing principle of the world … sought by the latest speculative philosophy."[20] Sophia is at once one and poly-hypostatic, engendering all and at the same time already containing all within herself. At the same time the earth is the potential "God-earth" or the becoming Sophia: the Mother contains within itself the Mother of God—it is Sophia who gives birth to the Theotokos (literally "God-bearer"). Matter is attracted to its own form-idea, and "when the idea— *natura naturans* —radiates through the petrified *natura naturata* the latter breathes the ardor of desire, surges with the foment of love. Such is the pan-eroticism of nature."[21] Nevertheless, the world in its given form differs from Sophia, inasmuch as a potentiality differs from its idea, since "the world is Sophia in its foundation, but is not Sophia in its condition."[22] Elaborating his conception of Sophia, Bulgakov arrives at the Cosmic Sophia, the pulsating material being-nonbeing, which aligns his doctrine with the pantheism and paganism characteristic of vernacular religiosity:

> Great mother, damp earth! In you are we born, by you are we nourished, you we tread with our feet, into you we return. Children of the earth, love your mother, kiss her ecstatically, drench her with your tears, shower her with your sweat, quench her with your blood, sate her with your bones![23]

It is worth noting that Fedorov's cosmism is wholly consistent with the Sophiological ambition to vindicate matter without departing from Christian doctrine. But unlike Florensky and Bulgakov, both Orthodox priests, Fedorov is less concerned with preserving the internal logic of the Christian dogmatics, and is far more focused on the project of the transformation of the world. Thus, his cosmism is not a form of crypto-immanentism, as is the case with Sophiology, but is overt immanentism. This was already evident to Bulgakov, who viewed Fedorov's ideas as a manifestation of economism and magism, which represent two different forms of pure immanentism. Moreover, according to Bulgakov, "Fedorov's teaching is precisely what Marx had but vaguely dreamed of,"[24] "a magical-economic kingdom of this world."[25]

## III. Marxist Self-Realization of Humankind as a Gnostic and Magic-Alchemic Magnum Opus

As evidenced by Bulgakov's work *Karl Marx as a Religious Type,* the Marxist project was at times received as a project of the sacralization of natural, material, and social conditions—an immanentist project of a very specific kind. Perhaps this could be accounted for in part by the fact that Marx's ideas dovetailed with an enthusiastic view of double belief as the foundation of popular religiosity. Another explanation is that the Marxist idea that the human being's self-realization is the end goal of history was itself interpreted as a kind of immanentism. Marx's texts were subjected to gnostic and mystical-alchemical readings, in no small part encouraged by Marx's own extensive use of alchemical and mystical imagery.

However, parallels between Marx's philosophy and hermeticism and gnosticism run deeper still. The problem of alienation, central to Marxist anthropology and critical social thought, finds obvious echoes in gnostic mythology. According to the gnostics, the material world was created not by God, but by a Demiurge (the main archon, "Yaldabaoth"); evangelion-light (gnosis-knowledge) rouses the "spiritual" people ("pneumatics"), who, having destroyed the malevolent world, reunite with God, i.e., overcome alienation. Thus, gnosticism may be seen as an ontology, anticipating and entailing a revolution, while Marxism, in turn, may be described as political gnosticism.[26]

At the same time, the hermetic tradition, revived in Europe by the humanists in the Renaissance era, asserted a total homology between the world and the human being. The text of *The Emerald Tablet*, ascribed to the father of hermeticism, Hermes Trismegistus, proclaims, "That which is above is like to that which is below," meaning a human being can change the world by transforming himself—through intellectual work, among other kinds—and vice versa. This led to efforts at transforming the world and attaining human power through magic, astrology, spiritual mysticism, and alchemy. In this context, moreover, external alchemy (transmutation of matter) is inseparable from internal alchemy (transfiguration of consciousness), i.e., a material act is inseparable from a discursive one. There are those who believe that Marx inherited the heretical-hermetic tradition from Hegel, whose speculative philosophy could be connected to hermetic mysticism.[27] The debt is particularly evident in Marx's concept of human self-realization or self-fulfillment.[28] The language of hermetic or philosophic alchemy is used extensively in *Capital*, especially in its opening chapters. And while David Harvey contends that Marx's use of alchemical terms is strictly metaphorical, the process of self-realization and the various stages of economic history—such as the emergence of commodity exchange or the development of the value-form—may well be read as a description of a global socio-alchemical Opus Magnum (the Great Work or magisterium—the way to perfection).

Soviet anti-religious propaganda. The cover of the booklet reads: "Against God, Priests, and Devils: Dramatizations, Songs, Recitations, and Games for Komsomol Christmas." Edited by Maria Rozen and published by Trud i kniga, Moscow, 1925. 23x15 cm. For more information: →.
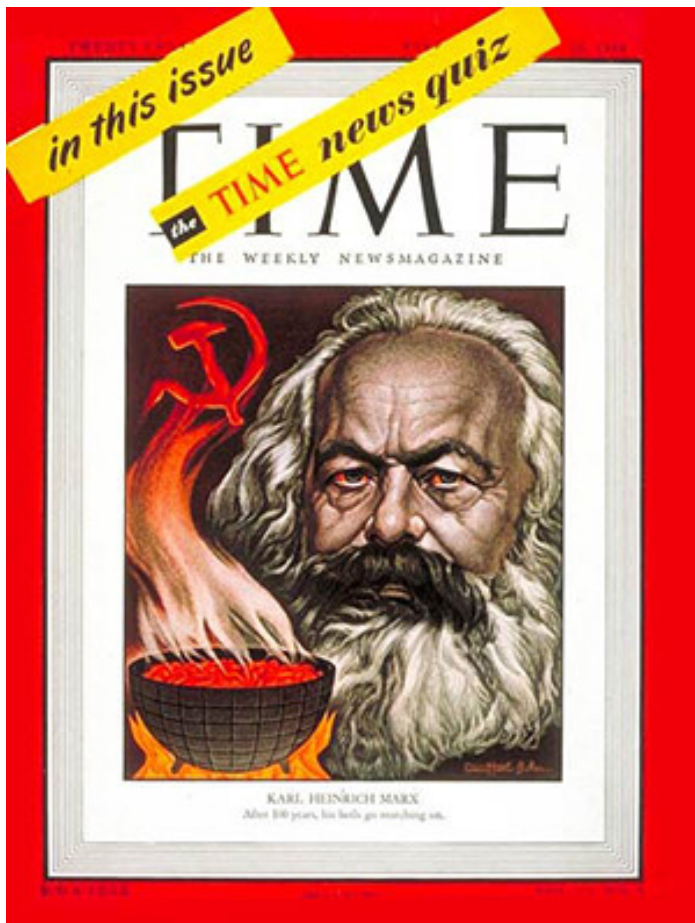
Ernest Hamlin Baker, Karl Marx, Time magazine cover, February 23, 1948. Gouache on board. 10.25x9.5 in.

It is worth recalling that magical-alchemical views, influential in Europe since the Renaissance, are, in the context of this discussion, nothing short of immanentism. The mage and the adept of hermetic alchemy seek the philosopher's stone, that is, power over the forces of nature. It is no coincidence that the roots of positivist science in modern Europe stretch back to alchemy. At the outset, alchemy craved two things: power over the forces of nature, and immortality. This way, so its adepts believed, lay the path to human happiness, wrought by our own hands.

This alchemical unconscious makes Marxism a tactical ally of all immanentism, including that of the Sophiologists, who strove toward a transformation of the world and a "redemption of matter." For philosophers familiar with the Western traditions of esotericism, mysticism, and gnosis (such as Soloviev and Fedorov), the Marxist project of human self-realization and his theory could well be seen as analogs to the magical-alchemical Magnum Opus, with humankind taking the role of the collective alchemist and the historical process itself as the Great Work. After all, the objective of any magisterium is self-creation, i.e., power over one's own fate.

Conclusion

Popular religiosity, Sophiology with its Fedorovian, cosmist charge, and the alchemical unconscious of Marxist theory are the three distinct but in some ways related "holy families" of Russian immanentism. On the level of ideas, the various members of these families are easily coupled and hybridized, despite their heterogeneity. In consequence, we witness the emergence of a kind of ideological field of integral immanentism in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Various kinds of immanentism, including some perfectly secular varieties, evince a distinct dialectic: the emancipation from the transcendent principle is accompanied by a manifest (or implicit) sacralization of the immanent world. The diminution of the transcendent principle as a gradual "death of God" over the course of the entire modern age was general, but in Russia these processes were accompanied by a radical sacralization of the immanent—or, if we take popular religiosity into account, its re-sacralization, a rediscovery of the very sacral nature of the material world and of the forces operating therein, human or otherwise.

X

Translated from the Russian by Sergey Levchin

Nikolay Smirnov works as an artist, geographer, curator, and researcher on theory-fiction and spatial practices and their representations of space and place in art, science, museum practices, and everyday life.

1
The term "discovery of the people" belongs to Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Harper and Row, 1978).

2
See, for example, Izmail Sreznevsky, "Testament of the Paisievski Sbornik Concerning the Pagan Superstitions of the Russian People," *Moskvityanin*, no. 5 (1851): 52–64. See also Nikolai Galkovsky, *The Struggle of Christianity Against the Remnants of Paganism in Ancient Rus* (Kharkov, 1916). (In Russian)

3
Yevgeny Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church* (Tip. Lissnera i Romana, 1880–1911). (In Russian)

4
The monastic or "black" clergy, hewing to the more rigorous transcendent principles, was drawn largely from the aristocracy, whereas the "white" or parish clergy was more secular, sharing many aspects of their parishioners' belief systems.

5
Gleb Uspensky, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Goslitizdat, 1955–1957), 117. (In Russian)

6
Sergey Smirnov, *The Old Russian Father Confessor* (Sergiev Posad, 1899). (In Russian)

7
Sorokin had previously used the image of copulation with the earth in his novel *The Norm*, written in 1979 and published in 1983.

8
The earliest presumed source text of this nature is the *Discourse of a Certain Lover of Christ and Zealot of the True Faith*, dated by various scholars to a period between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries. See also *Sermon on the Plagues of God*, attributed to Theodosius of Pechersk (eleventh century).

9
Among these were the Narodniki (Populists) movement. See also *The General Assembly*, a newspaper for Old Believers, published by Herzen, Ogarev, and Kelsiev as a supplement to their *Kolokol* in 1862–64; and *Dawn*, a newspaper for religious sectarians put out by the RSDLP in 1904. For further reading, see Nikolay Smirnov,

"Shaman, Schismatic, Necromancer: Religious Libertarians in Russia," *e-flux journal*, no. 107 (March 2020) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/107/321338/shaman-schismatic-necromancer-religious-libertarians-in-russia/ .

10
Boris Rybakov, *Paganism of the Ancient Slavs* (Nauka, 1981); Nikolai Nikolsky, *Selected Works in the History of Religion* (Mysl, 1974). (In Russian). Other studies, such as Boris Uspensky and Yuri Lotman, "The Role of Dual Models in Russian Cultural Dynamics," in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. J. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij (University of Michigan, 1984), 3–35, affirmed that the mismatch in the rates of acceptance of new religious ideas among different social strata leads to social upheavals, albeit with more subtlety and equivocation.

11
Rybakov, *Paganism of the Ancient Slavs*, 517.

12
Cited in Alexey Kozyrev, *Soloviev and the Gnostics* (S.A. Savin pub., 2007), 109. (In Russian)

13
Cited in Alexander Glazkov, "Concerning the Religious Foundations of Soloviev's Eschatology," *Soloviev Studies* 27, no. 3 (2010): 62. (In Russian)

14
Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914), 391. (In Russian)

15
Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 753, note for page 326.

16
Sergey Bulgakov, "Principal Problems of the Theory of Progress," in *From Marxism to Idealism* (Common Cause Society pub, 1903), 149. (In Russian)

17
Compare with the Mercurial (Divine) and Luciferian (Antichrist) hermaphrodite in the early fifteenth-century Christian-alchemical treatise *Book of the Holy Trinity*.

