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Edited by Peter Trnka

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If Not Now, When?

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Peter Trnka

Preamble

A world on edge. Or several worlds, depending on decisions, cuts to be made, concerning existence. A question?

Times between thought and sign transpire rapidly, overcoming—like machine gun fire **- - -** starting notions. Calling for the work to be done. Outdone by "what is happening."

Call it the world or events, if that language does not bind, restrict, or interfere. Noting—following our first critical note, "The Translator's (In)visibility in Julio Cortázar's 'Letter to a Young Lady in Paris', " one of several works co-authored and contributed by Bilal Hamamra, this time with Asala Mayaleh, also working here and now in the West Bank—that any translation, expression, gesture is not the same as what it is about, is (it might be said) impossible. Knowing that what is impossible becomes possible, often by the efforts of youth, the untired, the yet-to-be-exhausted.

The political ontologies of visibility and invisibility, the powers, good or ill, of ontologies, conceptions and frameworks, infra and superstructures, introduce themselves.

Time to get the work out, to let voices speak their words before—interruption, cessation, blockage, death. Thank you for the urgency in knowing this is always. Where is most pressing? What are the intense tendencies? Only little time for introducing, advertising, commenting, or jumping on the back of others' work, but this is always the case. The urgent timely untimely. What?

The unthemed theme: the world, a world of and for the poor, on edge, teetering on edges: proliferating, spreading edges, transforming, revolving.

Main

Thinking revolutionary tendencies and the coincidence of revolution and time, we cannot do and now we must do without Antonio Negri. I never met you in person, Toni, but I have lived with your thoughts and desires since I began to think.

In mourning to carry the spirit, to live with ghosts in preparation for better worlds. Preparing for future hauntological work, from South Africa by way of Fazil Moradi, let us phrase it with Jacques Derrida's voice:

> First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by localizing the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization …) finds itself caught up in this work of mourning. (Derrida 1994, 9)

And in the language of the event, though this is not necessary, a definition of this hauntology that replaces ontology, as Derrida urged Negri to do:

> Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* of the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (10)

Negri stayed instead with thinking time, ontologizing temporally and differently. We do not mind occupying (and sometimes fleeing) the nether-region, the indistinct zone between hauntology and political ontology.

The question. The question of the mark. The diacritical. The dash — - -

In Lujain Aqra and Bilal Hamamra's "Letter from Palestine: Resistance through Storytelling in Refaat Al-Areer's 'If I Must Die'," the dash cuts on the margin, an indication and a fragmentation. Thinking through the work of mourning.

In mourning, long live the martyrs, in this case, Yousef Dawwas, killed 14-11-23, and Refaat Al-Areer, killed 6-12-23. Knowing that "death is not absence" (11). On come the hauntologies, funeral oratories, *epitaphios logos*. Knowing, practicing that is, that "the strikethrough (dash) that traces it retains something of the stroke; the strikethrough remains writing—a vestige of a vanishing act and a paradoxical trace of a future-to-come" (11).

For Al-Areer in "If I Must Die," death is not an interruption, but narrative. Here, the continual work of refusal and resistance to colonial violence, oppression, and metaphysics, and continual imagining of Palestine: Aqra and Hamamra invoke in this regard Tahrir Hamdi's work *Imagining Palestine* (2023). Life is not grand narrative but little things:

> "If I must die, you have
> To tell my story, to sell my things,
> To buy a piece of cloth and some strings"   (Alareer 2014, 537)

All work is a machine to note—the need for future work. The collective nature of work is obvious to anyone immersed in it—given enough thought.

Monster Substance neocolonial settler-Capitalism: originating in primitive accumulation, that is, violence and theft, it continues in violence, bloodshed,

death, death, and continual death, production of death, the zombification of the living, capture and enslavement of all and everything—it wishes.

Spectres, ghosts of coming communism, global without national or international state formations and apparatuses—direct, non-representative democratic power, the living ethical expression of the multitudes. Cosmo-communism.

The violence of abstraction and political ontology is acted out in Margherita Pascucci's dialogue, "Capital and Poverty." Imagine Capital—and hence its epoch, Capitalism—dying. Pascucci acts it out for us, at the hands of Poverty. To do so, transvalue what Capital has formed, identified, valued, and made invisible. The power of the poor, the power of the working and unemployed and alienated and disenfranchised and homeless and migrant and stateless and underground multitudes, immeasurable and beyond *ratio* and *arché*: "the common is the immeasurable, being the plus of life" (29). Life is a plurality of singularities: "In material thought the principle of the singular becomes the world, and the world is an eternal and singular fragment of us all" (30). The real is the mad assemblage of wishes, wills, and desires: "poverty creates through difference and political love" (31).

People and shadows, things and their shadows, always in two worlds: the living-dead and the dying-living, white colonial capitalism and the other, center and margin, aboveground and underground, visible and invisible. Ryan Johnson in "The Cave of Whiteness: Du Bois, Baldwin, and Wright Recast Plato's Imagery" investigates the figures of white and Black thought in an experimental recasting of the philosophical canon. Affirming twilight thinking: the obscure, perplexed, dialectically or otherwise knotted. To be able to think—if one enjoys the privileges of whiteness—"the dangerous delusions of whiteness" (53).

In Mehdi Belhaj Kacem's "Nihilism, Parody, Profanation," translated by Conor O'Dea, Capital is a *cultual* phenomenon, cultural and cultish, and Capitalism the "permanent cult" of the religion of nihilism (64). The margin, the more that escapes Capital, is here *sur-jouissance*, passion that blocks/interrupts representation. The demand for all to appear is democratic fascism, Fukuyamian capitalist-possessive-individualist-Hegelianism.

The contrary right to disappear, in Kacem, appears decisionistic and Schmittian (perhaps still too Badiouian) in its thinking—of the event—as "the sequence where all are sovereigns" (68). If this means something like the anarchic distribution of material singularities, then so be it for now—in this quick written note—now dry, as Friedrich Nietzsche would say (1917, 236). The wet thought transferred to papyrus or an equally hydrophobic medium, like an electrical net.

Thank you, poets, for always it seems setting formal features of languages before us, as reminders of at-one-and-the-same-time language's powers and limits/failings. Transdisciplinary and experimental on purpose, not by accident. Juxtaposition and mutation of media for the purposes of creation. Letters and comments and articles and interventions all gray-zoned and intersecting.

Martha White's "Slide 9. Hypatia": linguistic or visual? Both. Sliding violence in metaphysical description: "a sister is just a stranger who hasn't es-

tranged you yet," from Benjamin Dugdale's "hornlet." Sonja Boon's "forgettings" takes me to think of dream-language in connection to the putative universal language of thought or *homolegein*. Or some original and hence transcendentally important (or not) mother-tongue. Do I have one? Ontological cuts. Or some proliferation of utterances, a multitude of noises, musics, and senses. Multi-media expressive, multilingual.

Language—this one right now—does not always do what the speaker wants. Amany Abdelrazek-Alsiefy shows us by reading Leila Aboulela that Muslim women differ and "harem" does not designate. And Hamad Abdullah Nazar points us to the variations on variations of Punjabi music in Radha Kapuria.

I dream in many languages, and they feel and look different. Ozayr Saloojee's "The Little Things" shows much of this, bricolages such—similarities and differences, hardly ever repeating identities. **- - -** Even the machine gun bullets differ. As Deleuze says, "no two grains of dust are absolutely identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolvers score their bullets in the same manner" (1994, 26). An intense atmosphere surrounds the amputation-(eating-writing-conversing-kitchen-)table.

Artists uminoko: collective assemblage with blurred edges and precise images. "ANYONE" questions—games—with the image. Reminding of *Discourse Figure* by Jean-François Lyotard (1971). Reminder: be a nominalist; the *logos* is clear and distinct only with huge losses, as Heraclitus figures by way of the obscure. Many obscurities. Just gaming, setting the rules or laws, making decision cuts. Wishing and willing. "JUST FUCKING."

What are the potentials (now) of an image? Of serial images? Of multi-layered, edgily connected, and interpenetrated worlds of images? What are the futures of images?

Metaphysical pundits—why still taken so seriously? Ontological terrors—treat them like two-year-olds.

Origins and prejudices: where are you from? Where are you *from*? Reverse direction. Complex question. Everywhere and nowhere. Cosmo-utopianism. Julia Sushytska's "Becoming Homeless in Language" is personal for me. My mother has always told me I was Czech and Russian. I don't remember my grandfather, her father, speaking about it. He spoke Czech to me. As did my mother. I believe she also spoke Russian. I am still unsure how much Ukrainian she speaks, if any, for multiple, overlapping, overdetermining reasons. My grandfather, on my mother's side, Dobřicky, was born in Odessa.

Welcome Heraclitus, of the *homolegein* and at the same time the obscure (contra Descartes), Deleuze's clear and obscure (1994): the living paradox of thought, having to work out knots as new knots are knotted—Penelope's web—the cross-verses, the living real complications.

The power—danger—violence—of a clear and distinct dividing line is shown—shown well, that is indicated but not blindingly, hence clear but still in need of thinking through, so somewhat obscure, not crystal blindingly unsullied unprotected burning fire in the receptor eyes, namely twilight thinking—in the conversation between Edward Casey and Michael Broz, "Borders, Phenome-

nology, and Politics Interview." Political configurations are and are not real (Karl Marx and Ernst Cassirer overlapping somewhat, in the fractally multiplied edgy border zones, on the myth of the state). In other, better, words, real has a time-location stamp. Real here and now. As any talk of nations should make obvious. Perhaps a central tension, paradox: the insistent call for national identity and belonging and the continual fluctuation of geopolitical lines. Hence the necessity, for the sake of definiteness, of the microlocal, the as-specified-in-real-gesture-so-as-to-avoid-indelible-errors-brought-by generalization/abstraction-or-the-will-to-universality-or-god-wish.

In a word, anarcho-communist-nominalist in the sense of a real anarchic distribution of multiplicities and the political distribution of multiplicities locally, not by way of the withered/destroyed state. In other words, a plasticity, as described by Catherine Malabou (2005)—see Conor O'Dea on Malabou on anarchy as the haunting of politics, below.

Militantly nominalist and microlocal global: Bohemian. Working people at risk. Universal precarity, almost. On the level of the real: people, desires, actions. Political ontology. Ontological infection. Ontological terrorism.

Cutting thoughts. Decisions, wishes, wills. Setting rules for the game. Playing around with things (images, people, images of people—the slides, violations, rapid). Is the thinking in the linking or in the gaps between? In the unstated and understated?

The futures—not stock shares but material-imaginary plenipotent worlds—of the poor, the badly voiced and silenced, marginalized, pushed to and over the edge. What of those?

End

Thank you, students, here and everywhere. Dedicated to the student occupations here at Memorial University St. John's Campus in 2024; to the teacher of the future, Antonio Negri; and to my mother, Nina Trnka, *neé* Dobřicky.

Biography

Peter Trnka is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Memorial University. He has taught at Karlova University, Prague as well as The University of Toronto and York University. He has published scholarly philosophical and transdisciplinary articles in various international journals, most recently the chapter "Disjoint and Multiply: Deleuze and Negri on Time" in the edited volume *Deleuze and Time*, as well as poetry and a cookbook.

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Letter from Palestine: Resistance through Storytelling in Refaat Al-Areer's "If I Must Die"

Lujain Aqra and Bilal Hamamra

Introduction

Since the Israeli Zionist occupation of Palestine in 1948, Palestinians have always sought to bring to life the lost Palestinian landscapes through their literary texts. Literature enabled Palestinians to regain the lost Palestinian areas figuratively and to reflect on the traumatic experience of living under the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian story is a story of displacement and uprootedness. As Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé point out, "the tale of Palestine from the beginning until today is a simple story of colonialism and dispossession, yet the world treats it as a multifaceted and complex story—hard to understand and even harder to solve" (2015, 12). The Israeli military occupation aims to assert control over Palestine, both physically and linguistically. By dominating the narratives, Israel positions Palestinians as outsiders in public discourse and history. However, many Palestinian authors such as Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, and Edward Said, among many others, have emphasized the pivotal role of narration in the (re)construction of the nation and, in the words of Tahrir Hamdi, "imagining Palestine," which alludes "to people who indeed existed historically and concretely on this land" (2022, 2).

This letter sheds light on the Palestinian martyr Refaat Al-Areer, who dedicated his life to telling the Palestinian story to challenge the Israeli project. Refaat Al-Areer was born in the Al-Shuja'iyya neighbourhood east of Gaza City in 1979. He earned a Bachelor's degree in English from the Islamic University of Gaza in 2001, followed by a Master's degree in Comparative Literature from the University of London in 2007. He then completed his PhD at Putra University in Malaysia. Afterwards, Al-Areer worked as a professor of English literature at the Islamic University.

Al-Areer co-edited the book *Gaza Unsilenced* (2015) with the Palestinian writer Laila El-Haddad. The book included a collection of articles by Palestinian and international writers interested in Palestinian affairs. They discussed the Israeli aggression on Gaza in 2014, during which one of Al-Areer's brothers was martyred. The book featured contributions from historians and prominent writers from Palestine and around the world, such as Rashid Khalidi, Richard Falk, Ramzy Baroud, and Hatem Kanaaneh, among others. The contributions

from such a wide range of authors and scholars helped to shed light on the complexities of the situation in Gaza and its significance in the broader context of Palestinian resistance and struggle for rights. In 2015, Al-Areer was also among the contributors to the establishment of the "We Are Not Numbers" initiative, which aimed to document the lives of the Palestinian people under occupation, moving away from the statistical discourse that often reduces people's bitter experiences to mere numbers. The initiative included several young writers from Gaza who expressed the realities of life under siege and war. Among them was the young writer Yousef Dawwas, who actively contributed his writing to the initiative. He was also one of the martyrs of the ongoing war on the Gaza Strip, as his home was targeted by an Israeli airstrike on 14 November 2023.