18
"As readily as he drowns personal individuality in the 'generic being' in the name of 'human emancipation,' he also abolishes

national consciousness, a people's collective identity, that of his own people, no less." Cited in Sergey Bulgakov, "Karl Marx as a Religious Type," in Sergey Bulgakov, *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Nauka, 1993), 262. (In Russian)

19
Sergey Bulgakov, *Unfading Light,* vol.1 (Isskustvo, 1999), 23.

20
Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 204.

21
Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 227.

22
Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 202.

23
Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 175.

24
Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 317.

25
Compare with Jesus's words: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Subsequently, the Sophiologist Lev Karsavin would formulate the platform of the left-wing Eurasianists as a synthesis of Fedorov and Marx. For further reading, see Nikolay Smirnov, "Left-Wing Eurasianism and Postcolonial Theory," *e-flux journal*, no. 97 (February 2019) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/97/252238/left-wing-eurasianism-and-postcolonial-theory/ .

26
Nicholas Thorp, "Marxism as Political Gnosticism," *Epoch Journal*, Spring 2018.

27
Cyril Smith, *Karl Marx and the Future of the Human* (Lexington Books, 2005).

28
Marx introduces the concept of "*Selbstbetätigung*" in his *German Ideology*, while some of its elements are described earlier in *Capital* without a specific term attached.

1.

In one of a series of video interviews conducted by Benjamin Piekut in 2005, Henry Flynt mentions his involvement in certain sci-fi literary scenes of the 1970s.[1] Given his background in mathematics and analytic philosophy, in addition to his radical Marxist agitation as a member of the Workers World Party in the sixties, Flynt took an interest in the more speculative aspects of sci-fi. "I was really thinking myself out of Marxism," he says. "Trying to strip away its assumptions—[Marx's] assumption that a utopia was possible with human beings as raw material." Such musings would bring Flynt close to sci-fi as he considered the revision of the human and what he called "extraterrestrial politics." He mentions a few pamphlets that he wrote and took with him to meetings with sci-fi writers, only to discover, shockingly, that they had no interest in such topics. Instead, conversations drifted quickly to the current state of the book market for sci-fi writing.[2]

I'm interested in this anecdote in the contemporary context given that sci-fi writing has acquired status as quasi-philosophy, as a medium where different worlds are fashioned, sometimes guided by current scientific research, as in so-called "hard" sci-fi. While I don't intend here to examine sci-fi directly, it does allude to the nature of worldmaking and generative aesthetics—the nature of which I hope to illuminate below by engaging with Flynt's work, as well as that of the philosophers Nelson Goodman and Peter Strawson. By doing so, I intend to uncover the meaning of Flynt's critique of the human referenced above.

J.-P. Caron

On Constitutive Dissociations as a Means of World-Unmaking: Henry Flynt and Generative Aesthetics Redefined

Coming out of the New York downtown avant-garde of the sixties, Flynt is often mis-categorized as a member of Fluxus—a group he claims to have never have been part of, notwithstanding his close collaboration with George Maciunas. His engagements with philosophy, mathematics, economics, Marxism, experimental music, and concept art—a term he coined in anticipation of the later "conceptual art"—testify to the broad scale of his thought, which could not be confined to just one artistic milieu. His work was guided by an overarching project: nothing less than the *total refashioning of human culture and experience*, as indicated by the title of his, until recently, only published book, *Blueprint For a Higher Civilization* (1975). His project brings together radical empiricism with cognitive nihilism, yielding the sensible-conceptual, interventive approach that characterizes some of his concept art of the sixties. He defines his "meta-technology" project as follows:

> **Meta-technology addresses the juncture at which the knower is an experiencing subject, for example—not a detection box. The juncture at which the knower the life-stream by a**

conceptual apparatus on it. (E.g. identitarian logic and quantitative idealization.) ... Proceeding to the point when meta-technology got its name, I coined the term, as I said, in 1979. It is defined as technology **whose field of action is the determination of reality**.[3]

2.

In its original formulation as proposed by the philosopher and writer Max Bense in 1965, generative aesthetics

implies a combination of all operations, rules and theorems which can be used deliberately to produce aesthetic states (both distributions and configurations) when applied to a set of material elements. Hence generative aesthetics is analogous to generative grammar, in so far as it helps to formulate the principles of a grammatical schema—realizations of an aesthetic structure.[4]

Bense's approach concerns the combining of material that has a signifying character into a functional unity—into a work of art. I want to propose a reconceptualization of generative aesthetics that instead concerns a cluster of interrelated, hypothetically transcendental structures of subjective apprehension and comprehension. This reconceptualization belongs more to *aesthesis*, as the study of sensibility and conceptually informed perception, than to the more parochial field of the philosophy of art. While following Bense's notion of the structural character of an investigation of "elements" to be specified, the concept of generative that I am preoccupied with is upstream from that level of investigation. I am instead concerned with the constitution of experience without presupposing the given nature and character of the unities to be combined, instead dealing with the determination of reality out of sensibility and a choice of conceptual frameworks. This understanding of generative aesthetics aims to be a kind of tinkering with the coordinates of experience. I will defend Flynt as an important figure in the history of that tinkering.

In order to better understand the traditional notion of generative aesthetics, it is helpful to examine two very different approaches to the problems of generative aesthetics as I understand the term. The first was developed by British philosopher Peter Strawson, especially in his 1959 book *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. Here he offers a thought experiment involving a "purely auditory world": a world without "given" objecthood, a "no-space world" composed solely of sounds.[5] This thought experiment is a way to

bracket the particular way our forms of intuition are entangled; this bracketing isn't the primary objective of Strawson's thought experiment, but rather a means to *test* the persistence of certain properties of the perceptual framework. The second approach to generative aesthetics can be found in American philosopher Nelson Goodman's notion of "world-making." The term encapsulates the "theory ladenness" of our knowledge and judgments, meaning that there's no such a thing as a framework-independent world. This implies that much of how we understand the world is the result of conceptual contraptions of our own making.

3.

Generative aesthetics thus pertains to a reflection on the conditions of experience itself. Strawson's thought experiment invites us to imagine that we don't have bodies—since having a body would entail having space—and that our only means to detect worldly items is through listening. One might ask: if we don't have bodies, what would constitute our personal point of view, or rather our point of listening? In Strawson's thought experiment he brackets the specific means by which "we" have access to sounds and sounds alone. It is only under this condition that we can understand the purely auditory world as a surrogate for a no-space world in the Strawsonian sense. I say "we" in quotes, because in this framework the difference between "I" and "my" surroundings is also put into question.

Within this framework, Strawson asks: if we listen to Sound A, and then to an identical Sound B, do we detect the *same* sound, or two *sounds of the same type*? Can we make this distinction without the additional dimension of a spatial coordinate in order to disambiguate between the two possibilities? Strawson provides a good example of such a disambiguation from ordinary life. Imagine two different orchestras playing the exact same piece of music in two different concert halls at the exact same time. Both orchestras reach the same chord at the same time. Is it the *same* chord? In what sense? We might be inclined to say that they are the same *type* of chord, but not the same *particular* chord, since they are spatially segregated. The point of asking whether Sound A and Sound B are the same in the no-space world is to see if it is possible to make a distinction that is not one of type, but of particulars, without spatial coordinates.

To help with this disambiguation, Strawson imagines that listener "has" a sound of their own, capable of being heard by "others." In addition to this listener-specific sound, and the sounds of others, there is also access to what he calls a master sound (MS). The master sound is a glissando, a sliding sound that goes up and down the audible spectrum. "We" locate ourselves relative to the trajectory of the MS in the world; our sense of "movement" is linked to this trajectory. Now imagine that Sound A and Sound B

actual trajectory of Master Sound

f — frequency f (MS)

time

frequency range
of Master Sound

occurrences of sound A and B
respecitvely, always concurrent to
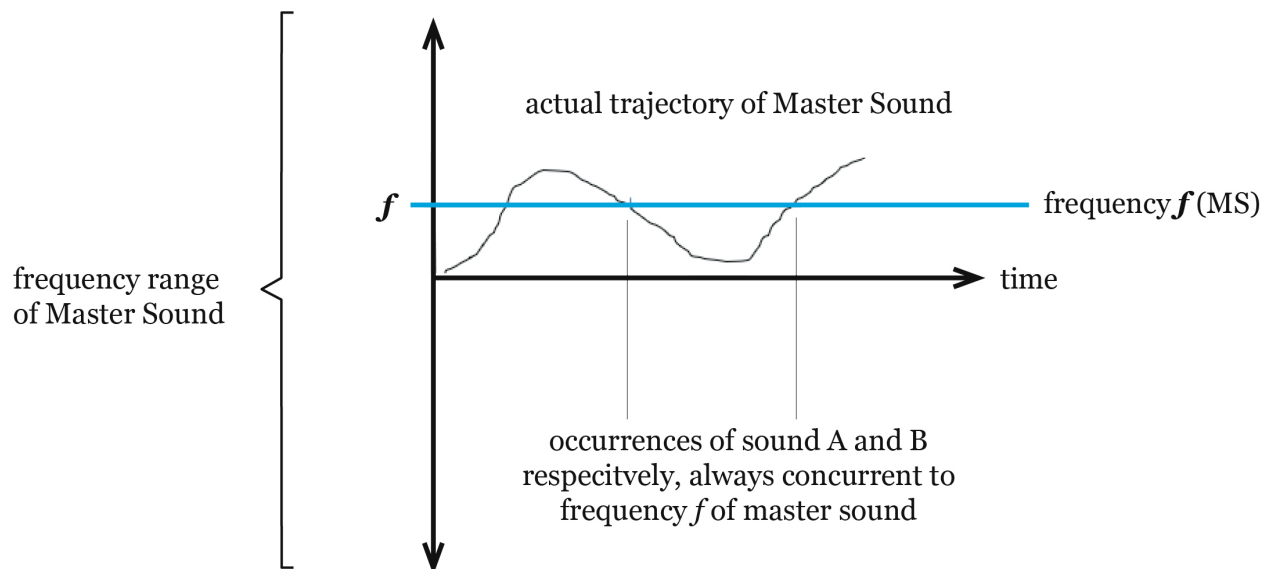frequency f of master sound

Diagram by the author

happen at the same point of the master sound's trajectory. This means that at frequency f of the MS, we listen to Sound A. Shortly afterwards, while the MS continues modulating as we "move," we find Sound B correlated with the same frequency f of the MS. Would we be inclined to regard Sound B as identical to Sound A—as the same particular thing — because of its localization relative to the MS, assuming there aren't any further timbral differences between them? Is having a master sound as an independent medium a sufficient means for reconstituting, within the purely audible world, an analogue of space, such that a reidentification of particulars would then become possible? And is having a constant sound of our own a sufficient condition for differentiating between ourselves and others?

The situation described is similar to the one depicted in the diagram above. In the diagram one can clearly see the function of the MS: its frequency range literally replaces the y-axis as a criterion of localization—meaning that it functions as a candidate for replacing one of the dimensions of localization, namely space. But the question

lingers, and it is a logical one: can one differentiate between Sounds A and B, or identify them, from their relative position to frequency f (which functions here as a spatial position) alone?

Strawson's answer is inconclusive, but his thought experiment nonetheless investigates the conditions of our perceptual-conceptual experience. Strawson's intent was to posit a frame of reference different from our own in order to test the survival of the properties of localization and reidentification that are characteristic of our frame of reference. In this sense, Strawson's proposal is a conservative one, in which the departure from an actual frame of reference serves only to validate it. Something quite different will be found in Flynt's approach.

4.

Whereas Strawson is overtly trying to describe the actual categorical structure of experience, explicitly against what he calls revisionary metaphysics, which thrive to replace

this categorical structure with another, in his *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman stresses the fact that we live in several different worlds, rather than just one.

Consider, to begin with, the statements "The sun always moves" and "The sun never moves" which, though equally true, are at odds with each other. Shall we say, then, that they describe different worlds, and indeed that there are as many different worlds as there are such mutually exclusive truths? Rather, we are inclined to regard the two strings of words not as complete statements with truth-values of their own but as elliptical for some such statements as "Under frame of reference A, the sun always moves" and "Under frame of reference B, the sun never moves," statements that may both be true of the same world. Frames of reference, though, seem to belong less to what is described than to systems of description: and each of the two statements relates to what is described to such a system. If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference. But, if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say. We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described.[6]

But even if we're confined to the different descriptions we have, we are not only confined to descriptions. According to Goodman, there are different ways of referring to a scenario besides verbal description. These nonverbal symbolizing practices—art is one example—symbolize not only through denotation but also through classification, expression, and exemplification.

Goodman's "grue paradox," although developed prior to his key writings on world-making, nonetheless helps illuminate the concept.[7] Goodman asks us to imagine, besides the ordinary color predicates "blue" and "green," two further predicates, defined as follows:

Def1 *grue*: anything that is green if examined before time t and blue after said time.

Def2 *bleen*: anything that is blue if examined before time t and green after said time.

The point of devising such weird predicates is to challenge existing predicates as the only adequate ones. While one might think of "blue" and "green" as primitive and "grue" and "bleen" as derived, the definitions given above can be reversed in order to give us "green" and "blue" out of "grue" and "bleen" as primitives.

Def1[2] *green*: anything that is grue if examined before time t, and bleen after said time.

Def2[2] *blue*: anything that is bleen if examined before time t, and grue after said time.

Given that grue was green before time t, and bleen was green after time t, while bleen was blue before time t, and grue was blue after the same time, predicates can be rearranged to form stabilities. Thus, it is possible to rearrange our predicates so that they are derived from the "weird" ones. Thus the argument from derivability doesn't hold.

Goodman then asks if there is a principled reason why we should use the predicate "green" rather than "grue" to refer to emeralds. The problem here is that of the differentiation between projectible and non-projectible predicates. Goodman equates this difference with that between predicates that are lawlike (i.e., likely to constitute regularities), and purely accidental predicates. The following two hypotheses give an example of this difference:

1. The copper object that I have on my table is a good electrical conductor. This confirms that copper objects are good electrical conductors.

2. The object that I have on my table is made of copper and is a good electrical conductor. This confirms that all the objects that are on my table are good electrical conductors.

To determine which of these statements is correct we need merely examine the properties of the objects on the table. The choice between "green" and "grue" cannot be decided in the same manner, for there isn't an empirical property that could decide for one or the other option. Goodman's answer to his own conundrum is a holistic one: we choose because of the history of a specific predicate—what he calls the degree of its "entrenchment"—and we adjust our regularities to the predicates we use accordingly. As Goodman writes, if we understand the predicates we use as being bound up by rules of use, then

a rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend. The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences; and in the agreement achieved lies the only justification needed for either.[8]

From his reflections on the riddle of induction, one gets the sense of the projective character of Goodman's aesthetics as well, which is fully developed in works such as his *Languages of Art*. As Goodman and Catherine Elgin write in their coauthored book *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*: "The mind is actively engaged in perception just as it is in other modes of cognition. It imposes order on, as much as it discerns order in a domain. Moreover, things do not present themselves to us in any privileged vocabulary or system of categories."[9]

Here a second dimension of generative aesthetics presents itself. While the Strawsonian thought experiment exemplified the downward determination of possible conceptual "moves" from an upstream modification in the sensible contents one has access to, Goodman's endeavor illustrates the upward determination of the categories of a world from the downstream conceptual choice of predicates to be projected. In this sense, Strawson's experiment tinkers with the upstream availability of perceptual contents, while Goodman's deals with the downstream conceptual determination of available perceptual contents.

5.

In a paper analyzing works by LaMonte Young and others, Flynt defines his concept of "constitutive dissociation":

> I find a principle running through these cases which I call constitutive dissociation. Constitutive dissociation presupposes a genre with a standard protocol. In the genre, situations are established by ordainments. (A reality exists because of somebody's rule.) Moreover, it is customary in the genre for situations to have certain aims. A constitutively dissociated situation comes about because the instigator of the situation alters the aims of the genre from the customary aims, without declaring so. Since the traditional aims are foregone, the instigator can evade or replace standard protocol with an inscrutable protocol (a contrived enigma).[10]

The radically nontraditional compositions—or rather compositions—that Flynt examines in this text result from actions and gestures that may or may not be determined

STROKE-NUMERAL

STROKE

VACANT
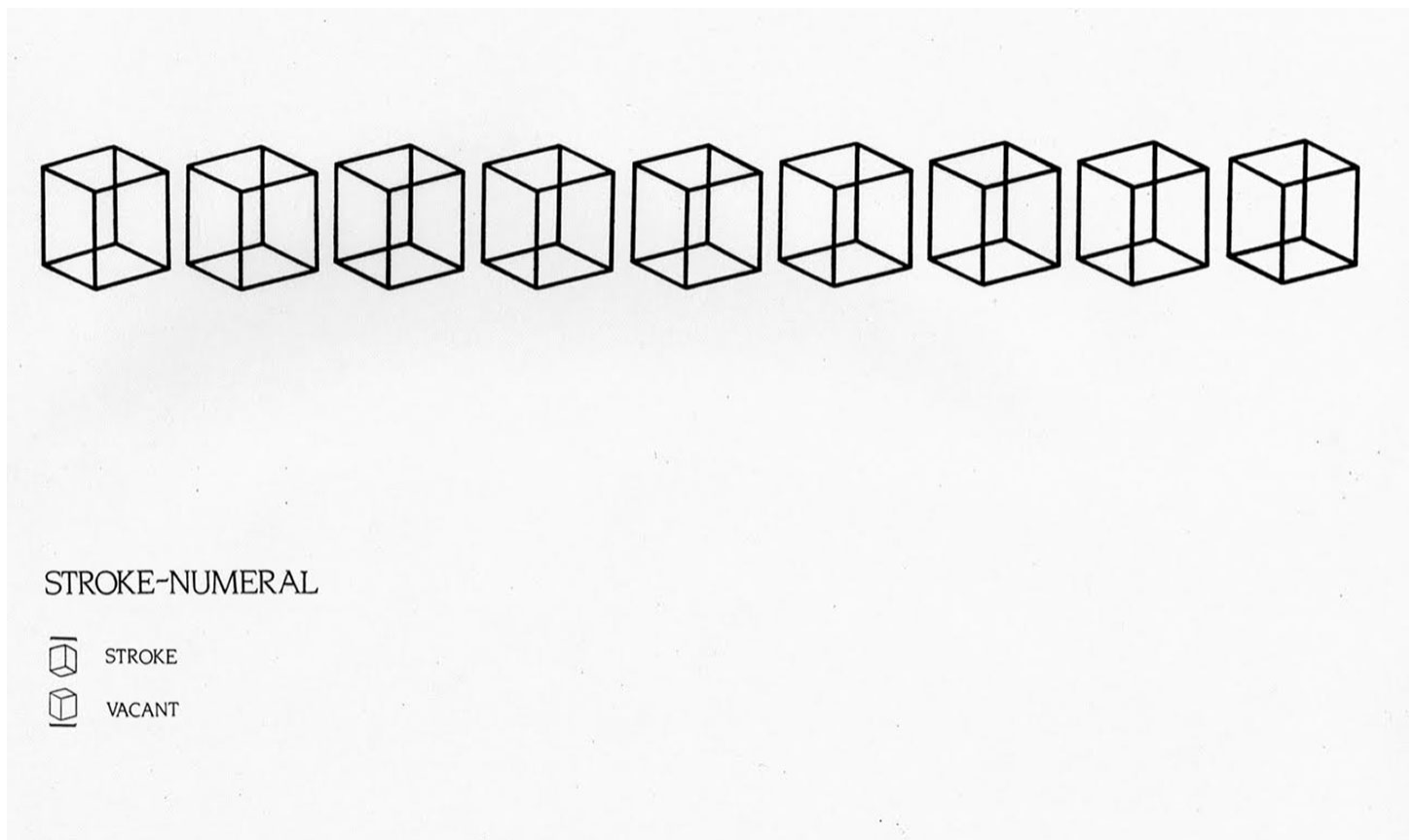
Henry Flynt, Stroke Numeral, 1987. Paint on aluminum; 19 x 41 1/2 in. Courtesy of Henry Flynt.

by a "score," which often takes the form of a linguistic text. They include pieces like those that comprise Young's *Compositions 1960*, such as his famous *#10 (to Bob Morris)*, which reads: "draw a straight line and follow it." These compositions are a considerable departure from the characteristic concept of a musical work as defined within the European tradition: a determined and detailed sound morphology that should to be respected in a concert performance. Some of Young's compositions propose nonmusical situations performed by human performers, as in *#2*, which instructs the performer to build a fire in front of the audience, or *#3*, which instructs the audience to do whatever they wish. Others employ nonhuman participants, like *#5*, which involves releasing a butterfly into the concert space.

Young's pieces create various "dissociated situations" insofar as they "alter the aims" of the concert performance "without declaring so." This leads to a conceptual revision of normative practices. I have referred to this elsewhere as "the normative turn" of the post-Cagean tradition, "a tendency to incorporate the attitudes of treating the work as a work (the act of reading a score, reproducing a score, performing before an audience, etc.) within the work itself."[11] The transparency of the work as work is abandoned, and the very act of "playing a work," its characteristic protocols and ordainments, become the aesthetic material of music. Richard Kostelanetz, referring to Cage's *4´33´´*, calls this "inferential art."[12] Such works presents unfamiliar situations that provoke the audience to ask, "Where is the work?"—a question that unleashes a process of searching and forces the audience to adjust their existing concepts. Flynt's own "Work such that no one knows what's going on," comes down to its title and the possible imaginative process that it feeds. What would a piece look like such that no one knows it exists? For pieces that elict such epistemological/ontological questions—what he would later call "meta-technological investigations"—Flynt reserves the predicate "concept art" .

Flynt first defined "concept art" in his seminal 1961 essay of the same title:

> "Concept art" is first of all an art of which the material is "concepts," as the material of for ex. music is sound. Since "concepts" are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language. That is, unlike for ex. a work of music, in which the music proper (as opposed to notation, analysis, a.s.f.) is just sound, concept art proper will involve language.[13]

The text advances an important critique of the European paradigm of concert music, which Flynt calls "structure art":

Much structure art is a vestige of the time when for ex. music was believed to be knowledge, a science which had important things to say in astronomy a.s.f. Contemporary structure artists, on the other hand, tend to claim the kind of cognitive value for their art that conventional contemporary mathematicians claim for mathematics. Modern examples of structure art are the fugue and total serial music.

For Flynt, music is a "structure art" because sounds are made to operate as vehicles for maintaining and communicating an abstract "structure," irreducible to the sensible presence of the sounds. In his later text "Against 'Participation': A Total Critique of Culture," Flynt clarifies this critique:

> My earliest surviving survey is "Concept Art," from 1961 (hereafter CA). In that document, my purpose in criticizing structure art, and in undermining mathematics, was to announce concept art as a new genre. Roughly, concept art explores the aesthetics of categorization, in works which serve as object-critiques of the exact sciences. (It was this last requirement which was never understood by the artists who adopted my phrase for their "word pieces.")[14]

For Flynt, structure art involves an underdevelopment both of structure and of the sensible content of the art. This results from the mutual tethering of one to the other. Insofar as music seeks to satisfy both poles (structural and sensible/musical), at the same time, both are diluted: structure becomes impoverished as it needs to be incarnated in sounds, and music becomes impoverished to the extent that it obeys a logic external to sounds themselves. Concept art is a way of releasing the abstract structure from the sensible carcass; when concepts are freed from incarnation, it is possible to create more complex and interesting logical structures.

Flynt saw concept art as occupying a higher threshold of abstraction above constitutive dissociations as such. He writes:

> If concept art was not a label for word pieces, neither was it a label for all art that was imaginative or thinky. Concept art was much more specific—and in an ironic sense academic—than that. You had to know David Hilbert and Rudolf Carnap as philosophers of logic and mathematics to understand my springboard. You had to engage with logic as an intellectual activity. (The logic of the creation of abstract entities by stipulation—as with Gottlob Frege's creation of the

integers 0 and 1 as abstract entities in Foundations of Arithmetic.) What did Hilbert and Carnap do? Implicitly, they cut the content out of mathematics, leaving only a formal shell. Cage, anyone?[15]

In that sense, many of the word pieces as constitutively dissociated situations fall into the category of the "downstream" revision of concepts, but with an important caveat: the reconceptualizations do not attempt to bring about logical consistency and relative closure, but, on the contrary, to *unbind the inferential pathways* of traditional practice. If we understand the ontological status of an artwork as the result of specific forms of *doing* that are always conceptually laden, then constitutive dissociations are a means of *world-unmaking* that dissolve the connections believed to be essential for certain practices, potentially yielding unheard of practices. The unmaking of worlds offers an occasion for the rewiring of the inferential links that form an anterior practice into a (still undetermined) posterior one.[16]

6.