It is noteworthy that since the beginning of the ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Al-Areer, who was martyred along with eight members of his family in his sister's house, dedicated all his energy to conveying the true picture of the genocide committed by Israel against the citizens of Gaza. He published reports in English on his X (formerly Twitter) account detailing the Zionist massacres and the human rights violations committed by the Israeli army. Al-Areer, in his compelling Ted Talk titled "Stories Make Us," comments on the importance of oral storytelling in documenting the history and culture of Indigenous people living under colonialism. He poignantly says, "we love the story because it is about our homeland, and we love our homeland even more because of our stories" (Al-Areer 2015, 13:56-14:03).

In his book *Gaza Writes Back* (2014a), Al-Areer presents stories written by young Palestinians to empower the Palestinian narrative in the face of its erasure by Zionists. The book was not merely a collection of texts on the themes of war and the resistance against Israeli genocidal crimes. It was an attempt to create a generation of Palestinian writers who could put into literature what had happened, relying on memory and personal experience, which were foundational in these stories. Collectively, these stories reflect, in one way or another, the martyr poet's own vision and conception of the relationship between literature and the Palestinian cause. Al-Areer concludes his article "Gaza Writes Back: Narrating Palestine" (2014b) with a poem titled "If I Must Die," a poem that went viral on social media when Al-Areer was assassinated in the Israeli raids on Gaza on 6 December 2023.

In "If I Must Die," the speaker's contemplation of mortality transforms the Palestinian story, immortalizing it as a narrative of hope and resilience rather than a rupture of narration:

> If I must die, you have to live
> To tell my story, to sell my things
> To buy a piece of cloth and some strings,
> (Make it white with a long tail)
> So that a child, somewhere in Gaza
> While looking heaven in the eye,
> Making it blush under his gaze,
> Awaiting his Dad who left in a blaze–

And bid no one farewell
Not even to his flesh, not even to himself—
Sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
And thinks for a moment an angel is there
Bringing back love.
If I must die, let it bring hope.
Let it be a tale.

(Al-Areer, 2014b, 537)

Here, death is depicted not merely as a natural life event but as a consequence of colonial technology and systematic oppression. The word choice of "must" in "If I must die" signals an inevitable sense of death.

Building on the relationship between colonialism and the death of the colonized, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian examines the politicization of Palestinian death in the context of Jacques Derrida's "topolitology of mourning" (2015). The dead body of the colonized becomes part of this "geography" that must be controlled. Shalhoub-Kevorkian offers a reading of the boundaries of the colonized body beyond its physical existence, which Al-Areer explores in his poem through the ghost of death that haunts the poem through lost farewells and the desire to knit a story out of death. Colonial politics are built on controlling the space (*topos*) of burial. The burial policies of the colonized body either permit stealing the bodies of martyrs or prohibit the family from retrieving their children's dead bodies, forbidding native Palestinians from mourning (Shalhoub-Kevorkian). The "flesh" of the father in "And bid no one farewell/Not even to his flesh" points towards his deceased body, to which his child could not "bid farewell." The father's body was probably not buried due to the colonial policing of death. However, what colonial powers cannot achieve is control over the ghost of the colonized body. Here, the dead body of the Palestinian martyr is an active agent, feeding the possibility of its return to life. The child will remain "awaiting his father" even if only in his memories, and the memory of his lost father will become a motif for continuing resistance. The speaker here contemplates the event of his death as a novel space of life through the continuation of his tale: "If I must die, let it bring hope/Let it be a tale." The syntactic choices in the poem reflect a desire for autonomy in a strictly controlled political and cultural sphere resulting from the Israeli occupation. Al-Areer uses possessive pronouns such as "you" and "my" as a vehicle of self-narration to tell his story without the influence of colonial ideology.

"Flying a kite" reveals an image of autonomy as it, like telling stories, is beyond the appropriation and control of the Israeli occupation. The symbolic act of flying a kite expresses freedom and hope for Gaza's children in the attempt to retake Gaza's sky from Israel's dominating drones. The kite becomes a metaphor for resilience. The power of lexical choices lies in their capacity to translate and immortalize experiences, enabling them to transcend the mortal confines of their speaker and to be preserved within the narrative.

The speaker narrates the experience of his expected death from a subjective point of view which highlights a personal experience: "If I must die, you have to live." Discussing subjective points of view in the Palestinian canon, Aman

Sium and Eric Ritskes (2013) propose that indigenous storytelling, because of its very subjective nature, challenges the dominance of colonial narrative. Such subjectivity threatens Eurocentric claims of objectivity. This threatening position that indigenous storytelling holds arises from locating the story-teller within the subjective sphere, a space for indigenous communities outside and beyond the realm of the colonizing empire and its spurious objective narratives. The poem reflects a desire to tell stories beyond death.

In narrating the father's departure, who "left in a blaze/And bid no one farewell," the poet uses dashes at the end of the lines 8-9. Dashes serve as a symbol of the harsh realities of displacement and separation suffered by Palestinians. Caitlyn Bartz (2021) argues that dashes create physical and spatial fragmentation. The poem portrays through dashes the reality of spatial fragmentation in Palestine caused by the Israeli domination of space as manifested in the Israeli apartheid walls and roadblocks. In "Awaiting his Dad who left in a blaze–/And bid no one farewell/Not even to his flesh, not even to himself—" dashes create an audible silence, evoking a melancholic atmosphere beyond the expressiveness of words. Al-Areer's employment of dashes serves as a subtle yet impactful portrayal of the emotions of loss and sorrow that paints the scene of the father's departure. Positioning the dashes at the ends of the lines creates a meaningful silence and a sense of separation. The fragmentation of these lines narrates the experience of displacement in the context of two farewells. The first farewell is that of the child and his father, who "bid no one farewell" and "left in a blaze," so the child is left to battle his absence alone. The second farewell is an internal one separating the father from himself, portraying the impact of displacement on the individual's sense of self. Here, "not even to his flesh, not even to himself—" signifies a separation from the father's own physical being. Dashes in the poem become a vehicle to portray the experience of displacement in the two farewells.

Death is presented as a story of hope, for children will grow to narrate the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Al-Areer discusses Palestinian *Sumud* in *Gaza Writes Back*, and he argues that stories from Palestine are an integral part of what Palestinians call "*Sumud*," which he translates as "steadfastness" (2014a). *Sumud* is an anti-colonial mode of thought and practice that resists colonial hegemonic policies through everyday practices (Hamdi 2022). *Sumud* helps Palestinians manage their everyday lives despite the threat of Israeli colonialism (Johannessen 1970). The poem manifests *Sumud* through the incorporation of daily life routines, such as "sell[ing] my things," which depicts a practice of commerce despite the specter of death roaming around. The image of the child flying a kite reflects the steadfastness of Palestinians in finding beauty in life despite the horrific circumstances. For Palestinians, death is a tale that pleads for telling. Al-Areer constructs a space for atemporal survival in his stories, emphasizing that Palestinians live to tell stories of hope, loss, resistance, and survival.

The specter of death in Palestinian life is portrayed in "If I Must Die" through the contemplation of mortality and continuity. The image of the longing child and the portrayal of the angelic presence aim to construct an image of

hope. The speaker's adamant desire for survival is preserved in tales that narrate hope and resilience. In the trajectory of Al-Areer's writings, and precisely in "If I Must Die," death becomes a tale of Palestinian *Sumud* and hope.

Al-Areer's writing opens up a space for reflecting on the ways in which Palestinians, even in death, continue to influence and participate in the social and political realms, suggesting that the act of communication and the expression of ideas are not strictly bound by the physical presence of the speaker. This challenges the notion of silence in death, presenting an alternative view where the martyrs continue to speak through their lasting impacts, writings, and the ways in which their lives have shaped collective consciousness and cultural narratives. In other words, death is not absence; the strikethrough (dash) that traces it retains something of the stroke; the strikethrough remains writing—a vestige of a vanishing act and a paradoxical trace of a future-to-come.

Biographies

Lujain Aqra is an undergraduate student of English Language and Literature at An-Najah National University in Palestine. She is interested in the representation of trauma and violence in modernist and contemporary Palestinian literature.

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uminoko on Their Work: *IS ANYONE HERE?* (2024)

(Black and White Photographic Print 8"x10")

uminoko

Let's play a game. We wish we could do something more; we wish we could say something impactful, something worth your time, but to tell you the honest truth, we have tried that already. And we failed. But we had fun doing it, so we were thinking maybe you could join along.

Imagine a game of chess, except there's no chess board or chess pieces, and there are not even two people playing against each other. There are three. So that leaves us with three players wondering what the fuck they are gathered here for, yet there is still the clock ticking. It's Somebody's turn.

Poor Somebody. They are confused, and they are expecting to do something with their hands, so they begin to write. They probably write something like, "Everybody is an Artist." Then they whack the clock; they pass the responsibility onto the next player.

Nobody knows what to do. Or rather, Nobody knows what to write. It's not hard to counter when the page before you is no longer empty, especially when you are Nobody, emptiness's accomplice. "You mean 'Everybody wants to be an Artist,'" responds Nobody.

Now Everybody is up; they were thrown into this game without much consent, and their name has already been written. It wouldn't be right if they didn't try to make sense of themselves. Plus, Everybody needs to have a little fun, so they join in accord. "No, that's not quite it," writes Everybody. "You see, we are better off adopting the role of the Artist. It's a tricky situation we are in, but we are in the same situation nonetheless. Whether or not it is necessary to adopt the role is beside the point, what's important is that we all had to write something; clearly, there's a certain attitude that we share."

From here, the game may become more defined. Somebody might quip, "there is no such thing as important people; there are only important players." The players may continue onwards toward a proper delineation of who will take the next turn, they may create rules limiting how many words can be said, and they may even conceive of a name for their newly found game. But that's just one possibility.

Maybe Nobody will play out of order. Maybe they will point out how the sky appears differently to eyes that only wish to look; maybe they will wait for

the wind to blow the pencil across the paper; or maybe they will write "I already know The End," as they proceed to smash the clock into a million little pieces.

The fact of the matter is this: the game is different for Everybody. However, they know it must be played, for Everybody knows that we cannot escape the finger that points both skywards and inwards. So, they ask the onlookers where they want to go, they seek guidance from their friends, and they knock on the door of Eternity's single wish. And if they find it? They laugh and go hide again.

That's all we have for you: a game we tried to play in the hope that we could write something useful. Or maybe what we really wanted was to find another player. …

Anybody?

Biography

We are uminoko (u-me-new-co). uminoko is a network of writers, painters, photographers, and designers; we are a network of teachers, janitors, butchers, bankers, and welders; we are a network of thinkers, dancers, actors, and architects; we are a network of anarchists, capitalists, communists, and criminals; we love this world but hate its ways. What unites us is that we share a common hope; the goals we mark for ourselves stem from this wish. We bring ourselves into form when that wish may be fulfilled. We still are not quite sure what this wish is, but we all know it is there. We bring it with us wherever we go. Maybe you do too.

Today is for tomorrow; and tomorrow can be seen with shining ocean eyes.

Until then,

uminoko • 海の子 • ocean child

CAPITAL and POVERTY

Margherita Pascucci

Al Mia Maestro, Toni Negri

I've been like this for days: I look asleep and I'm not, I look dead and I'm not.
I've been like this for days, but I know that you, Poverty, are here.
They tell you I don't hear, I don't understand, I don't see, but it's not like that.
I no longer have a sense of time, I, who stole time, produced it.
I was heedless of the day, of the night
and now
I don't know if it's morning, if it's evening, I barely perceive the change of light.

Nobody will understand.
No one will understand it unless I accompany it with these words.
The Capital that used money as a weapon, as a filter between itself and the world,
the Capital that produced and destroyed,
that generated and took away,
the solitary and powerful Capital,
Capital dies alone,
to leave you a strength.
Because money steals life, it captures it like loot.
And I want my disappearance to set it free.[1]

ACT I

[Silence. Capital speaks slowly, lucid but pausing. Poverty is in the corner, with a cone of shadow in front of him.]

Listen to me, so that you can release the strength that I leave you.
I am made of money, I am value.
I am an abstraction, a body that has become a ghost to flee from object to object, a desire that escapes itself like a mirage creates figures of light in the desert.
I am time which kills itself.

I express a relationship, the social relationship, which I abstract in order to dominate.
This is my task, to produce equivalence to dominate the real.

Over the years I have taken the heart of value, the abstraction of the social relationship, and the production of equivalence, and I have accelerated them to the point of making them independent entities.
This is how added value was born.

Added value is not different in nature from the value from which it arises, but it intensifies it.
Both are an abstraction of the relationship between people. However, in simple value the relationship still counts, whereas in added value the abstraction is such that it disregards the relationship constitutive of it.

The fundamental principle that composes and propels it is self-production.

Added value is self-production: with it I grasped the essential element of production and made it absolute.

In me, in it, conceiving, the plane of thought, is fundamental. But it is a thought, a conception, that subtracts the elements that compose it, so as not to leave traces, not to be grasped, not to be understood. It is a conceiving that hides and flees. A conception that obliterates its footprint as it walks on. And whilst playing with light, with desire, with images, it is a process of conceiving that disintegrates and destroys the creations of its very own conceiving.[2]

[Silence.]

When I produced added value, the knowledge of my own creation process, what I call my virtuality, had just been born. Now this virtuality, through the centuries, is eating itself, is self-combusting.
And I'm tired. My inner mechanism is exhausted.
I see, I recognize, that the abstraction I have chosen, my self-production, is a lie, a deception of reality.

I masked relationships, life, time. And I subtracted them from themselves: I subtracted relationships from relationships, life from life, time from time. I masked and subtracted, subtracted and extracted, because I abstracted.

I was born as an image of the social body, of an encounter, which I then forgot.
I was born as a cipher of a produced equivalence, worked out of differences to be valued, and I swallowed them, the differences, the workers, their work
to just exchange and store,
exchange and store.
I abstracted from the social body, and I became the self-produced value, a crystal of work.

I was the virtual, the bodyless invisible force of more and more.
I knew I was creating through destruction, but the mirage of producing, the incessant advance, was greater than one could know.

As if love moved me in my body, so was I moved by the force of the encounter between material and immaterial, between thought that forges matter and matter that pursues desire.
But I deceived them both: I forgot everything, everyone, I proceeded alone, violently, through destruction. As if inside a vortex I lived inside my self-production.

And I knew that you followed me, that you followed me like a shadow, that you were wherever I was, I knew that wherever I went I left you as a result of my presence, but I couldn't stop, I couldn't look at you.

In that hell of light and bodies it was a moment where everything stopped: my body, the vertigo of my progress, my heartbeat, time.

I saw you in the sun, covered in cardboard, and I bent down, it was a moment, you whispered:

> *Money is your original sin,[3] an all consuming sin, your mistake in knowing the common*
> *You are mistaken in money, you produce in measure dismeasure*
> *This is our difference, terrible and ferocious, the difference between the necessary and the possible*

Your words imprinted themselves on my body like wounds, like blades of light: you are like the original unabashed sin, you are the false knowledge of the common, you produce the immeasurable which will be your dissolution.

You are like original sin,
you are the error of knowledge of the common,
the ferocious measure of the dismeasure[4]
I am the necessary and you the possible

ACT II

[Capital falls asleep in a deep doze. He lies on a bed in the middle of the stage. Different images are projected on a screen in the background. They are images of his dream.[5] He speaks in the dream.]

{First image-dream: we are in ancient Greece, Money is an Idea—*I am Equality, I am Aequitas.*}

Figure 1. The golden funerary mask called *Agamemnon's Mask*, dating from 16th century BCE, found in Mycenae, Greece. Photo by ©Xuan Che, *Wikimedia Commons.* https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mask_of_Agamemnon#/media/File-%3AMaskOfAgamemnon.jpg.

I remember, you were so little. ... Ages ago, men were exchanging goods. There was reciprocity, redistribution. ... When a King came into power, when the civilization in Greece started to become a merchant civilization, you, Poverty, were born.[6]

You seemed to express two conditions: the first, destituteness, relational lack, dependence on others—in a word: the destruction of the ties of social solidarity.

The second, a kind of humbleness, a call for justice, voluntary poverty—that is, a choice of virtue.[7]

I was enjoying so much to see you embodying "disempowerment" of all kinds, but that call for justice, for naked happiness, that call to virtue irritated me, irritated me so much. ...

[Spells out:]

Penia, meskîn and *deha, faqir, darvîsh, bî kas, rash, 'anawim, 'ebyon, dal* and *misken* ... all my opposite, and my doing, brrbrrr a shiver down my spine just saying them, and yet, a languor, a subtle enjoyment.[8]

And these figures, poor them, popping up here and there in history, brandishing virtue as their sword: Socrates, *'ebyon*, Christ ... preaching voluntary poverty as self-realization ... poor things!

People of the Near East already had me in some forms,[9] but the Greeks were the first to use me, in the shape of a metal coin, a currency, thus giving birth to me, money, as concept, as common medium of exchange, *nomisma*[10]... listen how beautiful it is to pronounce me, like flowing water. ...

I was the Idea, the equality among all things, the One, the Beauty, the Good, the Just, the EQUAL. ...

What an Idea, Value! What a value will become, the Idea!

They thought, through me, to increase social relations, to ease them, but [*he sneers*] they broke them ... they made labour become the lever to equality, but indeed [*chanting softly*] they started the separation of the hand from the brain, of the product from the producer, of the brothers from the sisters ... and all this through me, through me ...

I was born as an idea, as an Idea that equals everything, that equals itself ...

[He mocks the voice of someone else:]

"By possessing the *property* of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, *money* is thus the *object* of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being. It is therefore regarded as omnipotent being. ... Money is the *procurer* between man's needs and the object, between his life and his means of life. But *that which* mediates *my* life for me, also *mediates* the existence of other people for me. For me it is the *other* person."[11]

OMNIPOTENT ESSENCE, Eh eh eh
Omnipotent Essence, that's what I am!

I am playing with you all, I am playing with the Universe
Reversing everything,
destroying, rebuilding,
destroying, rebuilding

Margherita Pascucci

I could change everything into its contrary,
make free the slave,
and the poor wealthy

[Singing:]

"What is here?
Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?
... Thus much of this will make
Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
Base noble, old young, coward valiant

This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions, bless th'accused,
Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves,
And give them title, knee, and approbation
With senators on the bench

... Come, damned earth,
thou common whore of mankind, that puts odds
Among the rout of nations; I will make thee
Do thy right nature."[12]

ACT III

[Capital continues to sleep. A small child, Common, escapes from the legs of Poverty, his mother, who is still in the corner, and goes to Capital's bedside. Capital wakes up, half gets up, but doesn't see him, just senses a shadow. Common's voice is perceived by Capital as many voices.]

You abstract and thus renounce the community

Value, your synthetic abstraction, allows for exploitation to enter human relations

My intimate rhythm, of nature, of life, is broken, crushed, for a quantity that nullifies

In extracting value, you renounce the univocity of nature, of mankind

Breaking the bond with me, the Common, suddenly you make humanity alone

Time, marvelous machine, a rhythm given to nature, an interiority: bloom and wither, blossom, ripen and rot

Is thus extroverted, counted, made a clock

Give and take, measure, dismeasure, each one left with her lot. …

[Capital, as if talking to a shadow:]

I was Sovereign, the sovereign of an Idea

[A voice:] The false idea of money as common being, while it is the common whore,

[Another voice:] "Wealth is but a painted mocked dream," a non-existent mystery

[Third voice:] The body of the debtor, an endogamous anticipation of his, her misery. …

[Common:] You have never contained anything but yourself, a stolen principle of self-production. …

You've traded virtuality and blood, virtuality and blood,

You've submerged lives in uproar, you've suspended them in noise. ...

Fragile illusion of an event ... wealth … fragile illusion of an event ... *but a painted, mocked*

dream …

illusion,

of the event,

that does not create, does not produce ...

but repeats itself, it just repeats itself

and never accomplishes

but pretends

to be

ful-fil-
ment.

ACT IV

[Capital has fallen back in the bed, still asleep. Common lies nestled at his mother's feet.]

{Second image-dream: we are in the Middle Ages—*I am Valor superadiunctus*.}

[Capital speaks while still dreaming:]

Then, the Romans, in their Empire, with the advent of that religion, Christianity, and its emphasis on charity, they invented the "love of the poor" ... the "cheerful giver," someone prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of the community, can you imagine?
An *isotés*, a "levelling out," an equalizing of resources between the brethren.[13]...
Ah ah ah
Ah ah ah
Can you imagine?

Ah Ah Ah

Figure 2. *Saint Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds*, by Giotto (1297-1299), in Storie di San Francesco, Basilica Superiore, Assisi, Italy. Photo by ©Giotto, Wikimedia Commons. https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predica_agli_uccelli.

[Capital wakes up, not remembering anything from the dream. He turns away so as not to look at Poverty, speaking slowly:]

We were in the desert, it was almost dawn.

I was half asleep and saw two figures approaching. They were light, they seemed disembodied.

He spoke to the birds, they understood him, they followed him in flight like a chorus. Her body was just an intense glow. Around them they had the sun, the moon, the stars, holding hands, dancing.

They came towards me lightly, and the trees, the animals, everything spoke, it seemed that creation was waiting for them.

I saw them undress, "I choose my sister Poverty," he said; "I choose my brother Francis," she said, "the knowledge that is freedom."

Suddenly they disappeared: the light, the birds, the forest, the moon, the sun, the stars. Darkness fell into dawn. It was a moment, I woke startled, my heart pounding: there was light again, it was tenuous, veiled. I made sure I was alive, and that I was only dreaming. But in that moment my interiority was hit, made vulnerable.

[Capital turns back to Poverty.]

You never would have believed that I too had an interiority.

I don't like showing it: it would be betraying me. I'm the one who cheats, I can't let it be otherwise.

But when your brother and sister, Francis and Claire, appeared to me in a dream, I had just created the added value and I was linking power to property, the power of the self to the property of the other.

In that uncertain hour of the unconscious, they arrived and put up resistance: "Where you place value, we produce knowledge," they told me, "where you establish ownership of the other, we ask for the right not to possess."

Thus they dissolved that intrinsic bond between the space of ownership and that of self-definition that I had strenuously tried to establish.

[Silence.]

They put me against the light, they made me vulnerable, and in that *chiaroscuro* of dawn they chose you.

[He dozes off, and resumes dreaming.]

[Voices in a choir:]

Ratio seminalem lucrosi, quam capitale vocamus
Ratio seminalem lucrosi, quam capitale vocamus
[That which is the source of profit is what we call capital]

"*Illud quod in firmo proposito domini sui est ordinatum ad aliquod probabile lucrum,*
non solum habet rationem simplicis pecunie seu rei,
sed etiam ultra hoc quemdam rationem seminalem lucri
quam communiter capitale vocamus,
et ideo non solum debet reddi simplex valor ipsius,
sed etiam valor superadiunctus."[14]

Sed etiam valor superadiunctus
Valor superadiunctus
Capital's intrinsic nature, valor superadiunctus.[15]

["That thing which, in the firm resolution of its owner, is ordered to some probable profit, not only has the simple character of money or of a good, but also, besides this, a certain seminal character of profit, which we commonly call "capital." And for that reason, not only the simple value of the thing ought to be returned, but also the superadded value."]

ACT V

[Capital dreams again. Poverty is still in the corner, silent. Common sneaks out of his mother's shadow and approaches the bed again. He looks at Capital intently:]

{Third image: we are in the 16th and 19th centuries—*I am the first and second Poor Laws.*}

[Capital is dressed in a Queen's dress on a throne and declaims:]

I. Be yt enacted by the Aucthority of this presente Parlyamente That the Churchwardens of every Parishe … shall be called **Overseers of the Poore** … and they … shall take Order … **for setting to worke of the Children of all such whose Parentes shall not by the saide persons be thought able to kepe and maytaine their Children**. And also all such persons maryed or unmaryed as having no means to mayntayne them … shall be lawfull … **to bynde such Children as aforesayde to be Apprentises** … to erect buylde and sett upp in fitt and convenyent places of Habitacion in such Waste or Common … **convenyent Howses of Dwellinge** for the **sayde ympotent**

Poore … And be yt further enacted … [t]hat … no person or persons whatsoever shall goe wandringe abroade and begge in any place whatsoever by Licence or withowte, **upon payne to be esteamed taken and punyshed as a Rogue**.[16]

II. And be it also further enacted by the auctority aforesaid, That all persons calling them-selves Schollers going about begging, all Seafaring-men pretending losses of their Shippes or Gooodes on the Sea going about the Country begging, **all idle persons going about in any Cuntry eyther begging or using any subtile Crafte** … or fayning themselves to have knowledge in Phisiognomye, Palmestry or other like crafty Scyence … all Juglers Tynkers Peddlers and Petty Chapmen wandring abroade; **all wandering persons and common Labourers** being persons able in bodye using loytering and refusing to worcke for such reasonable Wages as it is taxed … **shalbe taken adjudjed and deemed Rogues Vagabondes and Sturdy Beggars**, and shall susteyne such Payne and Punyshment as by this Acte is in that behalfe appointed … **be stripped naked from the middle upwardes and shall be openly whipped until his or her body be bloudye**, and shalbe forthwith sent from Parish to Parish by the Officers of every the same the nexte streighte way to the Parish where he was borne … t**here to put him or her selfe to labour as a true Subject ought to do**. … After which whipping the same person shall have a Testymonyall … mencioning the day and place of his or her Punyshment, and the place wherunto such person is lymitted to go, and by what tyme the said person is lymitted to passe thither at his perill.[17]

Figure 3. "*Quelque unes de nos bêtes de somme*," by Jean Ignace Isidore Grandville, lithography, *Les Métamorphose du Jour* 70: 1828-1829. Photo by ©Garnier Frères. https://www.famsf.org/artworks/quelques-unes-de-nos-betes-de-somme-plate-13-opposite-page-69-in-the-book-les-metamorphoses-du-jour-new-ed-paris-garnier-freres-1869.

ACT VI

[Silence—Capital wakes up. He looks, as in a mind's fog, for Poverty. Common is back on their mother's lap, who, this time, is sitting on the floor.]

[Capital:]

Was it a dream? Could it have been a dream?

[Common's voice multiplies itself in echoes, like a chorus:]

You use poverty, you use men's and women's bodies and minds
You abstract to deceive them
You possess the property, you mediate the existence, you express the omnipotent essence
of their lives
You create a space of ownership, a space of appropriation of the otherness
You are the possible and we the necessary
Work, labour
Measure and dismeasure of the Excess

[Capital, as if he hadn't heard Common and the voices, to Poverty, still hidden in the shadows:]

But do you know why I choose the possible? Do you know why I choose the possible and create a sterile double of reality under the illusion of expanding it, while I embed it in a false image, in a mirage?

Because it is precisely in the plane of the possible that abstraction finds itself more at ease, inside the mirage it is free to reproduce itself, regardless of reality.

[Singing softly:]

I will make you diamonds
of centuries
light laminate

Diamonds of centuries
Light laminate. ...

I love producing, producing glitter! For this I abstracted.
I abstracted from time, from work, from the common, from the relationships that I expressed.
I abstracted to divide and separate the life of each from that of all, and thus am able to abuse it overall.