Such a procedure might undermine our usual sense-based determinations of objects. A good example of this is Flynt's piece *Stroke Numeral* (1987), which hijacks a concept from the foundations of mathematics in order to produce what seems like an art piece, while in fact challenging the mathematical purview of David Hilbert's original concept. Flynt explains the mathematical concept of stroke numerals in his text "The Apprehension of Plurality":

> Stroke-numerals replace the traditional answer to the question of what a number is. The stroke-numeral "IIIIII" is a concrete semantics for the sign "6," and at the same time can serve as a sign in place of "6." The problem of positive whole numbers as abstract beings is supposedly avoided by inventing e.g., a number-sign, a numeral, for six, which is identically a concrete semantics for six. Let me elaborate a little further. A string of six copies of a token having no internal structure is used as the numeral "6," the sign for six. Thus the numeral is itself a collection which supposedly demands a count of six, thereby showing its meaning.[17]

In *Stroke Numeral*, instead of six nonambiguous marks he presents us with nine Necker Cubes—cubes that can be seen from two different perspectives at once, from above and from below. Flynt also provides a notation that attributes values "stroke" or "vacant" to each cube, depending on whether they appear to be seen from above

or below when we look at them. The resulting numeral is the sum of the values attributed by the spontaneous perception of the cubes. This introduces a fundamental ambiguity in which the same inscription can have different values, ruining the tentative perspicuity of Hilbert's method.

Flynt detected a similar effect in Marian Zazeela's installation *The Magenta Lights* (1987/2000), which he analyzed at length:

> Substantially, each of the mobiles in *The Magenta Lights* was white aluminum annulus with a single radial cut. Each strip hung from three points so as to become helical. From opposite sides of the two mobiles in a quadrant, beams of magenta light and blue light were directed at the mobiles. The mobiles were moved by slight convection currents and ventilation—and thus were moved independently and non-deterministically. At rare moments the two mobiles in a quadrant would come into phase and then the line of six images would exhibit isometric mirror symmetry about the midpoint ...
>
> The installation's illusory character allowed one to take it as an epistemology laboratory—as an opportunity to reexamine commonsense perceptions of the object ... In the twentieth century academic philosophy brought forth an epistemology which proposed that one could, by looking properly at what one saw in front of oneself, perceptually infer the uniquely correct substantial object or display ... One possible label for this academic epistemology is "comprehension." My reflections militate against comprehension. They contribute to a new enterprise which finds conventional reality to be a fiction, not at the level of theoretical conceptualization, but at the level of perceived objects.[18]

The full epistemological consequences of constitutive dissociations, as seen by Flynt, can be found in this quote. While Flynt regards concept art pieces as "object-critiques of the exact sciences"—proposing local disintegrative-reintegrative procedures at the level of concepts—he understands Zazeela's work as yielding a possible reconceptualization of our field of experience. In this reconceptualization, the identity of particular substantial objects isn't taken for granted. The "object world"—i.e., our habitual categorizations and judgements—is bracketed, allowing the perceptual field to be renewed.

EACH POINT ON THIS LINE IS A COMPOSITION.

Henry Flynt Jan. 1961
reconstruction 1981
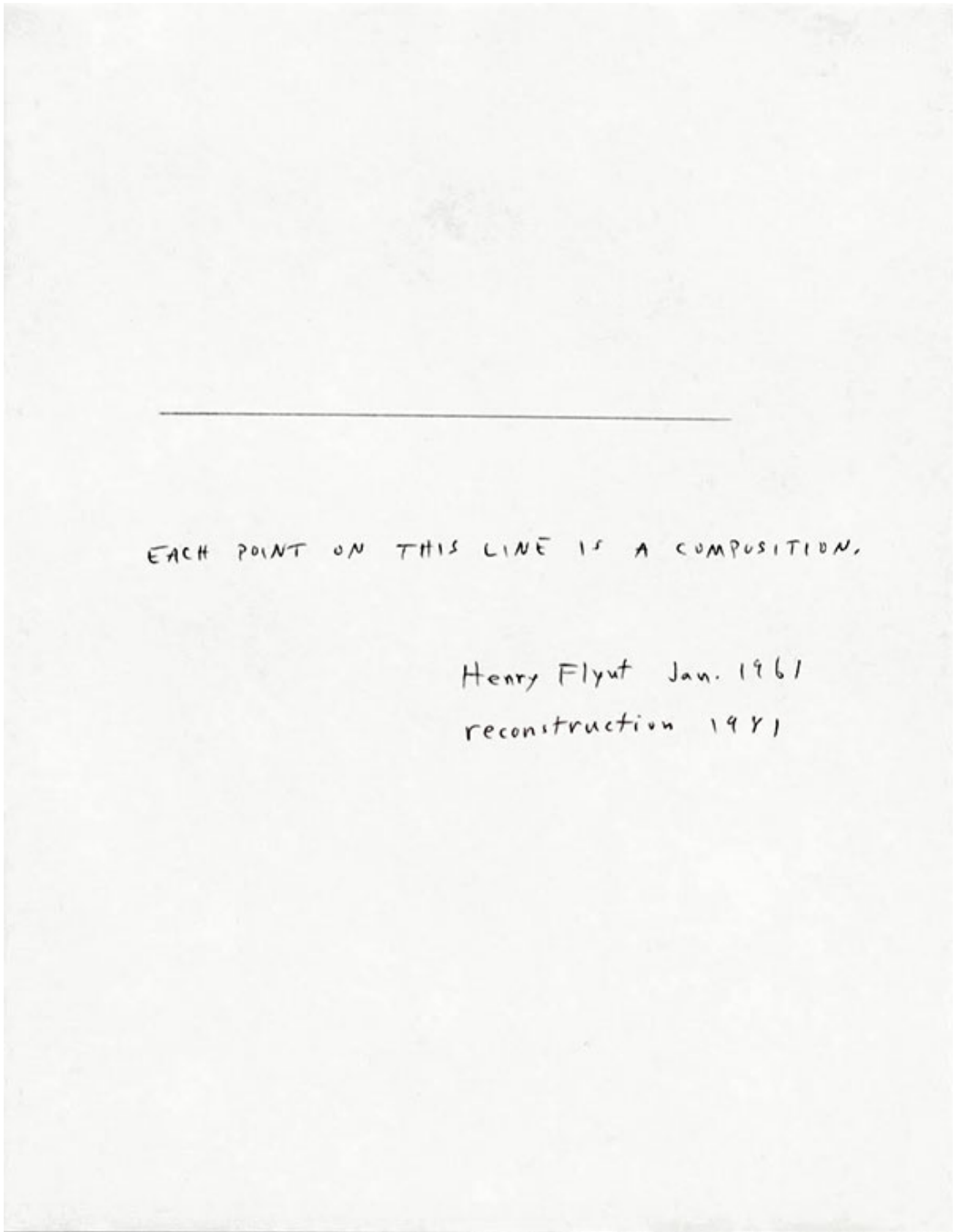
Henry Flynt, Each Point on This Line is a Composition, 1961 (reconstructed 1981). Ballpoint pen and pencil on paper; 11 x 8 1/2 in. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, MoMA, New York. Courtesy of Henry Flynt.

La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, Dream House: Sound and Light Environment, 1993-present; MELA Foundation, 275 Church Street, 3rd Floor, New York City. Photo: Jung Hee Choi. Copyright: Jung Hee Choi, 2009.

7.

In an interview with Catherine Christer Hennix, Flynt offers a striking explanation for the basis of his cognitive nihilist program:

> From my point of view—if you want to make an issue out of semantics—this is the profound issue. ... How would I understand the question whether there is a substantial glass other than the scopic glass—you know the conclusion ... that the question itself forces a yes answer. *This does not mean that a proof of the existence of the external world has been given. It meant that the proposition of the existence of the external world would verify itself even if it were false!*[19]

This kind of built-in verifiability, embedded in the very way the question is formulated, leads Flynt to reject mainstream mathematical and philosophical forms of knowledge and instead adopt a militant cognitive nihilism.

Thus, cognitive nihilism is not here a whim, but a kind of discipline. It takes seriously what Flynt presents as "traps" within our own reasoning, that force us to answer "yes," which then disqualify the question as legitimate. Legitimate empirical questions can be answered "yes" or "no." Flynt goes on to say that much of what we take to be "knowledge" about the world should be disqualified because of the compulsiveness of the answer—such as "Is there an outside world?" and "Is there language?" Once their status as knowledge is disqualified, the gates are open to the noncognitive tinkering that constitutive dissociations are an example of.

Whereas this serves Flynt as a means to articulate his global cognitive nihilist thesis, for me the main thrust of constitutive dissociations is methodological in a different sense. They are a logical tool for the reconfiguration of contents in both the conceptual and sensible orders. They are an "epistemological laboratory," as Flynt himself described them. Constitutive dissociations are a

meta-protocol for constructing practices and worldviews that can be further tested against one another.

This "further testing" suggests that this proposal is compatible with a form of *realism*—with one caveat. "Realism" here is not understood as the commitment to a complete reality to be fully and finally described by our symbolizing practices. Rather, this "testing" dimension leads to an *abductive* form of realism, wherein further hypothesizing can always yield different results, depending on how each new piece of information fits into the net of previously accepted ones—or on the necessary reconceptualization of the net itself, while maintaining maximum explanatory power. Within this localized tinkering—not without global consequences if its results are accepted—Flynt's world-unmaking reveals its solidarity with world-making.

The compatibility of Flynt's world-unmaking and Goodman's concept of knowledge as creation under specific constraints testifies to the reach of Flynt's conceptual contraptions, beyond the globally skeptic conclusions he might want to draw from them. In this abductive form of realism, a place exists for constitutive dissociations as a means for reconfiguring social and perceptual data—in the sense that every unbinding gives way to new bindings that reconfigure global aesthetic, political, philosophical, and scientific worlds.

X

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1
See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yiM9FRzxBU .

2
"I found out about a science fiction meeting that was held in Newark. So I went over there and attended the thing … I was carrying my leaflets much in the same way I carried my 'down with art' to the W.A.R. (Women Artists in Revolution) meeting. And what I found when I got there was that these fellows were exclusively interested in science fiction as a commercial literary genre" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yiM9FRzxBU .

3
Henry Flynt "Preface to Collected Writings on Meta-Technology," 2006 http://www.henryflynt.org/meta_tech/metatech_preface.htm . Bold in original.

4
Max Bense, "The Projects of Generative Aesthetics," in *Cybernetics, Art and Ideas* , ed. Jasia Reichardt (Studio Vista, 1971).

5
Peter Strawson, "Sounds," chap. 2 in *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (Routledge, 1959).

6
Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett, 1978), 2–3.

7
Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* , 4th ed. (Harvard University Press, 1983), 59–83.

8
Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* , 64.

9
Catherine Elgin and Nelson Goodman, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (Hackett, 1988), 6–7.

10
Henry Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York," in *Sound and Light: La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela* , ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Bucknell University Press, 2012), 85.

11
The standard reading of the Cagean gesture is that it dispenses with the subjective tastes of the composer, and by doing so, opens the work to an assubjective nature in its manner of operation. I suggest inverting the line of reasoning and instead see how such a gesture opens the work to exhibiting the interiority of the normative functioning of the concert ritual, which Flynt's constitutive dissociations anticipated. J.-P. Caron, "L´indétermination à l´œuvre" (doctoral dissertation, forthcoming). See also: J.-P. Caron, "Art and the suspension of subjectivity" https://tripleampersand.org/art-suspension-subjectivity/ .