I have woven an unknown weave of which you don't see the beginning, the end, but only an infinite circuit of haves and owes.
I leveraged the most fragile and delicate of relationships, the relationship that everyone has with oneself, and I made it accidental, no longer an eternal substance, but a solitary event.
This was my fault, my sin, incarnating money to its extreme. This was *its* error of knowledge, *my* error of knowledge, which I reproduced and reproduced, creating distorted relationships, confusing the possible with the real, deforming the *potentia* of the virtual with an actuality already dead.

In money I have produced a world of disembodied vestiges, the unreal.

I made man, the world, nature, events of themselves, the upside-down reflection of an outside-trap.

[Capital passes away in the dream.]

{Fourth image: we are in the 20th and 21st centuries—*I am the differential field of immanence.*}

Figure 4. Peter Yankl Conzen, somewhere in India, probably the 1980's. Photo by ©Margherita Pascucci.

[Capital exits the dream, gets up halfway in bed, and cries out:]

I produced a system of capture
Of capture

[Quieter.]
Of capture

[He falls back exhausted.]

And as a shadow resists the light of day, you now resist in me, like that dawn in a dream.

ACT VII

[Capital is exhausted, speaks softly:]

Come closer, I don't see you.
They say I feel but I don't know what I feel.
Thoughts are fragmented, they come in waves.
I don't see you, but I know you're here.

[Continues slowly, lucid, still:]

When I saw you in the crowd, in the midst of people, everything stopped.

In that hell of heat, of confusion, of bodies; in that hell of trees with red flowers and putrid lakes between the buildings; in the midst of the chaos, the poverty that is hunger, the poverty that is violence, the poverty that is enslavement, that is loneliness, you were there, still, a sharp blade of light of a single material thought: the common is bursting everywhere, the common is the immeasurable, that which I masked.

An immeasurable that comes to terms with time, with distance, with insurmountable misery.

An immeasurable that still dreams of me, because it is immersed in the mirage that I continue to procure. An immeasurable that I saw for the first time pressing, trying to get out of the mirage as if from a shadow, and struggle, struggle, struggle as if for a better life. My lie.

There, it was clear to me that in the face of the abstraction which I produced now exists a material thought, a thought of the body and an affection of the mind, which has a new desire.

It is a collective fragment, it is a singular chorality, where nature is time. A time where I don't count, to which I am a stranger. And while my abstraction wavers, dazzles, this time of material life puts it against the light: there is a thought of the body and an affection of the mind, the common is the immeasurable, being of the plus of life.

[Closes his eyes.] Your words come back to me like an echo
Material thought is composed of the only real property we have, the common property of our body and mind. ...

And while there is a silence of matter in motion, there is a silence of material thought. The silence of material thought is an equally profound silence, it is a silence that in silence creates. It is a silence that in imagining resists my up-roar. It is a silence that becomes music, and by composition dissolves the space of appropriation on which power feeds. In material thought the principle of the singular becomes the world, and the world is an eternal and singular fragment of us all.

[Break. Then he resumes with the same firmness, with the same calm:]

The strength that I leave you is the immeasurable itself.

It's a bet: that you can make it a true creation, the creation of a new system that gives the common its body again, that body that I stole from you and made a bloody image of the virtual. …

I turned creation upside down, like in a magic box

I saw you fleeing in the streets of the market, amidst the noise, the dust, the vehicles running, crowding.

I turned creation upside down, like in a magic box

I saw you asleep in the sun, on the street, among the cartons

I turned creation upside down

And here, in the midst of this daily hell, where humanity is a remnant, life is kept alive.

Because one still dreams in the street.

[Pronounces in a powerful, almost choked voice:]

I was Capital, I overturned creation,
I produced human misery, the excess of the immeasurable which now takes over and shakes me

I was Money, the money that mocks everything, that reduces everything to nothing, and while it only makes itself immortally fruitful, it forces every human being into need, labour, and hunger.

I never feared you, Poverty, never! Not when I produced misery, nor in the good of the common, nor in the revolutions, nor in the multitudes that swarm. …

[Pause, then resumes, almost whispering:]

Yet in the slums of the world I have seen life teeming in the midst of death. A continuous grappling with destruction, which creativity strives to make organic or to transform to use. Creativity is composite, it is common, it doesn't exist without composition.

And yours, the creativity of poverty, is transversal, collective and transversal, time. Poverty creates through difference and political love, both material, both never equal to themselves, both coupling with one another, body of the other's mind, to make one of the self.

Its time is a poor time, a material time, enveloped in silence yet immersed in noise. It is a time whose dimension is perceived while walking through it. Light abstracts, but everything is inside matter, the effort of manual work, surviving the day, reflection, thought—everything is inside matter as it is inside the light: time for work and idleness, nature, the colour, the power of black and white, the shadow, the hunger, love itself, the sweat.

Of a free equivalence, the mocked dream.

[Capital rises to his waist, leaning towards her, raising his voice again:]

Is this your strength, eh, the denunciation of value? Is it yours, the final word on value?

[Halfway between delirium, mocking, with a smile, he mimics her:]

You, Capital, establish property at the heart of the "I"
I, Poverty, undermine property, smashing it with the cause of the self, the persevering desire

You Capital weave the reality of the world into the possible of money and produce a second illusory reality
I, Poverty, replace the possible of money with the life of what is free and therefore necessary

You, Capital, are value, abstraction of the common,
And I, Poverty, am material knowledge, a force of composition that puts against the light your lie. …

[Throws himself down, exhausted, breathless. When he starts talking again, he is delirious:]

I see you sleeping until late in the morning, covered in cardboard in the sun. I see you get up, cross the street in bare feet. Barefoot, heedless of the cars that pass you by, of the men on the sidewalk. Careless, calm, like a queen, you touch the ground firmly, head held high, distant.

There is no smell, noise, heat that concerns you.

I look at you imploringly.

And you walk away, wrapped up in a dimension that I'll never know.

ACT VIII

[Capital has closed his eyelids, in agony, prey to nightmares. Poverty comes out of the shadows, approaches his bed, and smiling, whispers to him, caressing the hair of Common:]

Yes, I am life, fruit of what is free and necessary.

Yes, I am the material excess that escapes the abstract, deception, value.

Yes, I am true wealth and knowledge, *that which* only knows

I am no man's property but the life of all

Force of Poverty is my name,
Common is that which I am
to the destruction
that you caused
An insurgent "plus of being,"
against which you cannot be more

[She turns her back on him, takes Common by the hand, and singing, exits the scene.]

Labor of the nature's common
virtue of political love

So they lov'd, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one
Two distincts, division none
...

So, between them love did shine
...
Either was the other's mine

Property was thus appall'd
That the self was not the same;
Single's nature double name
Neither two nor one ...[18]

Neither two
Nor one
No one

[Music.]

Biography

Margherita Pascucci, PhD (2003), has published six monographs, including *Philosophical Readings of Shakespeare: "Thou Art the Thing Itself"* (Palgrave, 2013); *Macchina Capitale. Genesi e struttura dello sfruttamento* (Ombre Corte, 2022); *Causa sui. Saggio sul capitale e il virtuale* (Ombre Corte, 2009); *Potenza della povertà. Marx legge Spinoza* (Ombre Corte, 2006), foreword by Antonio Negri; translated in Persian by Foad Habibi (Qoqnoos, 2019); in English *Potentia of Poverty: Marx Reads Spinoza* (Historical Materialism Book Series, Brill, 2023); *Il tempo tessuto di Dio. Ritratto filosofico immaginario di Dacia Maraini in vari atti* (il ramo e la foglia edizioni, 2021); *Il pensiero di Walter Benjamin. Un'introduzione*, foreword by Ubaldo Fadini (Il Parnaso, 2002), and a little book of poetry, *Solidago virga aurea* (Bruno Alpini, 2023).

Notes

1. I would like to thank Paolo Evangelisti, Foad Habibi, Melissa Myambo, and Farah Zeb for their reading and insightful comments that opened my reflection to a further deepening of this text, touching themes that this dialogue "Capital and Poverty" cannot cover. Paolo Evangelisti, a specialist on Medieval economic thought, urged the reflection to pause more on involuntary poverty, the forms that Capital has in our contemporaneity on the one hand, and on the aspect of money-*aequitas*, calibrated on *necessitates*, on the other. For these fundamental aspects and for his essential study on the theme of money-*aequitas*, I refer to his entire work (2024; 2018; 2016). Foad Habibi and Melissa Myambo urged Poverty to talk. Since this was also a request from the reviewers, whom I also thank, I decided to introduce "Common," the daughter-son of Poverty. Common, though resembling *Eros*, son of *Poros* and *Penia*, was not thought along a Platonic line. It was, instead, the need to let "*bene comune*" (common good) enter the

scene, given, together with Evangelisti's thought, the experience of Melissa Myambo in Africa, of Foad Habibi in Iran, and mine in Bangladesh. The "original sin" was something that raised doubts and comments among the reviewers and for Farah Zeb. It was taken from a line in Marx's *Capital* Vol. 1 (see note 3 below). I left it as such, because I consider fundamental the moment, in Christian thought, when the "*ratio seminale*," from the field of metaphysics, comes to be conjugated also as a theological-political element. (On money and a perspective of contemporary theological economy, see Maria Grazia Turri (2014).) For a summary of the approach to the themes that traverse the dialogue between Capital and Poverty, please allow me to refer to my *Macchina Capitale. Genesi e struttura dello sfruttamento* (2022). For poverty as *potentia*, I refer to the fundamental teaching and work of Antonio Negri and, in memoriam, dedicate "Capital and Poverty" to him. For thinking poverty as *potentia*, please see his "*Kairos, alma venus, multitudo*" (2000) in *Time for Revolution* (2003). I tried to continue his insight from his preface to *Potentia of Poverty: Marx Reads Spinoza* (2023). I am grateful to Peter Trnka and *Janus Unbound* for welcoming the dialogue and for our common work. I also thank Joshua Royles for his patient, elegant, and auscultating editing work.

2. I thank Farah Zeb for her reading and this insight ("disintegrates the creations of its very own conceiving") that I include in the text.

3. "This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. … And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work" (Marx 1976, 873).

4. Zeb suggests "mismeasure," which is another beautiful insight to take into account.

5. Capital dreams as if he were the *Übermensch*, but the audience perceives only the flat narrative.

6. Allow me to refer to my "Ancient Thought" (2006): "The first use of the word 'poverty' surfaces in the Biblical world around the 10th century BC, referring to landowners who forced peasants to sell land. The term was used in the Bible, turning from adjective into noun, to indicate a situation of precariousness (physical, material, relational). This is a new condition because up to then most societies were gift-based: poverty as social condition was not present; reciprocity, redistribution, and domestic administration were the ruling principles. Then gift economies morphed into barter economies, and the concept of poverty as social condition begins to be registered (10th to 8th century BC—Book of Proverbs, 30, 8; 14, 20; 19, 4.7; 22, 2.29; 6, 9-11; 10-4, fl.; I Sam. 2, 7; Psalm 72, 12-15; Job, 24, 4-12; 5, 15). It coincides with the institution of monarchy in Israel in the 10th century BC and

the advent of merchant civilization in Greece, in the 8th and 7th centuries" (35-6).

7. See Majid Rahnema (2003).
8. Respectively, the Greek, African, Persian, and biblical words for poverty.
9. In the 13th century BCE.
10. In the 8th century BCE.
11. (Marx 1959, 120).
12. (Shakespeare 2004, 14).
13. Paul 2; Cor. 8; 2 Cor. 9.7; see Pascucci (2006).
14. Peter John Olivi (2016, 47), part III: "Points Regarding the Matter of Usurious Contracts," Sixth Point, section 63.
15. Think of the work of Peter John Olivi (2016) and the important studies on him (David Burr (1989); David Flood (2017); Giacomo Todeschini (2023; 2004; 2002; 1994; 1987); Paolo Evangelisti (2024; 2020; 2018; 2016); Michael Wolff (1994); Anna Rodolfi (2010); Marco Bartoli (2016); Alain Boureau and Sylvain Piron (1999), Odd Langholm (2010); Raymond De Roover (1974); and Amleto Spicciani (1990)). See also Oreste Bazzichi (2008, 112) and the notion of *lucrum latens* of Leonardus Lessius (1554-1623), Dutch theologian, whose main work is *De justitia et jure* (1605).
16. (Elizabeth 1597a, 346-50). This and the following are acts belonging to the old Poor Laws, the first governmental laws aimed at "managing" the poor as a social category. The old Poor Laws were issued in 16th century England, the new Poor Laws in the 19th century. See Karl Polanyi (1944).
17. (Elizabeth 1597b, 354-56).
18. (Shakespeare 1601, 25-44).

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The Cave of Whiteness: Du Bois, Baldwin, and Wright Recast Plato's Imagery

Ryan J. Johnson

Abstract

This essay seeks to locate a means for counteracting the philosophical canon by re-reading Plato's allegory of the cave with three Black thinkers—W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright. Rather than direct argumentation or strict historical analysis, my strategy attends to the images, allegories, and metaphors in Plato to unleash their conceptual force and meaning. Attuning to these nonargumentative elements of thinking is one of the great strengths of Black thought, one underappreciated by the discipline of philosophy. Doing this will generate three images: (1) Leisure or Crisis?, (2) The Examined Life, and (3) Twilight Philosophy. Next I place these images into Richard Wright's posthumously published *The Man Who Lived Underground*, and then conclude by clarifying my general strategy and finally reducing it into a simple argument.

Keywords: Allegory of the Cave, Shadows, James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois, Plato, Richard Wright

"The paradox is that human extinction provides the answer and the corrective to the modern project of whiteness."

—Saidiya Hartman, 2020

Introduction: In the Shadow of Two Great Mountains

Although written decades apart, an intriguing phrase is repeated, without change, near the beginnings of W.E.B. Du Bois' autobiographical works: "I was born," he writes, "by a golden river in the *shadow* of two great hills" (1979, 51). W.E.B. Du Bois returned again and again to that shaded scene in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Something originary and essential must have occurred there to continually call him back. Looking through his oeuvre, shadows are everywhere—from the "shadow of death" in *Souls of Black Folk* and the "Shadow of Years" in *Darkwater* to the "shadow of slavery" in the *Autobiography*, the "hateful mental shadows" in *Black Reconstruction*, and perhaps most of all, the "shadow of the Veil" across many works. Living in the shadow of the Veil sparked in him the development of a facility to read and interpret

shadows as they are cast by dark bodies caught in the white light. Du Bois calls this facility "second-sight," and this is why, James Baldwin later claims, Black Americans are in a better position for doing philosophy.

In the philosophical canon, shadow imagery invokes what is perhaps the most famous image in ancient thought: the "allegory of the cave" from Plato's *Republic*. Nearly anyone who knows anything about Plato, academic or not, likely knows this allegory. By now, philosophers, mostly white and European, have nearly wrung the allegory dry. But the discipline has mostly ignored how Black philosophers have evoked it, even though many Black thinkers—including Ralph Ellison, C.L.R. James, Huey P. Newton, and Martin Luther King—engage the cave imagery in fascinating and powerful ways.[1] Part of my claim in this essay is that the social-political-historical position of Black subjects, traditionally excluded as they have been, is critical for being able to offer powerful yet still underappreciated ways of doing philosophy as well as identifying who are and who should be considered philosophers.

My strategy for making this claim may seem imagistic, but it is an attempt to learn from and emulate a way of thinking I value most in Du Bois. I want to attend more to what he calls "some little alightings of what may be poetry" than to "sterner flights of logic" (2016, xxi). Attending to these "little alightings" is a strength of Black philosophy yet underappreciated by the discipline, which partly explains the exclusion of Black thinkers from the canon. While Du Bois admits that these "tributes to Beauty" may be "unworthy to stand alone," I find in them a conceptual force that makes Plato and other classical thinkers impactful. More than any single argument placed in Socrates' mouth, it is the "Thought for the Fancy—or the Fancy for the Thought" that really sticks with us (Du Bois 2016, xxi). Making this claim—that images, allegories, and metaphorics carry conceptual force and meaning that straight arguments cannot—reflects Kevin Thomas Miles' hermeneutic for reading Du Bois. To "give some attention to the repetitions that make an appearance in an author's writing," Miles attends to the "bars of music Du Bois has situated at the beginning of every chapter" of *Souls of Black Folk* (2000, 199-201). But rather than music, I track the movement of sight, light, and shadow. While some scholars have touched upon or mentioned these "little alightings" and fancies for thought, few (with the exception of Christina Sharpe (2016)) have taken them seriously as *doing* philosophy independently of straight argumentation.[2] Arguments are just one form of philosophizing, and not necessarily the best form.[3]

Attuning to the "Thought for the Fancy—or the Fancy for the Thought," I try to locate a means for counteracting the canon, white as it is. Reading the allegory of the cave with Black thinkers—Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright—I seek to push philosophy to see them *as philosophers*, with the not-so-small aim of turning our whole disciplinary history inside-out.[4] While this aim may seem too high, the "impossible," C.L.R. James says of Toussaint L'Ouverture, "was for him the only reality that mattered" (1989, 290). Rather than trying to sort out the precise nature of their difference (that would take a whole book), this article only follows the imagery of the cave in Black Thought through these Black thinkers and derives images therefrom.[5] Here are the three images I

found: (1) Leisure or Crisis?, (2) The Examined Life, and (3) Twilight Philosophy. I then show how these images are dramatized in Richard Wright's posthumously published novel, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, which is, in a significant sense, a translation of Plato's allegory to a subterranean life below the streets of New York City.[6] Listening to how these Black thinkers engage with the canonical cave shows that *who* is doing philosophy matters when identifying *what* is considered philosophy.[7]

The Cave in Black Thought

In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois describes life in the shadow of the Veil. Be sure to listen for echoes of "Book 7" of Plato's *Republic*:

> … looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, see[ing] the world passing and speak[ing] to it; speak[ing] courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world. One talks on evenly and logically in this way, but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head. … It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited; they talk louder; they gesticulate. Some of the passing world stop in curiosity; these gesticulations seem so pointless; they laugh and pass on. They still either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even what they hear, they do not understand. Then the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realizing in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in. (1986a, 649-50)

While Du Bois echoes Plato's cavernous imagery to express the Black experience, a question emerges: *Who* is *who* in this dark cave?[8] To answer, split this question into three: (1) Who is the prisoner still chained to the wall? (2) Who is the prisoner turning away from the shadows to see the rest of the world? (3) Who is behind the prisoners, pulling the strings of the shadowplay and perpetuating the illusion? For Du Bois, the entombed prisoners are Black folk, while the world beyond the cave is the white place where pale bodies live freely and cheerfully, shrouded by their self-annointed ontological innocence.[9] While I do not challenge Du Bois here, it is interesting to extend his thinking by placing his imagery closer to Plato's, simultaneously recalling ideas that appear elsewhere in Du Bois' writings.

First, make the prisoners white, their eyes fixed to the dark shadows on the wall. Second, make the ones who have broken free Black, those able to see the world beyond the cave and thus discern the shadows on the wall for what they are—mere appearances manufactured to construct and corroborate a false worldview. On this reading, Black eyes have a wider, deeper, more accurate vision of reality, while white eyes are imprisoned by their mistaking shadows for reality. This misapprehension leads white people to become highly invested in

the "truth" of the shadows, which in turn leads them to stubbornly reject the plea of Black folk for white people to free themselves from the blinders of whiteness and see beyond the "Veil." To make it even clearer, let us imagine that the Black folk, though broken free from the blinders fixing their vision, remained chained to the other prisoners, the white people.

What follows from this recasting? All the prisoners—white, Black, and otherwise—were educated through the same shadowplay in the cave of the white lie, the pernicious lesson of which is clear: whiteness is superior to Blackness. At first, both white and Black eyes internalize the lie of whiteness; they only see the shadows on the wall and believe that what they see—the supremacy of whiteness—is true and real. Black prisoners, however, free themselves insofar as they distrust, then outright reject, the depiction of the projected bodies because they realize these are mere shadows. The Black prisoners thus turn their heads and discover the rest of the cave and the world beyond. They see beyond the Veil and discern the machinery that goes into constructing and maintaining the white world. This is a version of Friedrich Nietzsche's Greatest Weight, now called the "heaviest chain."[10]

The Heaviest Chain

On this recasting, the only way to find true freedom, outside the cave, is to convince all the interconnected prisoners to collectively reject the shadowy appearances. This connectedness, however, seems to be the heaviest chain of all. Du Bois knows well what makes it so heavy: "[H]ow should I explain and clarify its meaning for a [white] soul? Description fails" (1986a, 656).

Since there are far too many to list, here are just a few attempts to raise the heaviest chain so others can see: Frederick Douglass narrating chattel slavery and its aftermath; Ida B. Wells reporting and tabulating the thousands of Black bodies brutally lynched; Du Bois accounting sociologically of the economic, political, and social disadvantages and exclusions resulting from racist policies, norms, and laws; Brian Stephenson graphing and charting the numbers of the drug war and mass incarceration; Black Lives Matter recordings of brutalized bodies and videos of shootings and killings. No matter the type of description, no matter how detailed or visceral, no matter how many times it is repeated, nothing seems to make white eyes distrust the immediacy of the shadows, or even to look away for a moment. While it is true that it "take[s] two to hold a chain," as Toni Morrison says, the "chained and the chainer," what makes it so heavy is the chainer's denial that he holds the chain and the existence of the chain itself—a kind of anti-black gaslighting (1975, 39:50). Thus given the centuries of repeated rejection and denial, Du Bois expresses great personal turmoil at this inability to see and hear: "I suffer. And yet, somehow, above the suffering, above the shackled anger … above the hurt that crazes, there surges in me a vast pity,—pity for a people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered and made miserable for such a cause, for such a phantasy!" (1986c, 926). The way this phantasy dulls the senses is what makes the chain so heavy.

Whiteness is too convinced by the play of shadows to recognize what Du Bois calls the "unknown, unapprehended Truth" that would alleviate the heft

of the phantasy (1986a, 664).[11] Whiteness enjoys watching the shadows on the wall *too much*; it finds *too much* comfort, coherence, and security in believing that the way they see the world is the real world itself. To extend Frank Wilderson's words, white life is too "dependent on Black death for its existence and for its conceptual coherence" to realize it already holds the means for true independence (2020, 228-29). Hence Du Bois reluctantly admits: the "greatest and most immediate danger of white culture, perhaps least sensed, is its fear of the truth, its childish belief in the efficacy of lies as a method of human uplift" (1986a, 664). After travelling across the United States and much of Europe, Du Bois is amazed that "so many intelligent people believe … in it so deeply," continuously and repeatedly deceiving themselves to the point of making "an art, almost a science, of how one may make the world before what is not true (664)."[12] Given its near global extent, it is hard to deny that whiteness is, as Bobby E. Wright says, a "psychopathic racial personality" that is bred into the structure and psyche of the world (1990).

Not many years later, James Baldwin revived Du Bois' insights but in a slightly different key: "Most people guard and keep; they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be" (1963b, 94). Too much is at risk—reality itself—to reject how they have always seen and understood the world. It would be too painful to see their false reality as merely a distorted reflection of the world beyond their heads. Unwilling to admit the truth of these lies, white people then project their festering fears onto Black bodies. Like shadows projected on the wall, Baldwin writes, the "white man's unadmitted—and apparently, to him, unspeakable—private fears and longings are projected onto the Negro" (1963b, 103). White folk thus reject the claims of Black folk, who, in so many ways and so many times, try to show them that the shadows are not only fake but toxic for all and deadly to many. "It is terrible to watch people cling to their captivity and insist on their own destruction," writes Baldwin (1998a, 474). Yet cling they do, as if everything, everywhere depended on it, and blame they do also, Black people for the suffering whiteness created but cannot quit. The bluest eye, to evoke Toni Morrison (1970), only sees dark bodies.

Thus white folks dismiss or laugh, Du Bois writes, even when a freed Black person "speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world" (1986a, 650). With eyes fixed in one direction, restricted to the play of dark figures on the wall that contain their unattended fears and rage, white prisoners do not see themselves, will not reflect on their selves, and cannot see how whiteness itself confines them to a distorted, dangerous account of the world. This is the perspective of holes poked through white pointed hoods.

Ryan J. Johnson

Second-sight

The Black prisoner, freed as he is from the restricted vision, sees *both* the shadow world of white sight *and* the white light producing the shadows. Such double vision is not a choice but a matter of survival. Du Bois calls it "second-sight" (2007, 8). It is a "second" because it sees twice: Black eyes see both what white people see and the world beyond whiteness. Blackness sees with both sorts of sights simultaneously.

The second-sight and corresponding after-thought (*nachdenken*) of Black eyes and Black souls show something white eyes never see, something white souls cannot know about themselves and their shadow world. So foreign to whiteness, second-sight seems almost magical, a conjuring of worlds beneath the surface. The "Negro is a sort of *seventh son*," writes Du Bois, "*born with a veil*, and *gifted with second-sight* in … a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (2007, 8).[13] In African American folk culture, this conatal veil refers to "children born with a caul (a membrane from the placenta covering the infant's face at birth) [who] are gifted with prophetic and psychic abilities" (2007, 209).[14] Priscilla Wald calls it the "embodiment of the uncanny" (1995, 177). Hence Du Bois says, "I am singularly clairvoyant" of white souls because he can "see in and through them" without white people even noticing (2016, 17). Richard Wright's (2021) translation of Plato's cave allegory into the New York City underground will show how confused white people are when they get close to seeing this magical world behind the veil.

While white souls are enrapt by the play of the shadows on the wall, second-sight allows Black souls to "view [white souls] from unusual vantage points," perspectives that white eyes cannot see because of the types of foreclosure in the structure of whiteness (1986c, 227).[15] Such a perspective allows Du Bois to see the inner "workings of their entrails" and they are not pretty (227). "I see," he writes, not God's chosen gift but just an "ugly, human" (227). Such unadulterated acuity threatens to expose and embarrass white folks so much so that they resent those who possess the the power to see things they cannot. From the days of slavery to Jim Crow segregation to the prison industrial complex, drug war, and police brutality, Black souls have witnessed that white people are most vulnerable and mistaken.[16] But when Du Bois points out that what white people see is an elaborate sham of shadows and smoke, his words sound, to white ears, filled with "bitterness" and "pessimism" (1986c, 227). His clairvoyance humiliates white people and they resent him for revealing something about themselves that they cannot (and do not want to) see. Thus a resentment festers and eventually foments an "American Atrocity" like lynching and other forms of racial terrorism and barbarism (Lancaster 2021).

Yet white people know, deep down, that the shadows and darkness playing on the wall are the shades of evil. To prevent the confrontation with such disagreeable truths, white people go to extreme lengths to retrench in their worldview through new excuses and exclusions. As Charles Mills shows repeatedly in *Blackness Visible*, they are extremely creative in their ability to prevent the airing of the uncomfortable and unsettling truth of the distortions of whiteness.[17]

They instead choose, with every passing day, to risk nothing, to keep looking at their shadows, and elaborate and evolve new iterations of whiteness. Hence the social (racial) contract depends on an "*inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made*" (Mills 1997, 18, emphasis in original).