12
Richard Kostelanetz, "Inferential Art," in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Da Capo, 1991).

13
Henry Flynt, "Essay: Concept Art," 1961 http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/conart.html .

14
Henry Flynt, "Against 'Participation': A Total Critique of Culture," 1994.

15
Henry Flynt, "Foreward," in *Concept art 2001 Concept Art 50 years* (Grimmmuseum Berlin, 2011), 12.

16
I must here mention Nick James Scavo's provocative essay "Against Worldbuilding," which shares many of the preoccupations of this essay, if not its conclusions. *Tiny Mix Tapes,* December 13, 2018 https://www.tinymixtapes.com/features/2018-against-worldbuilding .

17
Henry Flynt, "The Apprehension of Plurality," 2 https://aworkstation.com/decades-old-dream-house-sound-installation-in-danger-of-closing-artists-live-like-this-their-entire-lives/ .

18
Henry Flynt, "The Lightworks of Marian Zazeela," in *Sound and Light* , 106–7, 116. There's a good photograph of this installation here https://aworkstation.com/decades-old-dream-house-sound-installation-in-danger-of-closing-artists-live-like-this-their-entire-lives/ .

19
Henry Flynt, "Philosophy of Concept Art," interview by Catherine Christer Hennix, in *Concept Art: 50 Years* , ed. Henry Flynt and Catherine Christer Hennix (Grimmuseum, 2011), 37. Italics in original.

Imogen Stidworthy

Detours

1. Black Hole

When Iris Johansson first connected with her reflection in the mirror after many years of being put in front of it by her father, it was a terrifying experience. It took months of training[1] before she could control her fear, and the black hole she had always seen in the reflection was slowly replaced by the image of herself. Her father put the mirror inside a cupboard so that he could control and frame the image—a proto-cinematic technology, literally, in that it prefigures Iris's use of the cinema screen a few years later. He isolated small parts of her face at a time so that she glimpsed them through the cracks between his fingers or framed between his hands—a series of close-ups. Each feature was accompanied by a word: "ear," "nose," "mouth," "hair ." This wove connections between the sensation of her face beneath his hands, the image of it in the mirror at a distance, and the word used for it. The process unfolded through several sensory and perceptual registers at once: sonic, visual, spatial, bodily, verbal. Through multisensory modes of seeing and voicing, Iris developed a relationship between her feeling (of) "me," her appearance, and words. She learned to "meet my self in the mirror and call her 'I,' even though 'I' was not 'me.'"[2] These personal pronouns are as precisely chosen in English as in Swedish; in her autobiographical book, *A Different Childhood*—written in Swedish—Iris refers to herself as "Iris" or "the girl," until the period when she committed to "become ordinary" and connect with the social world, and switches to "I" and "me."[3]

Imogen Stidworthy, Balayer – A Map of Sweeping, 2014–18. The video still portrays Christof Berton, who from the age of ten was part of the community of adults and nonverbal autistic children developed by Fernand Deligny at Monoblet, Cevennes, France. The community lasted from 1967 to 1991.

I turn around slowly and see Iris sitting where she sits. Her body becomes by itself an independent thing. She becomes essence and I myself and the essence can leave the immaterial body and be between it and the material body sitting on the swing.[4] What was strange was that … *something* … was in between these two states, the child sitting on the swing, concrete, and the sweep [immaterial body] in the atmosphere. This *something* was aware of both and could register both from the outside. It is still very inexplicable to myself but it is a very, very clear memory and experience of it.[5]

Iris describes being in *and* without space, a paradoxical state in verbal terms. Samuel Beckett once evoked *being* with an image of the tympanum, a thin membrane in the ear (commonly known as the eardrum): "I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating … on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either."[6] In the moment of speaking, I hear my own voice: being is imagined as the sensation of the tympanum resonating with the voice. The membrane marks difference as well as connection between voicing and listening, and between what is felt as inside or outside the body. Being is a threshold state, where spatial distinctions collapse into each other.[7]

"Turning around like corn in a mill I float between querns, / I have thrust myself up to my throat into two-dimensional space."[8] Arsenii Tarkovsky imagines the movement of voicing in these lines from an early poem. He evokes being as the impulse to speak before sounding as voice, engaging the folds of the larynx so that they flutter faster than the blink of an eye between opening and closing—between a three-dimensional passage and the one-dimensional line of closed lips. Being has neither inside nor outside, but is both at once.

I press my palms together and try to sense the line between them. The more I try to pinpoint the more resistance spreads, left and right hand become one thing, a zone of heat and pressure with no center and "between" is an inside with no surface. Their difference is only tangible when the slightest sideways movement rubs skin against skin. Before I know it the sensation has transmuted into words—"two hands!"—and a rub-up between different forms of thought: one fully embodied, the other as verbal language.

Glossary: " **Go-between**": Iris Johansson is a Swedish writer[9] and therapist who specializes in working with groups. As a child she was nonverbal and learned to connect with language in a communicative sense at the age of twelve. Later she was diagnosed as autistic, and today she moves between verbal and nonverbal modes of

being. Fernand Deligny (1913–1996) was a French pedagogue, writer, and filmmaker. Between 1967 and 1991, he developed an experimental living space with nonverbal autistic children outside institutional and therapeutic frameworks, near the village of Monoblet in the Cevennes, France. Phoebe Caldwell is a therapist and writer in the UK who specializes in nonverbal communication using a method known as Intensive Interaction. She works mainly one to one with nonverbal people on the autistic spectrum, in contexts of state care. Johansson, Deligny, and Caldwell each have a practice of living or working with nonverbal people involving techniques and technologies, vocabularies and forms of mediation. And they speak both ways, committed to communicating their findings to wider networks through words, films, and forms of mapping. Through them we come closer to the languages and voicings of nonverbal people, and so they figure as *go-betweens* with nonverbal being, including our own.

*

In July 2018, in Fagersta, Sweden, Iris told me about her father's voice and how first, as a young child, she connected with its sound through the skin on his back. Next, she connected with his words, and then, in front of the mirror, she connected his words to things—to what she saw in the reflection.

> You know, when this black hole was in this mirror moving round, I could not look in the mirror. In the middle it was black like the eye, the pupil in the eye—that was black. And that was like … that was *själ*—that was total nothing. If you look at the television and see a typhoon, and when they have filmed from above the typhoon, down into the typhoon, this was in the mirror. In the middle it was black like the eye. No depth, no height, no … It was a vacuum.

> So my father he often took *my* hand and lifted out my hair and helped my hand to hold it up, and me to look at it. Or he put his hand in front of one eye and let the other eye see [*puts her hand over her right eye*]. And he often said, "Look at me, look at me," and then I looked up at him; then my eyes came close to this [whirlwind] in the middle. Then he took that [his hand] away [from my eye] and then I reacted on that, and then he put his hand on the other side [*puts her hand over her left eye*] and I reacted on that, and so on.

> And sometimes he held his hands so I saw a little in the middle of my eyes [*she holds her hands over her eyes, leaving a tiny gap to see through*], and he said, "Your nose is there! Your nose is there!" and then I saw in the mirror and then there was a nose there, or a mouth, and so on.[10]

Later, Iris very consciously built her sense of relationship with herself, verbal language, and the social world through mirroring. At around twelve years old she used a mirror to model her facial expressions on another girl's. By alternating her attention between the girl's face and her own, comparing and adjusting until they appeared the same, she made a connection with herself through the appearance of the girl. In her teens, she went through an intense period of cinema-going, watching six or seven films a week. She used cinema to perfect her social performance, by observing the expressions of the actors. "One way to learn how one should be, how to act, was to go to the movies," she explains. "There, all possible human behaviours were playing out on screen."[11] The actors' rehearsed, exaggerated behavior was easy to memorize. For over a year, Iris studied the minutia of their gestures and facial expressions and practiced them in front of the mirror at home for hours at a time. She became a mirror reflecting back to people the kinds of social expression they expected to see, to take away the fear that her "wild" appearance triggered in them, and open the way for them to be able to connect with her on their own terms.

*

> The external life—what a person normally thinks of as her life, what most people agree on: eating and sleeping, going to school, having a family, and living in a society—the value of all this I was oblivious of for the first ten years of my life. I called this the ordinary reality or the ordinary world. I had another habitat where I knew the world. This was a condition that was light and colourful and where I was everywhere myself, and which I called Out, or the real reality or real world or the immaterial.[12]

Iris can still go into the different realities she lived as a child, as well as new ones she has learned to be in as an adult. One reality is not forfeited for another;[13] rather, each is produced by a different mode of (her) being, with its particular sensory perception and ways of being-in-relation with people, self, and things, just as each mode of being produces its own reality. There are no hierarchies between different realities. Knowing and meaning emerge differently in and *as* different modes of sensory perception, which for Iris are shaped by being in what she calls the "real reality," being in the "ordinary reality," and being autistic.[14] When she is in the real reality, she receives "valuable information" and knows things that we do not know, or do not know that we know, in the ordinary reality.[15] Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela write, from a biological perspective on consciousness, that "this inseparability between a particular way of being and how the world appears to us, tells us that *every act of knowing brings forth a world*."[16]

Iris's real opens to both the ordinary and the real reality, and is always to some degree in both. The interplay between them confuses my dualizing impulses and tangles up its values—"real," "staged," "fake," "authentic." Each is real and authentic in its own terms.

positive mode. "You cannot help another person—if you try to," Iris explains, "you may succeed in making them feel better, but they will be dependent on you and will not lose their fear of their own fear." Iris creates a "parenting" around a person, a space of such safety that she or he will have the strength to connect with her or his fear. This

Imogen Stidworthy, Iris (A Fragment), 2018–19. Iris Johansson watching video rushes playing on a laptop and commenting on the material, which consists of a therapy session with a client (seen out of focus, on the right) filmed the previous day.

"The primary is where nothing else is," Iris explains. "It is part of the real world, it comes from the real world, and I have only taken part of that reality which other people can see, and made a concept from it. When I say 'where nothing else is': If I say 'I feel safe inside'—that is where nothing else is. I don't feel scared or anything else, I feel safe. It's the basic."[17]

The primary is not some kind of objective reality, or an ideal state. Iris describes it as "a kind of knowledge," and also as "what counts when nothing else counts."[18] She further defines the primary as individual and more than individual being. Perhaps it is a state of being unmediated by terms other than one's own and so, in a completely contingent sense, it represents a certain truth. Her therapeutic method is based on her experience of the primary in its negative and positive modes, and a conviction that all the problems we experience are produced by fear. Fear takes over when a person is unable to connect with the primary, and Primary Thinking Work is about helping people to connect with the primary in its

happens through a touching or overlapping of the "communication fields" which surround each of us: an indirect, immaterial touch between bodies. "When one wishes to communicate with a particular person one gathers up the atmosphere and directs it at that person … The other does the same thing and so they meet in a mutual atmosphere. In that moment the total atmosphere changes and the situation is redefined."[19] When a person is in a state of fear their communication field is torn, and part of what Iris does is to go into their communication field and "mend the holes."[20]

Films are made and viewed in the "secondary," which is the domain of culture, language, and the social world. But certain films connect with the primary, and watching films together is an important practice in Primary Thinking Work.[21] Iris's favorite director is Andrei Tarkovsky, who "connects with something that is essence, especially in *Stalker*." Her favorite actor is Matt Damon, because he is able to engage with his role as a fictional character

through primary dimensions of (his) being, and through this becomes a channel for the viewer to connect with the primary (of theirs). And so, in Iris's personal narrative, as in her therapeutic work, acting, mirroring, scripting, and staging, in all their artifice, are channels for connecting with the primary. "Artifice" comes from the Latin: *ars* (art) + *facere* (make) = "make art": a channel through which to connect with the primary, as well as the different realities we produce.

*

"You want expression, but I cannot give you expression," Iris tells me.[22]

We are in Fagersta, Sweden, in June 2018. The place is an old barn in the remote countryside, similar to the barns that Iris and her daughter Anneli grew up in, a generation apart. The two women are having a conversation about Iris's training in front of the mirror as a child, with her father. She is speaking in Swedish and each time she pauses, Anneli translates into English and into her own words, on the fly. The two women are sitting close together on a short bench, at right angles to each other. Anneli is facing Iris with her legs on either side of the bench, framing her mother's body. Iris is looking straight ahead towards the open doors of the barn and beyond. The staging brings them very close to each other, so that their bodies are speaking to each other as much as their words.