Here Baldwin sees one of the great impediments to racial progress: "One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself—that is to say, risking oneself," Baldwin writes; "If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving" (1963b, 94). By turning away from the shadows, the Black freed prisoners risk themselves, though in this risk they could, if they give everything up, gain themselves in ways unimaginable and unseeable from within whiteness. The question is: what price are white people willing to pay?[18]

Notice Baldwin's insight into the kind of freedom that white eyes do not see: "[O]ne can give freedom only by setting someone free" (1963b, 94). The dangerous white delusion is that freedom means freedom *from*, when it is always and only a freedom *with*. Freedom is a *relation* not separation.[19] Through Baldwin's eyes, we see that the Black prisoner, by turning away from the white world and gaining the power of second-sight, cannot deny that he remains shackled to whiteness. His freedom, like his slavery, is intimately chained to whiteness, while white freedom, according to white sight, mistakenly sees itself independently of Blackness. Seeing this sense of intertwined and interdependent freedom requires the second-sight of the Black former prisoner, something that the white prisoners refuse to, and thus cannot, see. What is needed is the kind of vision that comes from reading images from Black interpretations of the cave.

Images from the Cave

We have now racially recast, with Du Bois and Baldwin, Plato's allegory of the cave. As with all good allegories, there are many images to see, more than any one person can enumerate. For now, I sketch just three: (1) Leisure or Crisis?, (2) The Examined Life, and (3) Twilight Philosophy. These, respectively, articulate the insights from above: (1) second-sight, (2) the heaviest chain, and (3) the play of shadows and light. After this, we will bring these three images into life by turning to Richard Wright's posthumously published novel, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, which sets Plato's allegory in the sewers and caverns of mid-century New York City.

Image One: Leisure or Crisis?

In my recasting, the freed Black prisoners offer a model of doing philosophy distinct from the canonical Aristotelian model of thinking under conditions of leisure. Perhaps closer to the critical model of thinking that Kant articulates in his Enlightenment accounts of freedom, Black philosophers are often forced, by the demands of whiteness, to think under the weight of crisis. Remember

that Du Bois founded (and edited for decades) the NAACP publication: *The Crisis*.

One of the lasting problems I see in much of western thinking is that it starts from a place of passivity, as is dramatically exemplified by Plato's depiction of where the prisoners in the cave begin: seated, chained, vision fixed in place. But I have always wondered: How did the prisoners get there? Who put them there? Why *these* prisoners? A whole system of underground torture and confinement lurks unsaid in Plato's account. It just begins with prisoners shackled in place.

One great benefit of Du Bois', Baldwin's, and (we will see) Wright's re-articulation of thinking is that they show how *activity*, not passivity, is at the origin of philosophy. Context and culture are essential to and inextricable from Black life. Black Thought often occurs not during times of leisure, safety, and passivity—often scarce in positions oppressed by white supremacy—but under the threat and force of compulsion and oppression, or amidst the urgency of unstable and dangerous conditions—from the end of a whip, gun, or threat. Given such critical conditions, one might not think because one has time and leisure, because one has an endless series of unimpeded choices, or because one begins in passivity. Rather, one thinks because one *must*, because one is compelled to think, because one does not have a choice but *to think*—right here, right now, and with existential exigency.

This is a kind of thought that occurs not out of freedom from suffering but from the body of *pathos*. It is one of George Yancy's most poignant refrains.[20] Baldwin says it well: "I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering … but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are" (1963b, 106). White prisoners, saved from racial suffering by the blinders of whiteness, are not forced to think critically, and thus do not learn much, if anything, about the world beyond the cave. They do not, in short, ever grow up, but remain stuck playing language games and thought experiments. How can the American philosophers be so enamored with endless iterations of the Trolly Problem yet be almost silent on lynching, Jim Crow, Japanese internment camps, and so much more? White philosophers detail elaborate interpretations of the shadows on the wall in order, it seems, to ignore very real histories far more deserving of their insights and brilliance. By contrast, Baldwin writes of one "who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and, indeed, no church—can teach" (106). Black thinkers do not have the luxury of ignoring their bodies, histories, and material conditions. Rather than wonder, G.W.F. Hegel says, "fear of the master (*Herr*) is the beginning of wisdom" (2018, §195).

Thinking from the body of *pathos* produces a keen ability to see the truth beneath appearances. A person, writes Baldwin, "achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable … because, in order to save his life, he is *forced to look beneath appearances*, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words," or in my recasting of the allegory, to see the shadows for what they

are: false copies of reality (1963b, 106, my emphasis). This keen ability to see beneath appearances leads to a shedding of fears. "If one is continually surviving the worst that life can bring," Baldwin continues, "one eventually ceases to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring. … It demands great force and cunning continually to assault the might and indifferent fortress of white supremacy," depicted here as the play of shadows on the wall (106). Such great force and cunning lead to a kind of inner strength of which the Stoics would be envious. It "demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck," whose heavy chains are tied to yours, "and an even greater miracle of perception" (106). This miracle of perception is, in the recast cave allegory, the second-sight of the Black prisoner who turned away from the shadows and looked beneath the superficiality and falseness—as seductive, threatening, and violent as they are—and witnessed the fire and the dangerous shadows they cast (last time, this time, and surely next time).

Here is one of the many great virtues of Black philosophy, a virtue that proves the aristocracy of the highest, sharpest, most powerful form of thought. As Baldwin reminds us, the descendants of slaves are the "Negro boys and girls who are facing mobs today [and who] come out of a long line of improbable aristocrats—the only aristocrats this country has produced" (107).[21] They are aristocratic because they see that, even though the white perceptions of dark bodies differ from the perceptions of Black folk, this difference does not, in any way, entail racial superiority. A general understanding of the role Black thinkers played, and continue to play, would, if acknowledged, reveal a great deal about whiteness to white people than white philosophers want to admit. As Lawrie Balfour emphasizes, Baldwin never shied from holding up such a "disagreeable mirror," yet few are brave enough to look directly into that mirror (2017).

In the original allegory, the philosopher is the one who has broken free from the chains and diagnoses the shadows as false reflections of reality. Plato sees this freedman as *the* philosopher, whose task is to free other prisoners from their shackles. As this racial recasting shows, such a task is especially challenging given that it is so difficult to philosophize from within the conditions of crisis of the Black person who has freed himself from the illusions of whiteness yet remains chained—by the heaviest chain—to those clinging to the illusion. "It is hard under such circumstances," Du Bois well knows, "to be philosophical and calm, and to think" (1986a, 650). Who can think clearly when one is constantly distracted by crisis after crisis, with images and stories of anti-black violence on silent but violent repeat? As Toni Morrison said, the "very serious function of racism … is distraction. *It keeps you from doing your work.* It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being" (1975, 35:46).

And yet, these are the circumstances in which Black philosophy has been forced to operate for centuries. Yet given the dominant, oft overlooked colour of the canon, it is easy to forget that Frederick Douglass was a contemporary of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, that Alain Locke was four years older than Martin Heidegger, that Baldwin was five months older than Gilles Deleuze. But it is time to change that; it is long past time, in fact.

The first images pulled from the recast allegory are thus: philosophy done in and from crisis, not leisure, brings a more powerful, more effective, and more demanding kind of critical thinking. This is the image of second-sight.

Image Two: The Examined Life

Another image emerging from placing racial considerations inside Socratic imagery pertains to the meaning of an examined life. In saying this, I am joining the chorus of scholars who read Baldwin in the Socratic lineage. Cornel West called Baldwin the "black American Socrates," a "blues-inflected, jazz-saturated democrat" exercising "a powerful and poignant self-examination—always on the brink of despair, yet holding on to a tragicomic hope" (2004, 79). Similarly, Joel Alden Schlosser "explores how James Baldwin's essays and fiction continue and modify a kind of Socratic examination transposed to the context of racial domination and white supremacy" (2013, 487). Echoing this chorus yet with the emphasis on images, allegories, and metaphors, I point to a shocking scene wherein Baldwin came to realize that classic dictum: the unexamined life is not worth living. Please be forewarned, this scene includes description of sexual violence.

Baldwin describes the "unbelievable shock" he felt when he was sexually assaulted by a powerful, slobbering drunk Southern white man (1998a, 390). In the face of this man's "despairing titillation," Baldwin recalls what he thought while looking into his glassy wet eyes (390). At that moment, he realized a deep American truth about the structure of his Black sexual organs in relation to the reach of the white groping hand: "as my identity was defined by his power, so was my humanity to be placed at the service of his fantasies" (390). As Saidiya Hartman elegantly and powerfully demonstrates, Black identity and humanity are seated, almost completely, in the delusional, ever-dangerous, fantasies of a sexually repressed, intoxicated, unreflective whiteness that is never called to be responsible for itself (2022).

Though he likely knew it long before, at that moment Baldwin fully realized that the possibility of becoming property is one of the defining features of the racial erotics of the colour line.[22] As Cheryll Harris brilliantly shows, whiteness mutated from a racial identity into a kind of social-political-economic property enshrined in and protected by layers of American law (1993). Whiteness, in a deep sense, is not only drunk on its own fantasies, as in this shocking scene, but is situated in a world designed to foment and feed those fantasies. Realizing this, Baldwin quickly recognized the danger engulfing him like a tidal wave: "This man, with a phone call, could prevent or provoke a lynching" (1998a, 390). In American law and history, Black bodies are considered white property. When whiteness is left unexamined and Blackness is legally protected property, Du Bois asks, "how should I explain and clarify its meaning for a [white] soul? Description fails" (1986a, 656).[23]

In a flash of fear, Baldwin recalled the sexual asymmetry of slavery, wherein the Black person was "a slave because his manhood has been, or can be, or will be taken from him" (1998a, 391). In slavery and its afterlives, the Black man (Baldwin's focus here) has no rights to his relations—wife, children, family,

etc.—because all are owned, and at the pleasure of, the white enslaver.[24] This is what Orlando Patterson calls "social death" (1982). Who could forget that horrid phrase from the Dred Scott case: a Black person possesses "no rights which the white man was Bound to Respect"? Although the Fourteenth Amendment brought legal changes, the societal conditions of that defining American moment persisted through Baldwin's time and continue today.[25] As whiteness and maleness are the ground of all legal and political rights, a white man can kill, sexually assault, rape, whip, jail, maim, etc. any Black body with near impunity. Correlatively, a single white word, gesture, even silence has been fatal for innumerable Black lives. The power of whiteness, Baldwin realized, consumed everything like a rapacious parasite.

By violating Black bodies, Baldwin also recalled, a white slave owner not only satiates his sexual fantasy and seizes his violent pleasure, but increases—or would increase, in nine months—his wealth and social-economic status. These sordid, heavy truths are, sadly, easy to see in any honest history. But what is more difficult to see is Baldwin's next point. Through the violent impregna-tion of Black female slaves, white men *inscribed themselves* into the plantation pro-duction process. As Baldwin realized, "Blacks were not the only stallions on the slave-breeding farms!" (1998a, 391). Possessing "every conceivable sexual and commercial license" not only destroyed the dignity of the enslaved peoples who suffered the enactment of that license but also, in turn, "emasculated [the masters] of any human responsibility" (391). Such destructive relations defined hundreds of years of white-Black relations, and they continue to structure the colour line today.

Amidst the intensity of this realization during the sexual assault committed by that drunk Southern white man, Baldwin experienced what is often con-sidered *the* defining philosophical insight in Plato's oeuvre: "When the man grabbed my cock … I watched his eyes, thinking, with great sorrow, *The un-examined life is not worth living*" (391). Let us pause here, if we can stomach it, to consider the difference in context between Socrates and Baldwin.

Socrates was on trial for his life when, Plato reports, he uttered that famous dictum. While it is true that he did so in the wake of a death sentence, it is also important to remember that his trial was conducted *by his peers*. Those who heard, judged, and sentenced him were his political and social equals, so he could have legally done to them what they did to him. Now compare that piv-otal moment in the ancient Athenian's life to the moment when Baldwin had the same insight. Baldwin was travelling through the American South on assign-ment to report the effects of de-segregation in Charlotte, Little Rock, Birming-ham, and other Southern schools. Until then, Baldwin had lived almost ex-clusively in cities. Born and raised in Harlem, he had just left Paris, after living in Europe for a decade. It was his first time in the South, and he was a Black, gay man. Amidst the constant terror of his experience, that sweaty white hand grabbed his genitalia, and Baldwin's sharp brown eyes locked into the reddened, dilated, glassy pupils of his assailant. At this exact moment, structured by the physical intensity of racism and sexual assault, that founding philosophical adage erupted in Baldwin's mind.[26] The difference in context is everything.

The point of tarrying with this brutal scene is to reach a tragic Baldwinian lesson: *growing up Black in America better prepares one for being a philosopher*. We see this insight in Baldwin's reflection on lectures that he gave to high schools in Watts, the primarily poor African American neighborhood in southern Los Angeles then known for the Watts Uprising. Through his visits to Watts, Baldwin noticed, that "these despised, maligned, and menaced children have an alertness, an eagerness, and a depth which I certainly did not find in … students at many splendid universities" (431). Forced to grapple with the psychic effects of living under constant oppression, violence, malice, threat, and more, growing up Black in America carved out what Baldwin calls an "alertness, an eagerness, and a depth" of thinking akin to prime philosophical thinking. Compared to the privileges of whiteness, "it is a very different matter, and results in a very different intelligence, *to grow up under the necessity of questioning everything*—everything from the question of one's identity to the literal, brutal question of how to save one's life in order to begin to live it" (431, my emphasis). Such questioning is not, as we saw in Image One, a result of leisure but lies under what Yancy calls the "violent weight of whiteness" (2017).

Correlated to "alertness, an eagerness, and a depth" is a critical capacity for endless, indefatigable questioning of everything. This is the existentially imperative form of questioning that Socrates would surely have recognized as quintessentially philosophical and the key to an examined life: to be part of "a people under the necessity of creating themselves *must examine everything*, and soak up learning the way the roots of a tree soak up water" (1998a, 432, my emphasis). Baldwin thus notices how the racist conditions of the United States instill in Black souls a social, intellectual, and existential disposition that prepares them for the art of philosophy as depicted, thousands of years earlier, in Socrates, though now within a key and context that the Athenian lover of wisdom could never have known.[27]

This second image is thus double and interconnected, depending on one's subject-position. For white subjects, there is a call to look directly into the disagreeable mirror, to break habits of evasion, to let go of the heaviest chain, and to learn from Black thinkers and history. For Black subjects, the lesson is that growing up Black in America better prepares one for being a philosopher. These different images are interconnected because, as the recasting of the cave allegory shows, Black and white freedom are chained together. Seeing this sense of intertwined and interdependent freedom requires the insights from Black thinkers, better positioned as they are to philosophizing, and a corresponding honesty among white thinkers to listen and learn from Du Bois, Baldwin, *et al*. To repeat what Baldwin repeats: "I repeat: The price of the liberation of the white people is the liberation of the [B]lack, the total liberation, in the cities, in the towns, before the law, and in the mind" (1998b, 342). This is the image of the heaviest chain.

Image Three: Twilight Philosophy

Plato stipulates that, when a prisoner escapes the cave and enters the world outside, he will emerge into midday, the hour when the sun is perched at its

peak in the sky. It seems more likely that it would be nighttime—or dusk or dawn—when the prisoner leaves the cave than it would be high noon. When the prisoner emerges, it could be that the moon and the stars, not the bright sun, would cover the sky with diffuse twilight.

By re-reading Plato's allegory through the lens of Black thinkers, we learn that sunlight and daytime are privileged perspectives because they assume that one will be able to see, grasp, and consume everything that one sees whenever and wherever one sees it, without bias or blunder. Recall how much trust René Descartes put into clarity and distinctness. Put differently, assuming the ever-presence of sunlight and daytime implies an unchanging ability to discern truth, beauty, and goodness. By contrast, Du Bois writes, "I am the child of twilight and night, and choose … that air of humility and wonder which streams from moonlight" (1986a, 658). Twilight philosophy does not assume the clarity and distinctness of perfect sight and full light but the murky yet penetrating vision that comes from being forced to see through a veil.

To see it, let us return, for a moment, to that Socratic maxim from Image Two: "the unexamined life is not worth living." This maxim contains the heart of the western philosophical tradition. It would be childish to deny the importance of self-examination. But as we saw with Baldwin, it is equally childish to leave *it* unquestioned and decontextualized. Examination is a powerful intellectual tool in almost any domain, including philosophy, science, race, and gender, but it does not guarantee success in discovery. Perhaps this is why Du Bois amends the classic Socratic dictum: "Of course I knew that self-examination is not a true unbiased picture" (1986b, 1117). Du Bois knows from personal and professional experience that self-examination does not necessarily lead to the truth. Far too many white people have examined their lives yet failed to notice the whiteness blinding and binding their vision. This is by design—whiteness is supposed to function invisibly, perfectly, like an unbreakable law of nature.

The assumption of daylight is the bias that one can be truly unbiased, or better, the assumption of universality. This is perhaps clearest when thinking about American history, with its perpetually problematic (ab)use of "*all*." To assume that daylight is always and ever-present is another way of denying that "all" often masquerades as pale and male.

At the same time, Du Bois does not discard self-examination, for without it no picture is complete. His point is simply that it requires a keen ability to see during the twilight hours, in between the light and the night, and this ability requires the presence of others. When out walking in twilight, one cannot see as far as during the day, so the need for others is stronger. Even if skilled at hearing and reading echoes, others are necessary to bounce off the sound. No matter how hard I try, some parts of me remain invisible and inaccessible. Human vision cannot illuminate everything, just as no one can erase their particularity and assume a purely universal position. We can only see ourselves *through and with* others, and from many different angles and degrees of light and darkness. Given that no one person is privileged enough to see it all and that the sun does not shine bright or long enough for complete self-transparency, the second-

sight of Black philosophy provides a perspective that has been refused and wasted for far too long.

Self-examination, in short, is a collective process developed not in the clear light of day but at dawn and dusk, in the twilight of a past that seems too heavy to bear and the haze of a future for which we cannot but risk hope. To be sure, it will be tough and we may, in the end, fail, as Baldwin notes: "This birth will not be easy, and many of us are doomed to discover that we are exceedingly clumsy midwives" (1998a, 475). But escaping history should not be the point, just as living only at noontime cannot bring perfect wisdom. Birth is never so easy.

The third image of a racially recast Plato's allegory is to become, like Du Bois, children of twilight so that we may examine each other, clumsy midwives that we are. Twilight philosophy operates neither in pure light nor pure darkness; it is neither pure pessimism nor the arrogant optimism of one who feels entitled to speak for "all." Baldwin said it best when he was asked if he were more optimistic or pessimistic:

> … I can't be a pessimist. Because I'm alive. To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter. So I'm forced to be an optimist, I am forced to believe that we can survive whatever we must survive. But [inhaling] … the future of the Negro in this country is precisely as bright or as dark as the future of the country. It is entirely up to … the American people, whether or not they're going to face and deal with and embrace this stranger whom they maligned so long. What white people have to do is try to find out in their own hearts why it was necessary to have a [n-word] in the first place. Because I'm not a [n-word]. (1963a)

This is the image of twilight philosophy as reflected in the disagreeable yet always honest mirror that is James Baldwin.[28]

The Man Who Lived Underground

To bring this story to a close, I will attempt to put these three images into practice by turning to Richard Wright's 1942 novel *The Man Who Lived Underground*. Written between *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), it was finally published in 2021.[29] Wright described it as an unexplainable blend of his grandmother's devout religiosity, the non-logic of surrealism, jazz and blues improvisation, and true crime stories.[30] Reading Wright's book in light of our recasting of Plato's allegory with Du Bois and Baldwin brings together all of our themes and images—crises and chains, examination and second-sight, light and twilight. As Wright's grandson, Malcom Wright, as well as Kathryn T. Gines (2011), notice, *The Man Who Lived Underground* is "Plato's allegory *in reverse*" (Wright 2021, 215). Wright places the allegory on and below the streets of midcentury New York City.

The Man Who Lived Underground is the story of Fred Daniels, a Black man who is walking home after work one day when three policemen accuse him of committing a double murder. Despite his pleas of innocence, they take him to

the station and torture him until he signs a written confession stating that he was too disoriented to be able to read. The scene is brutal, and it is the theme on which Wright improvises the rest of the story. As we learned in Image Two, it is hard to think when one is constantly distracted with never-ending crises. After signing the confession, the police take him to see his pregnant wife, find she just began labor, and take her to the hospital. In the chaos of the hospital, Daniels breaks free from his chains and flees down a manhole. Thus begins his cavernous surrealistic world of improvisational living in shadows and twilight. Yet more than a single cave, as in Plato, Daniels explores a seemingly endless underground world of murky caves, twisting tunnels, rushing dark water, and shaded stairways. To survive down there, a keen sense of second-sight is required.

From below, Daniels assumes an almost *unheimlich* (uncanny) perspective onto a series of intimate spaces that observes, enters, and pilfers almost without detection. Digging tunnels, removing bricks, drilling holes in walls, Daniels survives those "mist shrouded labyrinths" through improvisational agility (58). He is living behind the veil. Along the way, he gathers food, tools, and objects that he reimagines and deploys differently however is needed. He uses diamonds, watches, and rolls of 100-dollar bills as wallpaper, lining the room with his stolen typewriter. Crawling, swimming, burrowing, and using what he finds randomly, Daniels peers through keyholes (a year before Jean-Paul Sartre's famous scene), listens through walls to voices and singing, loosens bricks so he can remove or replace them at will. Look at this vivid depiction of second-sight. What "Fred Daniels sees underground is overdetermined," explains Wright:

> They are things seen through a magnifying glass of such strength that they take on a new meaning. Little events, which we perhaps all see each day, take on an entirely different significance. Emotion charges them so that they grow red hot and are fused with everything that happens in the world. Meanings slide together. Events are telescoped. (193)

Living underground is the kind of improvisational existence that only comes from such a forced surrealistic perspective. There is no assumption of day or universal outlook. Wright depicts Daniels doing what Du Bois says: "view[ing white souls] from unusual points of vantage," allowing him to see the inner "workings of their entrails" (2016, 17). To get a better sense of living underground, I recall a few scenes.

Early on, Daniels sees a slimy rat bearing its fangs in anger, following a tiny floating brown baby, which had drowned and been discarded like garbage. Twice Daniels finds himself on the other side of a wall of a singing Black church, which brings a "pain induced by the naked sight of the groveling spectacle of those black people whose hearts were hungry for tenderness, whose lives were full of fear and loneliness, whose hands were reaching outward into a cold vast darkness for something that was not there" (63). The split in his consciousness divided further while below. Later he sees a naked Black male body stretched out on an undertaker's table. In another scene, he happens upon a furnace room reddened by the glowing coals tended by an old man who never

turns on the light. Soon he finds a movie house where "people were *laughing* at their lives, at the animated shadows of themselves" (74). Could there be a clearer example of a modern Cave of whiteness, eyes fixed by the play of light and shadow on the wall? Next he stumbles across a real-estate office that contains a safe and a sleeping Black guard, as well as a radio store with a safe where "he saw an eerie white hand, seemingly detached from its arm, touch the metal knob and twirl it" (81). Through cracks and crevices he also sees a sweaty butcher, intimate scenes in basements, a jeweler's shop, and many other bewildering sights until he was swirled into the unstable epiphany that "he was *all* people and they were *he*" (106). When he eventually regains his composure, he returns to some of the scenes and realizes in horror that the same policemen who had accused him without cause were now accusing other Black people of the thefts that Daniels had committed. His underground life had come full circle, and it was time to return to the surface and tell others of the "terrifying knowledge" he had gained (63). For now he possessed the full power of seeing in between light and dark, which others might call clairvoyant.

After an uncountable number of days—for time passes differently underground, away from the sun—Daniels reemerges, with a new understanding of that heaviest chain. I read his return as a result of the phantom chains that had, for so long, bound him to white bodies staring at the shadows on the wall. Like the freed prisoners from Plato's allegory who return to the cave to tell those still imprisoned about the world outside—but in reverse—he runs to the police station to turn himself in and tell his three former torturers of the lessons he learned.

But no matter how hard he tries, they do not—they *cannot*—understand him. Since he escaped, they found the actual murderer, so his seeming clairvoyance humiliated the white cops, and they resented him for knowing something they could not admit. They thus try to get rid of him, even burning, to his dismay, his signed confession. Still, Daniels pleads with them to see that he is guilty—not for the double murders of which they accused him, but for living underground, behind the veil, in between the shadows on the wall and the two great hills. Down there, he stole money, tools, radios, and he wants to return it all. Most of all, he tries to teach them that *they* are guilty too, as is *everyone*! Daniels pleads: "Yeah, I know I'm guilty. Everyone's guilty. I'll show you everything underground … we're *all* guilty" (148). Yet as always, description fails.

Daniels begs them to come see life underground so that they can experience the world that he saw, beyond the Veil, where he could reach out to within inches of unsuspecting bodies "sleeping in their living, awake in their dying," eyes fixed on the wall of the white world (75). He had seen the imagery of the heaviest chain and begged the white police to help him lift it so they could all break free and leave the dangerous delusions of whiteness. But they do not believe him. Their eyes remain imprisoned by the shadows on the wall. To them, he is a raving madman, and his words sound even more bitter and pessimistic when he proclaims the white world is dead.

Eventually, he pesters (like a gadfly) enough to get them to leave the precinct and see the underground firsthand. And for a moment, it seems like they might

actually see the shadows for what they are. As they drive back to the point of escape, he recounts the wild tales from underground. After more torture and belittling, they find the manhole and remove the heavy cover, unknowingly close to turning their white eyes away from the wall and seeing beyond the Veil. Daniels is ecstatic. Then a siren screams. And there is an air raid: "Soon the rainy air was full of screaming. The policemen stood with lifted faces. A huge bright beam of light shot from the horizon and stabbed the white sky; another rose and crossed it; within ten seconds the air was full of bright, roving columns of light" (157). With the scream of an emergency, the cops are lured back into the white world by that same play of shadows on the wall, now the sky itself. As twilight philosophy teaches, the daylight will not save us just as examination does not guarantee truth. Feeling his chance at liberation slipping away, Daniels stops halfway down the hole, between the world above and below, begging them to follow, to break their gazes from the sky above. "Mister, *this is it!* LOOK!" (158). But it is too late. The policemen, too mesmerized to notice the apocalypse of whiteness erupting around them, jam Daniels down. "Get into the hole, now!" shouts one policeman (158). When he won't stop pleading, one shoots him in the chest, sending him crashing into the sewage.

Long ago, Plato warned us about this. Telling the truth to those still imprisoned can be fatal. If his escaped prisoner "went down into the cave again and sat down in his same seat … wouldn't he invite ridicule? … And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?" (Plato 1997, 516d-e). This is almost exactly what the policeman says after killing Daniels: "You've got to shoot his kind. They would wreck things" (159). As explosions shake the ground they stand on, they replace the manhole cover, sealing off Daniels, placing the Veil firmly back in place.

Down below, the sewer water carries Daniels away: "He closed his eyes, a whirling, black object, rushing along in the darkness, veering, tossing with the grey tide, lost in the heart of the earth" (159). Up above, the shadowplay of the white world goes on until it all, eventually, burns to ash. But it should be no surprise. Baldwin already gave us Noah's rainbow sign: No more water, the fire next time!

Conclusion

My major goal in this essay is to change the canon of philosophy. While I do love the canon, I desperately want it to change—*immediately*. But as much as I may try, canonical change is collective. One way others have done this is to make a case for the inclusion of excluded voices through the very currency of the canon—direct argumentation. This is what John McClendon and Stephen Ferguson show in *African American Philosophers and Philosophy* (2019), and many others do too.[31] This is a worthy and essential task, and I hope my work complements theirs. But there are many other ways to bring change, so I have taken a different strategy.