Emma[23] *and I circle around them with cameras held waist heigh. As we move around, we record the distance between them as well as the distance between them and us. Through our viewfinders, the gap between their bodies widens, narrows, closes, and opens up again. The two women slide back and forth across the visual field, eclipsing and revealing each other. The split-screen shot of nurse and patient in* Persona[24] *flashes up in my mind's eye—the two faces spliced together from separate film strips so that they are both split and merging.*

Anneli and Iris mirror each other in the rhythms of their voices, hand gestures, posture—and even in their hairstyles. They mirror in relay, voices picking up one from the other, arms sweeping in lines and loops. Iris's description of her mirror training is happening in a space of mirroring between mother and daughter, two scenarios seventy years apart, and we are weaving them together with the cameras. Later, putting the footage from both cameras together in one frame, in certain moments their bodies become completely confused and it is hard to tell them apart. As Emma and I circle around them, our distance from them is marked in sonic space by the sounds of our feet shifting our weight across the creaking floorboards. The image frames rise and fall with the movement of our footsteps, which have fallen into sync with the rhythm of their gestures.

Glossary: " **Rub-up**": The rub-up[25] is what is produced in encounters between people who voice themselves through different forms of language. Bewilderment, energy, friction, heat, intimacy—the rub-up arises in grappling with unfamiliar terms, in not understanding. When language reaches its limits, our relationship with it is exposed in new ways, and in this sense the rub-up is inherently reflexive. In these conditions we learn to attune to different registers of voicing around and beyond our own, broadening the scope of communication. Some may be unrecognizable to us as voicing at all. The rub-up emerges in many shades whose affects are wide-ranging, contingent, unpredictable. In any relationship, especially between people who do not share (a) language, it is impossible to say how the other is experiencing it. And so, in the encounters I set up with or between people in the course of research / developing an artwork, my attention is on the rub-up happening between them, or between "us," and how it affects (my) language.

2. *Un blanc (a blank)* [26]/ *"One cannot just point a camera at it and catch it: the very effort to do so will kill it."* [27]

Monoblet, Cevennes, France, some time in the early 1970s: Fernand Deligny recounts a story involving Janmari, a nonverbal autistic boy who resides with him in the collective living space in Monoblet. The story begins with Deligny explaining something to a visitor in his study and while tapping his finger on the table "in response to some surprise or other that had emerged from the wandering lines that we scrupulously trace." The wandering lines were the routes taken by the children around the living areas, which the adults traced on sheets of semi-transparent paper. At that very moment, Janmari, "who teaches me the most about what I'm telling you and who was then fifteen years old, and autistic—though that particular word seems to be falling out of fashion," was passing by.

> [Janmari] left, quickly, and reappeared sometime later and deposited a pile of mud on my table not very far from where my tapping had taken place … There it was, in the dross of damp earth and ash, what in archaeology is called a find: all the pieces of a clay ashtray that, four years earlier, had sat on the table where I had been tapping my fingers … A clay ashtray had been broken and the shards tossed into the basket of papers we piled up and used to light the bread oven … And in the blink of an eye the shards buried for five years in ash and earth were rediscovered.[28]

Monoblet, May 2014. It is early afternoon and the last

Image of Janmari from the archive of Jacques Lin (2005). Video still.

stages of post-lunch cleanup are happening in the kitchen next door, out of sight. Janmari is sitting bolt upright and alert, sniffing the air, listening. He will not relax until he hears the almost inaudible brushing sound that tells him that the pan scourer is back in its place, in a little wooden box above the sink. What can my camera and microphone possibly pick up of what this means for Janmari, or the quality of this kind of attention? Jacques Lin is resistant to my desire to develop a work here; this it not because he has a problem with me being around, or filming. Rather, it is his despair at how limited the recorded image is, including, above all, his own recordings. (I recently watched Jacques's video footage of Janmari, shot in 2001.) After a lifetime of recording the people he lives with, Jacques sees only the failure of the footage to communicate what he sees in it. Its meaningfulness is trapped in what he alone can see. In his eyes, the recorded gestures appear in and as *the accumulation of gestures witnessed over decades in all their repetitions and variations— this is what is clearly not visible in any recording.*

Because there is a clear difference between seeing and being seen. / As soon as there is some SELF, we are dealing with looking. / When looking predominates, it is at the expense of what? / At the expense of *seeing*, as I believe an autistic child sees, without even having any awareness of being.[29]

Here Fernand Deligny reflects on the nonverbal autistic child's act of seeing, taking into account that this child's sense of self cannot be assumed, or even imagined, by "we who speak." As Deligny insisted, "When I say: 'to see hands,' one must be skeptical. It would be better to say 'to look at.'" He brought his questions to bear on his practice of filming and the framing of a subject. "'To film' is strange—why not 'to camera' [*camerér*]?" he asked.[30] In the infinitive, the noun becomes a verb. Playing with grammar, the masculine noun (in French) confers subjecthood onto the camera, and creates a certain independence for the camera in relation to its operator.[31] Deligny picked up the camera warily to both work with and to resist its power to make images—a tension that runs through his incessant questioning of the visual image and of cinema. Thinking in the infinitive, he filmed in the infinitive—"camera-ing": using the camera as a tool to produce a nonsubjective gaze.[32] This is a *meta*-cinematic practice in that making a film is not the main object.[33] The operation recalls one of Deligny's earlier meta-cinematic uses of the camera, when he was trying to make a film with a group of disadvantaged youth but ran out of money to buy film stock.[34] He set up the camera with no film in it and let them put their eyes to the viewfinder, triggering a self-staging with the camera, a film without a film . Having the camera in their hands in this way produced a certain power, and the camera became a tool for shaping

relationships.

> It is possible that by following them, those "wanderings," journeys or gestures whose project escapes us, to follow them with the hand and with the eye, gives rise to a way of seeing that pierces the linguistic covering that our seeing inherits from birth and some say well before.[35]

Fernand Deligny developed a network of living spaces outside institutional and diagnostic frameworks at a time when French state care mainly involved locking autistic people away in psychiatric hospitals. He resisted writing about the children in clinical or critical terms. Instead, he followed their wandering lines, straying from grammatically correct sentences[36] and wandering along with their elaborations, rhythms, and constant detours. [37]

*

Giorgio Agamben identifies the moment at the beginning of the twentieth century when people's gestures were captured and played back to them as moving image for the first time. "In the cinema," he writes, "a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss."[38] Cinema was not the cause of a loss of meaning in bourgeois society, but it produced a new gaze through which this reality could become apparent *and* which made it happen in new ways.[39] Gestures lost their relation to "all naturalness," just as we lost our ability to decipher them. "And the more gestures lose their ease under the action of invisible powers," says Agamben, "the more life becomes indecipherable."[40]

Indecipherable—like the stereotyping of the gestures of autistic people as "unreadable," "meaningless," "out of control."[41] Loss of "naturalness": reflexive awareness slips into self-consciousness, which can overtake us in encounters with ourselves via visual technologies. This evolves into new forms with each new media regime in ways that can make us step outside ourselves or lock us into the image of our own appearance.

> 3. *"You may be invisible. I may be blind to you. That is—until you make yourself processable ."* [42]

Phoebe Caldwell is hovering in the doorway, her eyes following "Olly," who is nonverbal and autistic, as he moves around the classroom. He has just passed her and is moving quickly across the floor towards a far corner. His movements are agitated and twitchy, he is panting rapidly. He spins and twirls by the window, biting his hands, then turns and flies across the classroom again, passing by her,

apparently not seeing her, tracing wide loops back and forth. The camera follows unsteadily, trying to keep up, to keep him in the frame. The footage takes on an uncomfortable edge, as though the viewer is stalking him. The camera is close to Phoebe now and she can be heard panting too; each time Olly passes her, she adjusts her panting rhythm to echo his. He comes a little closer with each flyby. She moves into the room. He approaches Phoebe and brings his ear near her mouth. Her body seems to be morphing, concentrating into a panting ball. Now he brings his cheek to her mouth to feel the pressure of her breath. Then a smile spreads across his face. Their breathing is synchronized now. With his fingertips he lightly and searchingly touches the sides of her face, as if he is blind—trying to recognize her. His saliva is falling in a thin line past her mouth and sliding down the front of her sweater. She is oblivious to it. They move around each other with mouths open, inches apart, and she mirrors his gestures, touching his cheek and breathing rapidly. His smile opens into an expression of outright joy and he laughs out loud.[43]

> Each [autistic person] uses a unique language to make sense of their world. And it's that we're going to use because it's so much of an essential part of their life. This is the thing that they really tap into … Olly breath-holds and it was when I started tuning in to that breath-holding rhythm that he *really* started to get interested and started to come back for more. And then he was taking my arms and getting me to squeeze his chest … I started breathing in his ear and echoing his breathing and he turned around and grabbed both my arms, and looked deeply into my eyes and then he just gave me a huge hug, which he's … I've never seen him do that—not like that. It's as though he says, "Finally! You are talking to me!"[44]

Glossary: " **Voicing**": In encounters between people, different forms of language   communication may be happening, but we cannot be certain. What we take for a voice may not in fact be a form of address at all. ("He missed the voice, or the voice missed him." —Fernand Deligny). Or a voice may take a form that we do not recognize as a voice. To engage with different forms of language means widening our scope of attention to different registers, so that *voicing* includes speech sounds and sonic utterances, but also somatic registers of bodily gesture and movement, rhythms, spatial and temporal forms, imperceptible vibrations, and silences. Voicing: "calling forth" in the impulse to mobilize oneself towards another or to "me."

*

As a therapist, Phoebe is with her "communication partners" for a few hours at most, in intense one-to-one

Top: Image of Christof Berton from the archive of Jacques Lin (2002). Video still. Bottom: Imogen Stidworthy, Balayer – A Map of Sweeping, 2014–18. The video still portrays Christof Berton.

engagement. They are nonverbal people on the autistic spectrum; she is a specialist in nonverbal communication who uses Intensive Interaction, a form of mirroring behavior.[45] This mirroring of gesture and sounds does not aim to produce sameness, but variation, "even the slightest difference,"[46] which is where language and the call and response of communication begin. She is called in to make contact with a person, usually during a moment of crisis when she or he is in the full throes of an autonomic storm, or "autistic meltdown," triggered by sensory overload. She brings to bear her forty hears of clinical knowledge and research into autism, but the interaction itself is about immersion, flow, empathy, and intuition: the tacit, unthought knowing of embodied experience.

> I find myself being fragments of other people. I don't know which bits are me; who I myself am— and who everyone else is, is not clear—the edges between us seem to soften ... Until I look in the mirror, I have no idea what I look like or who I am.[47]

Losing a sense of bodily boundaries can happen when we are dancing, attuned to another person, or immersed in nature. Many people on the spectrum describe intense feelings of a "leaky sense of self":[48] becoming confused with other people or with one's surroundings, losing or having no sense of being "me," in ways that can sometimes be existentially threatening, but also exhilarating, liberating, and joyful.

*

Christof Berton, who lived year-round in Deligny's network of collective living spaces from its early days, spends hours at a time handling a book with total and intimate attention.[49] He flicks the edges of the pages across his lips and nose, breathes in their smell, in a highly multisensory form of reading. Iris Johansson and Donna Williams, the writer, artist, and activist (who was also good friends with Phoebe), have both described the pain they experience when clothing touches their skin. People on the spectrum often have extraordinarily heightened sensory responsiveness; they are so open to stimuli that sometimes the nervous system has to respond by filtering or blocking sensory input, to protect itself from overload.[50] "A friend on the spectrum describes the response of her nervous system to any form of emotional warmth as like being 'hit with an emotional taser.'"[51]

An autonomic storm is a state of physical and emotional chaos experienced by an autistic person. It can feel life-threatening, throwing the limbic system into fight-or-flight mode.[52] When nonverbal autistic people are in pain, they cannot necessarily communicate about it, locate it in their body, or know what is triggering it. If there is no way to stop it, they may try to create a distraction

powerful enough to drown it out: they may hit their head against the wall, as Janmari used to in Monoblet; they may tear the skin of their lips, as Iris used to as a child; or they may throw themselves off the kitchen table, as did a small boy who Phoebe worked with. She realized that a certain tone in his mother's voice caused the boy unbearable pain. Throwing himself off the table was a way to distract from it with a more powerful sensation—a different pain, but at least one of his own making.[53] These are extreme measures for relief. Witnessing them can be very disturbing for others, but they are a form of self-care.

*

> When I was a child I was taken to America. And my mother had to go somewhere, and I was left with strangers for ... a while. And they were very kind, and I disregarded them completely, and I went down to the gate and I bellowed. And all my self was in that misery and despair of abandonment. And I can still hear that bellow, silently. That silent bellow. She came back of course. I think, touching that despair and abandonment when there is nothing but ... but ... a sort of empty horror, has helped me enormously in reaching ... um ... in aligning myself with some of the states of the people I see. Because most of the ones I see are very distressed—that's why people ask me to go ... I've been changed basically by this ... um ... experience of other, of not-me—of me and not-me getting together, you know, in the sense of ... ah ... deep encounters with ... ah ... with the quiddity of—ahh ... of ... of different-from-self, of not-me; knowing in a sense that one doesn't normally know.[54]

The voice of a traumatic childhood experience becomes a source or *re*source for attuning with others in their trauma. "Aligning myself": not to touch but to *co-respond* —for a person in sensory overload, a certain distance between *me* and *not-me* is needed for close contact to be possible at all. Phoebe's "bellow" is a seed of recognition that resonates with her communication partner and touches, without coming too close. On the borders of language, sometimes this is all there is between people, and sometimes it's all that's needed.

*

In a video clip filmed by a colleague of hers, Phoebe is seen making her first visit to see "Pranve," a nonverbal autistic man.[55] He is known for being violent, and many caretakers have refused to work with him. Phoebe stands outside his front door waiting, even though the door is open. She is waiting not because she is scared:

> The first trick is that you don't go in—you've got to

establish communication *before* you invade their personal space. That's rule number one. So what I did was I listened when his mother opened the door. I will listen for any sound, or breathing— ... *hhhh* ... *hhhh* ... *hhhh*, as little as that—that can be the rhythm.[56]

*

Gary Peters, a professor of philosophy and performance, writes about "improvisations that are 'hyperaware,' ... that in their profound concern for the other open up a performative space that is attentive to, responsive to, and, above all, supportive of the mark-making project of the other."[57]

Improvisation is a part of all communication, verbal or nonverbal,[58] and descriptions of actors practicing free improvisation come close to how Phoebe engages with "me and not-me getting together ... knowing in a sense that one doesn't normally know." When Intensive Interaction is working, the binary of self and other dissolves and there is no hierarchy. Therapist, patient; neurotypical, autistic; initiator, follower—the roles alternate and become indistinguishable.

And towards the end we had the most extraordinary engagement and he was inspecting me from about *that* distance away, inspecting me and curious and laughing and joyful—and I felt similarly warm. We were locked into each other in a sort of *duende* ... And we had this extraordinarily prolonged gaze, rather than a stare, a sort of mutual gaze. And it was very moving for him, and for me obviously—for both of us.[59]

Like the call and response of mirroring behavior, sameness and difference fold into each other in the rub-up of communication happening, and the language of each person is changed. Phoebe does not look for feelings of love, or for the ecstasy of being able to step outside herself, but they are part of the experience— *ecstasy*, from Greek, *ekstasis*: "standing outside oneself." Being fully open to another person opens you to feeling less yourself. Unconditional openness is in fact essential for the interaction to "work" at all. In this sense it is part of the therapeutic responsibility, but it demands letting down all your social defenses in a way that is usually only "safe" in conditions of complete mutual trust or vulnerability. When Phoebe meets her communication partner, she or he is a vulnerable person at their most vulnerable. There is no place or even possibility for social defenses, and so each of them is open and vulnerable enough to feel safe with the other.

*

Different forms of voicing call me to listen with all the senses,[60] because when I engage with a language I do not know, I do not know what I am listening for.

*

In February 2018, Phoebe was invited to a special school to consult with the staff and meet some of the students. With plenty of notice and in no state of emergency, it was an opportunity for me to film her at work, which we'd both been looking for since we first met. I went alone to the school to prepare before her visit. One student was too agitated for me to spend any time with, and others were leaving for an activity, but I filmed Jamie. The next day, not a single meeting between Phoebe and the students worked out. The agitated boy was walking so fast through the narrow corridors and up and down the stairs that she could barely catch a glimpse of him. Another boy was upset and had to spend the entire time calming down in a quiet room. Jamie was locked into his screen and Phoebe didn't seem to want to disturb him. My footage shows her sitting patiently on a chair while bodies move rapidly through the frame—we couldn't capture a single moment of Intensive Interaction.

February 2018. A young man is hunched in front of a laptop clicking rapidly through something on the screen. Sound effects and distorted voices fill the room. His back is rounded and his head sinks almost to the level of the monitor in front of him—he is fully absorbed. A young woman rises from a sofa nearby and intervenes with a word and then a gesture, reaching out towards him. He catches her hand with his eyes still locked on the screen, smiles as she bends down and puts her head on his shoulders, tickling him under the arms for just a moment, before withdrawing to her seat. All around are signs of the protocols of industrialized care and education.

I'm warned that the boy can get very agitated, he might jump around or attack me. On my first visit I want to give him space, not to impose. I place myself and the camera as far from him as I can, hugging the wall—can a meter here or there make all the difference?—and find myself constantly tracking back and forth through the viewfinder between his face, hands, mouse, laptop, and feet. Before long he becomes agitated and a caretaker motions for me to leave the room. The footage is shaky and nervous, a recording of my state more than his.

The next day, I come closer. The camera is directly in front of the boy, a short distance from him as he works, taking in the table, the wall behind, and a window to the left. I detach myself from it, leaving it steady, allowing things to move in and out of the frame while I expand attention to what is happening around and between all of us. The boy's face is masked by the laptop, only his eyes appear in the narrow strip between the top of the screen and his thick
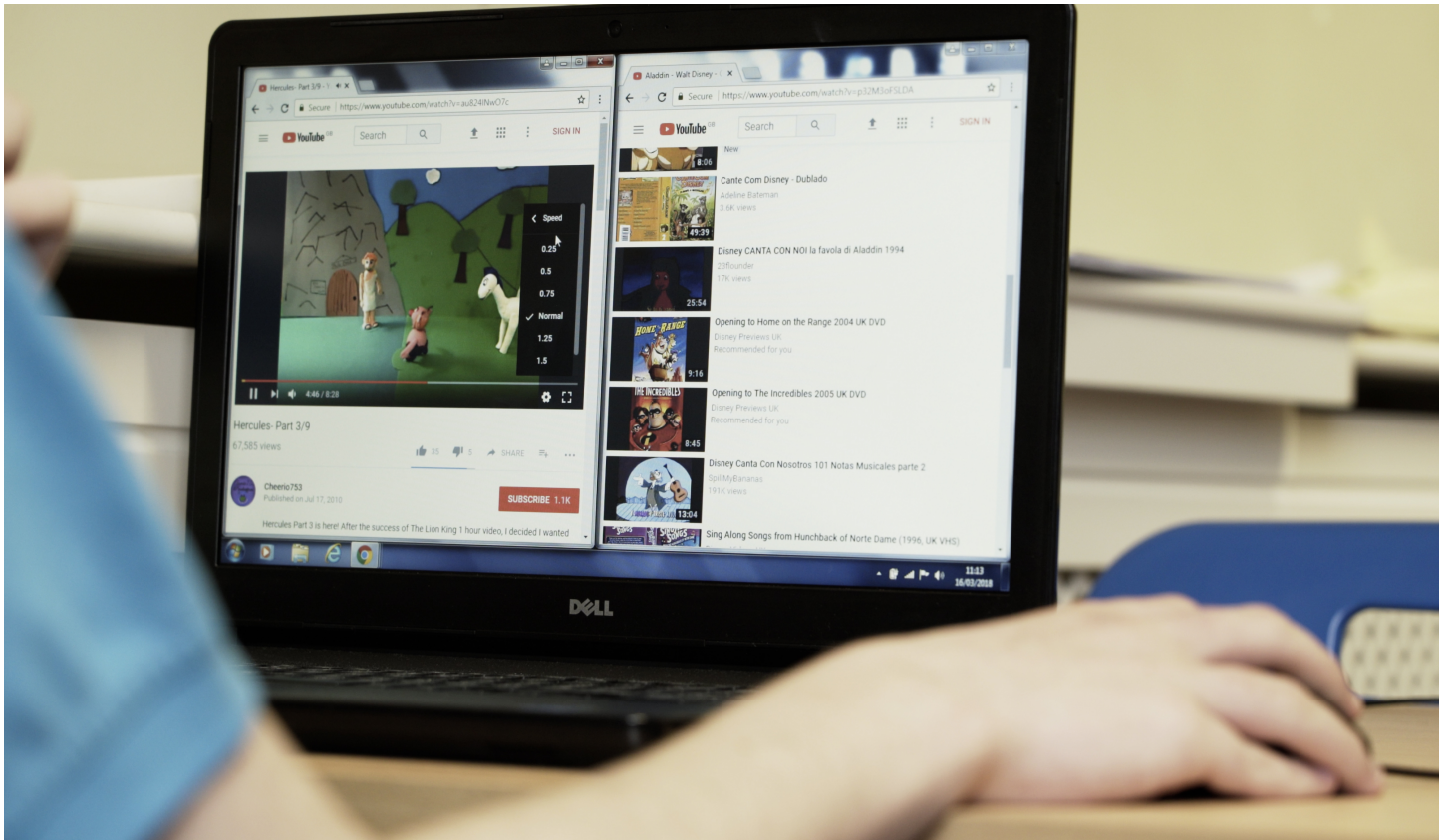
Imogen Stidworthy, Jamie, 2018. Video still.

hair. From this position, what is recorded shows more about what he is doing than who he is. Who is he? In terms of educational profiles, medical and social classifications, he is a vulnerable teenager on the autistic spectrum. He has learning difficulties and exhibits "challenging behavior." He is seventeen years old. He is a young man. He is Jamie. As a subject for the camera he could be presented in the mode of a portrait, to try to capture something of his character. The camera could focus on him, on his activity, or on his relationships with the people around him. Who or what is the subject here? Resisting being caught up by who he is, I try to keep attention on what he is doing. And what he does is fully described on the level of sound. After fifteen minutes of observing him through the viewfinder, I suddenly become conscious that the repetitive whine coming from the laptop has changed. It is not the sound of a video game, but of cartoons—cartoon voices! In the jumble of noise, one voice pushes its way into my awareness. It has been repeating persistently for the last ten minutes and suddenly I register words—slowed down, emphatic, and dragging: "But I'm different from you guys!" The boy is talking to me, or to us! I move around to stand behind him and watch what he is doing. He is working like a DJ, moving the mouse at lightning speed between several Disney clips opened in different windows, cutting between scenes and changing playback speeds at the same time. He returns over and over again to one scene, in Hercules:

"But I'm different from you guys!" He is cutting his own script together at 0.25 x speed, and this is how he is talking to all of us in the room.

X

All images courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

This text draws on my artistic and doctoral research into different forms of language and modes of being, which has developed over the past five years.The doctoral dissertation "Voicing on the Borders of Language" (Lund University, Sweden, 2020) can be accessed here.

1
"I saw something fuzzy that moved sometimes and stood still sometimes. I saw two different shapes. Father was like he was, quite distinct, but the other was a peculiar little thing, I don't know what, and it was that he told me to look at." Iris Johansson, *A Different Childhood* (Inkwell Books, 2012), 45.

2
Iris Johansson, conversation with author, Fagersta, Sweden, June 2018.

3
In this text, in which interpersonal relationship is a main focus, I refer to the key figures in ways that reflect my relationship with them during my artistic and doctoral research. I worked closely with Iris Johansson and Phoebe Caldwell over several years and so use their first names only, after introducing them. When referring to Fernand Deligny, who I never met, I use his full name throughout.

4
Iris, *A Different Childhood*, 212. This passage is read aloud by Iris in the video sequence that is part of my installation *Iris (A Fragment)* (2018–19)*.*

5
Iris, email to author, September 2019.

6
"Perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition." Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable* (1953; Grove Press, 1979), 352. Cited by Mladen Dolar in his essay "The King Listens," commissioned for the exhibition publication *In the First Circle* (curated by Imogen Stidworthy in collaboration with Paul Domela, Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona, 2012).

7
This way of conceptualizing the voice is formulated in the work of Kaja Silverman, Guy Rosolato, and Jean-Luc Nancy.

8
Arsenii Tarkovsky: "From a volume of stone I learn language that is beyond time. / Turning around like corn in a mill I float between querns, / I have thrust myself up to my throat into two-dimensional space, / And the millstones of life and death have pulverised my spine." From the poem "From a volume of stone I learn language that is beyond time," in *Poetry and Film: Artistic Kinship between Arsenii and Andrei Tarkovsky*, ed. and trans. Kitty Hunter Blair (Tate, 2014).

9
Besides *A Different Childhood*, Iris's books include *En Annorlunda Liv* (A different life) (Forum, 2013), and *En Annorlunda Verklighet* (A different reality) (forthcoming 2021).

10
Iris, conversations with author, Dahab (South Sinai, Egypt), recorded during research and filming for the installation *Iris (A F ragment)*.

11
Iris, *A Different Childhood*, 316.

12
Iris, *A Different Childhood*, 205.

13
If she is alone for more than four hours Iris can slip into a negative mode of real reality where "nothing moves inside" and she can initiate nothing. She avoids this by making sure she is in contact with people regularly and follows a precisely timed daily "schedule" starting at 4 a.m. each day.

14
Contemporary diagnosis frames autism as a developmental and neurological condition with certain characteristic effects, such as issues around processing sensory information through a hypersensitized nervous system. This produces infinitely wide varieties of affect, one of which is sensory overload ("autonomic storm"), experienced by many people on the autistic spectrum (discussed below in relation to the work of Phoebe Caldwell).

15
Iris sets out proposals for alternative social and economic structures in her books *En Annorl unda Liv* and *En Annorlunda Verklighet*.

16
Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Shambhala, 1992), 26. Italics in original.

17
Iris, telephone conversation with author, August 27, 2019.

18
Iris, conversation with author, Fagersta, July 2018.

19
Iris, conversation with author, Dahab, February 2018.

20
S. J., conversation with author after a therapy session with Iris in Fagersta, July 2018.

21
Iris, conversation with author, Dahab, February 2018.

22
Iris, conversation with author during filming in Fagersta, June 2018.

23
Camerawoman Emma Dalesman worked with me in Egypt and Sweden during filming for *Iris (A F ragment).*

24
Ingmar Bergman, 1966. Bergman's image of two merging personalities: a hard-edged vertical cutting together of two strips of celluloid / two shots / two women's faces spliced together.

25
Dictionary definitions of "rub up," without a hyphen, include "to revive or refresh the knowledge of" and "to improve the keenness of (a mental faculty)" https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rub%20up .

26
Un blanc: a cartoon speech bubble with no words in it; also a figure of speech, introduced to me by Jacques Lin one day when we fell silent during a conversation. Along with Gisèle Durand, Jacques Lin was one of the first adults to join Fernand Deligny's experimental living space in Monoblet, in 1967. Between 2013 and 2014 I carried out research and filmed in the small informal care home in Monoblet, where they still live with two of the autistic children (now adults) who grew up in that community. (While there I developed material for the installation *Balayer – A Map of Sweeping,* commissioned by the São Paulo Biennial 2014.)

27
Trinh T. Minh Ha, "Speaking Nearby," interview by Nancy N. Chen, *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 21 (March 1992): 82–91.

28
Fernand Deligny, "Acting and the Acted," in *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Catherine Porter (Univocal, 2015), 135–36. In this essay Deligny uses this anecdote to show how such "initiatives" by the autistic children reveal "aspects of 'ourselves' that escape us" (137). The story has been retold time and again by people connected with his experimental collective living space, especially Jacques Lin, who includes it in his autobiographical book *La vie de radeau: Le réseau Deligny au quotidien* (2019).

29
Fernand Deligny, "When the-Human-that-We-Are Is Not There," in *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, 201. Throughout this part of the essay, Deligny refers to Lacan's notion of "the real," as developed in the latter's text *The Egoin Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (W. W. Norton, 1991).

30
Fernand Deligny, "Camerér," *Camera-Stylo*, no. 4 (September 1983). Also in Deligny, *Oeuvres*, ed. Sandra Alvarez de Toledo (L'Arachnéen, 2007), 1742.

31
Deligny was friends with Louis Althusser and was interested in the latter's concept of interpellation: the process whereby language constitutes people as subjects in terms of how they are addressed.

32
This paragraph draws on a commentary by Jean-Francois Chevrier on Deligny's essay "Acheminement vers l'image" (literally "On the way to the image"). Both the commentary and the essay are published in Deligny's *Oeuvres*.

33
I began using the term "meta-cinematic" during my doctoral research to speak of a particular relationship between the filmmaker, their recording equipment, and the situations they encounter. I see this

relationship, which is central to my work, manifesting in different ways in the practices of go-betweens like Iris, Phoebe, and Fernand Deligny. Meta-cinematic situations give rise to a reflexive awareness that is less about making films (whether or not this is happening) than shaping relationships between people, in the rub-up between (their) different forms of language. These kinds of affects are an inherent part of filmmaking, but working meta-cinematically is about activating and channeling them towards other ends, including how they unfold in the space of the artwork. In this context the artwork is itself a form of language or voicing (in my practice, the artwork contains different voices and forms of language). Working with artworks and installations in a meta-cinematic modality produces different modes of awareness and relation with visitors, as well as between them. ("Meta-cinematic" is also a term from 1950s film theory, referring to an approach to filmmaking whereby the viewer is made aware that she or he is watching a fiction film. "Orthodox reflexivity affirms the role of narrative structure as a transparency; modernist reflexivity seeks to reverse this role." William C. Siska, "Metacinema: A Modern Necessity," *Literature and Film Quarterly* 7, no. 4, January 1979, 285–89. In other words, meta-cinematic filmmaking affects the relationship between the viewer and the film—but this is not the same as using it as a relational tool between people.)

34
Fernand Deligny worked with troubled young men in the context of the experimental project "La grande cordée" (literally "The great cord/belt," 1948–62). Organized by an informal group of mainly communists, the project involved creating a constellation of living spaces in youth hostels for "juvenile delinquents," away from their families and outside established institutions. This was immediately after WWII, when Deligny was working with the French Resistance. Deligny was instrumental to the project and it was his first major experiment in alternative social relations. See Yves Jeanne, "Fernand Deligny: liberté et compagnonnage," *Reliance* 21, no. 3 (2006): 113–18.

35
Deligny, *Oeuvres*, 812.

36
Deligny developed a very singular writing voice as he tried to take account of the nonverbal within verbal language.

37
"Detour" was a key term used by Deligny and the other adults of his community. It described a child's indirect and elaborate route from A to B as he or she carried out a task (fetching a water bucket, putting away the laundry). Through the practice of mapping the children's movements, it emerged that the "ornamented" (*orné*) lines of such routes were neither excessive nor meaningless, but absolutely necessary to the task being carried out. They were also found to relate to the presence of objects or past events no longer visible—like the spot on the table in Deligny's story about Janmari and the ashtray.

38
Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Means Without End* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 52–53.

39
See Raymond Bellour's discussion of this history, as analyzed in Hilary Radner and Alistair Fox, *Raymond Bellour: Cinema and the Moving Image* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

40
Agamben, *Means Without End*, 52–53. The scope of these effects is part of the history of post-cinematic affect and how it both emerges in and shapes contemporary subjectivities and technological and globalized conditions. See Steven Shaviro, *Post-cinematic Affect* (Zero Books, 2010).

41
Giorgio Agamben begins "Notes on Gesture" by describing the spasmic, uncontrolled movements of people with Tourette's syndrome (52–53). He suggests that some time after the arrival of cinema, everyone lost control of their gestures—that "ataxia, tics, and dystonia had become the norm." His words evoke the current "overdiagnosis" of autism and the tendency to see signs of autism all around, in social behavior, computing skills, or how we behave with our screens. For example: https://ww

w.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/ PMC5849631/ .

42
Janet Gurney, conversation with author. Gurney is a close associate of Phoebe Caldwell and director of the London-based charity Us in a Bus, whose therapists use Intensive Interaction and other methods of nonverbal communication with people on the autistic spectrum and people with learning difficulties.

43
Description of a scene from the DVD *Autism and Intensive Interaction: Using Body Language to Reach Children on the Autistic Spectrum* , by Phoebe Caldwell with Matt Hoghton and Penny Mytton, (Jessica Kingsly Publishers, 2010), 75 mins.

44
Phoebe, conversation with author, 2018, about her methods in the scene described above.

45
"Mirroring behavior" is a term from developmental psychology. It refers to the playful preverbal interactions, using sounds and gestures, between an infant and a parent or caregiver. It is seen as an essential stage in the interrelated processes of individuation and language development. See, for example, Daniel Stern's study of infant development, which was groundbreaking at the time of its publication in 1985: *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (Basic Books).

46
Phoebe, conversation with author, February 2016.

47
Phoebe, citing a friend who is on the autistic spectrum, in her book *Hall of Mirrors, Shards of Clarity: Autism, Neuroscience and Finding a Sense of Self* (Pavilion Publishers, 2017), 8.

48
In *Always More Than One*, Erin Manning draws on research into preverbal infants and their unbounded state of bodily and subjective openness (to environment, to parent/carer), questioning the cultural preoccupation with the individual and advocating a process of individuation that is much more about being in relation (with others). Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's*

Dance (Duke University Press, 2012).

49
Christoph Berton still lives with Gisèle Durand and Jacques Lin and figures in my installation *Balayer – A Map of Sweeping* . See the image at the start of this essay, a video still that shows Christoph using a pen to make marks on a piece of paper as he listens to the sound his pen makes.

50
For example, the strip lighting used in most schools and care homes interferes with the cognitive processing of many autistic people, causing their vision to fragment and making it hard to focus.

51
Phoebe, *Hall of Mirrors, Shards of Clarity* , 12.

52
Donna Williams, cited in Phoebe, *Hall of Mirrors, Shards of Clarity* , 36.

53
Phoebe, conversation with author, February 2017. Phoebe advised the mother to speak in a natural tone instead of her special voice. The boy's table-jumping stopped immediately and he was able to stop wearing the helmet he had been using for several years.

54
Phoebe, conversation with author at Phoebe's home in Settle, Yorkshire, 2017. The passage is part of the voiceover in my video (*Phoebe)* note towards a future work (2017).

55
The video is from Phoebe's personal archive.

56
Phoebe, conversation with author, Settle, Yorkshire, 2017. Part of the voiceover in my video (*Phoebe)* note towards a future work .

57
Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 53. In the context of theater, free improvisation is an approach to improvisation developed in the 1950s and '60s by the director Peter Brooke, to achieve the closest attunement between actors and open up new dimensions of relation between

them and with audiences.

58
The Indian screen-music composer Mani Kaul made a comparison between the role of rules in improvised Indian raga music and the role of rules in spoken language. "I am speaking English, my second language. I have no idea what I am going to say next and nor do you. I am improvising. But the moment I make a mistake, you will know it." From a lecture delivered at the School of Sound, South Bank Centre, London, June 2000.

59
Phoebe, conversation with author. *Duende* is "a heightened state of emotion, expression and authenticity, often connected with flamenco," according to Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.or g/wiki/Duende_(art) . Federico Garcia Lorca said that "all arts are capable of *duende*, but where it finds its greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance and spoken poetry, for these arts require a living body to interpret them, being forms that are born, die and open their contours against an exact present." "Play and Theory of the *Duende*," lecture delivered in Buenos Aires, 1933.

60
Phoebe, in numerous conversations and publications.