My strategy seeks to exploit features of the canon that have been canonically assumed yet underappreciated: imagery, allegory, and metaphor, or what Du

Bois nervously called "some little alightings of what may be poetry." Many scholars find these interesting and amusing, but few take them as seriously as the "sterner flights of logic" (2016, xxi). Thus my strategy claims that the very nonseriousness of imagery, allegory, and metaphor provides an opening for not simply including excluded voices but for deforming and reforming the canon from within. While philosophers are smiling at the cute little allegories and focusing more on their inferences, they do not realize, until it is too late, that those very thinkers they diligently excluded are already on the inside and turning the canon inside-out. To evoke Du Bois' imagery, my strategy is to think between great hills and ascend up their backside under the cover of shadows.

But for those who prefer sterner logic, I can reluctantly put my overall argument in four claims. First, images, allegories, and metaphorics are ever-present but underappreciated by the discipline. Second, not only do images, allegories, and metaphorics carry conceptual force and meaning that straight arguments cannot, but they are often better ways of doing philosophy. Third, one of the strengths of Black thought is what Du Bois calls "Thought for the Fancy—or the Fancy for the Thought" and we should take these as seriously as "sterner flights of logic." Fourth, learning how Black thought approaches non-argumentative forms of canonical philosophizing teaches us therefore an indirect strategy to elevate Black thinkers and change the canon. So, there it is—a straight argument—if you need it. But I hope you don't. For taking it so directly misses my point. I thus ask you, reader, to pay more attention to the nonargumentative features of the canon. Placing these in the foreground and arguments in the background allows us to seize upon a strategy for turning the canon of philosophy inside-out *on its own terms*. While some might deter, complaining, for example, that Christina Sharpe's strategy can only be done with certain terms, I respond: *Every word is polysemous* (2016).[32] And add this: *Images, allegories, and metaphors can do things no argument can*. So I ask the reader to see the images of Black Thought, to seize upon all the underappreciated images in the history of philosophy, to explode the polysemy in every word, and to turn the canon inside-out so that the future of philosophy will be richer, more diverse, and more welcoming than its past.

Biography

Ryan J. Johnson is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Elon University in North Carolina. He has written two monographs, *The Deleuze-Lucretius Encounter* and *Deleuze, A Stoic*. He is co-author (with Biko Mandela Gray) of *Phenomenology of Black Spirit*. Additionally, he is the co-editor of *Nietzsche and Epicurus* and *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Metaphysics*. His teaching is an experiment in improvisation and occurs almost exclusively outside. He loves Spinoza, John Coltrane, and trains.

Notes

1. In more of the analytic tradition, Kristie Dotson also uses the Allegory. See Dotson (2014).

2. While Robert Gooding-Williams (2009) does evoke shadows, he does not consider their full philosophical content.

3. In a discussion of modes of writing in C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins*, Fred Moten sees a kind of improvisational thinking and doing history that operates "[n]ot by opposition; by augmentation. This means an attention to the lyric, to the lyric's auto-explosion, to the auto-explosion the lyric gives to narrative" (2017, 3).

4. Though Cedric J. Robinson does not include Baldwin, but instead Richard Wright, he does make it clear that his drawing of the tradition is meant to be an opening, not a closing: "as a scholar it was never my intention to exhaust the subject, only to suggest that it was there" (2000, xxxii).

5. Baldwin's critique of Wright is well trod ground, and Wright's relationship to Du Bois is fascinating but too much for me to handle here.

6. It is, of course, more than that. It shares much with Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, an inspiration for Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, as well as plenty of Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, and many other works.

7. On the question of "who" is doing philosophy, recall that Thomas Holt claims all readings of Du Bois must reckon with Du Bois' insistence that his "own life became the text, the point of departure, for each of his major explorations of race, culture, and politics" (1990, 307). Nahum Dimitri Chandler says this in his chapter "Elaboration of the Autobiographical Example in the Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois," where he characterizes Du Bois' writing strategy as a "hesitant" yet "insistent" "apology" (in the Socratic lineage), noting its complication of Enlightenment assumptions about objective truth through a "subjective genesis" and a variation on Jacques Derrida's insistence on the interplay between history and *logos* in his "tracing of the problem of genesis" in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (2014, 777).

8. See also Tom Hawkins (2019).

9. For more on Baldwin's comments about the white "Presumptions of Innocence," see Lawrie Balfour (2001, 87-112).

10. For more on Nietzsche and Du Bois, see Kathleen Marie Higgins (2006).

11. For a diagnosis of white self-(mis)recognition, see Ryan J. Johnson and Nathan Jones (2021).

12. Also see Elvira Basevich (2020).

13. Emphasis added. On the figure of the seventh son in Black folklore, see Yvonne Patricia Chireau (2003). See also Shamoon Zamir (1995).

14. David Levering Lewis speaks of a "unique angle of vision" (1993, 280).

15. The "structure of whiteness forecloses (what the Germans call) *Schuld* and shame" (Johnson and Jones 2021, 4).

16. For a powerful and elegant historical example of this, see Annette Gordon-Reed (2008).

17. Due to its resonances with vision and light in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, see especially "Non-Cartesian *Sums*: Philosophy and the African-American Experience" in Charles W. Mills (1998, 1-20).

18. This is one of the lessons I draw from John Brown in my forthcoming book, *The John Brown Suite*.

19. Here one might draw upon Martin Luther King's use of Paul Tillich in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in particular the notion that "sin is separation" (1964).

20. See H.A. Nethery IV (2020) or George Yancy (2019).

21. Here there is an interesting difference in reading "aristocracy." While Baldwin reads aristocratic status as conferred by crisis, early Du Bois argued for the value of elitism. For him, neither Blackness nor crisis alone produce the aristocratic virtue of second-sight. Only the "Talented Tenth" possess such a gift, which bears a moral duty to free both whites and the Black folk from their respective illusions. On Du Bois' elitism see Adolph L. Reed Jr.'s chapter "Stratification, Leadership, and Organization: The Role of the Black Elite" (1997, 53-70).

22. For more on this, see Jack Turner (2017). For a more recent and expansive take, see Rinaldo Walcott (2021).

23. See George Yancy (2017).

24. For more on the afterlives of slavery, see Saidiya Hartman (2007, 6). And for the gratuitous intrusion of property relations, see Hortense J. Spillers (2003).

25. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois tracks the emergence of this process (1998).

26. For more on the libidinal violence of racial politics in Baldwin, see Marc Lombardo (2009).

27. This seems a variation on what Stephen H. Marshall calls "Black Prophetic Politics" (2011).

28. For more on honesty in Baldwin, see Johnson and Jones (2021).

29. A short story version (which cuts the first police brutality scene, condenses the underground life, and alters the final apocalyptic scene) was published in 1942, and republished in 1945 and 1961.

30. For more on gender in Wright and Nietzsche, see Cynthia Willet (2006).

31. Other examples include Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman (2003) and George Yancy (1998).

32. "Wake," *et al.* strike me as variations on what G.W.F Hegel means by "speculative words." A speculative word has "two dictionary *meanings* [*Bedeutungen*]," a double signification that Hegel delights in because a "language has come to use one and the same word for two opposite meanings" (2010, 81). Speculative thinking is satisfied when it seizes upon such speculative words because it locates, in ordinary words, a language's speculative spirit, the obvious example of which is *aufheben*, which means (roughly) both to cancel and to preserve. A useful and enjoyable game is to search for speculative words in other languages. Catherine Malabou's reading of Hegel sees "plasticity" as a double-sig-

nifying speculative word (1996). For more, see Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda (2018, 56).

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Nihilism, Parody, Profanation (Part 1)[1]

Mehdi Belhaj Kacem

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Translated by Conor O'Dea

To profane means: to *reappropriate*. The similarity between the appropriative event, and the problematic equivocation we are struggling to elucidate with regard to the purely nihilistic charade of the event, thus coincides to a fault with the Agambenian notion of profanation;[2] an equivocation which comes undoubtedly from all manner of misinterpretations that we continue to nourish regarding *jouissance*.[3] We shall soon see why.

And the equivocity would signal its possible lifting in this way: the event is pure appropriation of the inappropriable; profanation is reappropriation of that which was expropriated in the sphere of the sacred (that is to say, today, purely and simply, the sacro-sanct capitalist "private property," in particular that of billionaires). The re- of profanatory reappropriation really signals that it is about a repetition, an ontico-ontological "reparation" which was obscurely "possessed" but is so no longer.

There is thus, in profanation, the idea of a *jouissance*; we cannot cut off [Giorgio] Agamben's face-off with the concepts of psychoanalysis, and in particular the way in which the economy of *jouissance* commands repetition.

[Alain] Badiou wrote us one day that "the event properly spoken characterizes itself by delivering not *jouissance*, but the chain of its consequences." It took us a great deal of time and effort to come to the conclusion that he was correct. But the evental *affects* of love, of art, of politics, of science, of philosophy are properly "*sur-jouissances*," these *passions* sharing with *jouissance* all its character traits of *interruption* of all representation, which is in its essence sexual *jouissance*, but yet distinct from it.

As witness of love in an exemplary way, the *jouissance* of the event is *a jouissance which does not repeat itself*.

Wouldn't *Homo Sacer*[4] be someone that, in some way, anyone, no matter who, could appropriate? It is thus not an accident if the figure of *Homo Sacer*

can find its exemplary illustration in the prostitute under the laws of [Nicolas] Sarkozy,[5] that is to say someone that you can violate, slash, and kill without incurring the least real punishment.[6] That which is dissimulated in the interpretation made by [Slavoj] Žižek (2002) of *Homo Sacer* is in reality the most important today: the index of sacrality that this figure must, in its very definition, by all necessity, *traverse* in order to find it where it is. The "sacred prostitution."

The sacred is *precisely* that structure which brings Death into immanence, which fabricates, by way of a body "biologically" living, an *anticipated Death* which no supplementary act of homicide can come, in the eyes of man, to *kill again* (the "Muslim" of the camps, the Haitian Zombie, the Hindu Pariah. In democratic nihilism, we thus contribute as well to the "sacralization" of these "figures," in contemporary "artistic depression." The "profanity" of *Homo Sacer* is immediately recognized as that which is most "*sacred*").

The impasse that we have pointed to concerning the ethics of refusal of "throwing a sacrificial veil over Auschwitz," it is there and not elsewhere: this is why the conceptual sobriety that [Philippe] Lacoue-Labarthe (and [Theodor] Adorno before him)[7] order us to "after Auschwitz" could not but be: Auschwitz *has* been sacralized. And it is a matter of saying once and for all what has been said. The index of sacrality without aura which will have re-covered Auschwitz.

*

This is why one can take the measure of the point or the question, apparently derisory, of the irony[8] which will have finished by leading us: to a quite distant truth. As pure form of contemporary subjectivity, for which romanticism is the forerunner sign, it delivers the key to the actual moment of nihilism, after that of [Ludwig] Feuerbach, [Friedrich] Nietzsche, [Martin] Heidegger. Agamben, in this respect only, but in this respect totally, deserves to complete this glorious trio; and maybe with him there is again an advantage of complicity with and fascination for nihilism which there was not with the three illustrious predecessors. It must be said that everything will have been done to make it seem so.

So, what is Agamben saying to us? This: it's not incredulity or indifference which opposes itself to the religious, therefore, today, in Capital, but a sort of "active negligence" of which we form the syntagme.

In the era of Capitalism, the question of profanation reveals itself to be quite distinct from earlier forms of religion, where the sacrilegious act was duly punished. Profanation is more and more visibly *already* inscribed in the very processes of capitalist consummation. The democratic nihilism of Capital formally *condones* profanation; and this is the whole of the problem that Agamben is attempting to unwind.

To take something quite good from Žižek, *Homo Sacer* is essentially *homo sucker*, that is to say, he who in relation to the product, to merchandise—merchandise which is as often a "human" being as an object, it suffices to evoke

"stars" and their permanent passibility to "people," that is to say to the citizen demonstration of the "profanation" of their private lives, all of which is in fact bound to be read as an unwitting sedentarization of Akhenaton's subversion[9]—and effectively that of a parody of profanation; but parody, by way of the logic of repetition that we are unleashing, which resembles a parody of the very thing it is parodying. But as the profanation of Agamben itself claims to be a "subversive" form of parody, there's a big risk that we will lose ourselves in the details.

The dialectic that Agamben proposes to us would thus be in some way: the very bad, permanent parody by way of which the distractions of the global capitalist spectacle give themselves over, and a little step further, which makes all the difference (for Agamben!), a qualitative jump towards a "good" parody which would be the true profanation. Agamben says to us: "[t]o profane the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation" (2007, 21). But then what exactly is an *unprofanable*? We are the first generation of Capital, educated in this by post-68 vitalist leftism, to inscribe, at least parodically, profanation within the consumption that we adore; we consume so many journals, TV channels, we consume the discs and films that they sell us, and at the same time we are profoundly "negligent" of them, a negligence that Agamben assures us is the profanatory *stimmungen*[10] [sic] *par excellence*, and which he compares to the focus of the child *vis-à-vis* its toy (and as well, of course, to the human cruelty to which he bears witness in this respect). Contemporary art of the last 30 years (Wim Delvoye, Maurizio Catelane ...) has brought the elevation of this structure to a hitherto unattained extreme.

Profanation is thus nothing less than the absolute singularity of the epoch in which we grew up, that which localizes it historically. If Capitalism is a cult, and the most extreme that has ever existed,[11] our epoch is the first in the History of humanity where *iconoclasm* and *iconolatry appear to be rigorously the same thing*. A being which appears is exactly an event,[12] and thus, whatever name that we apply to this sequence, "nihilism" or something else, the method which is ours consists in traversing from the most extreme negativity of this epoch itself to detect in this very negativity, the "positive" of what is being sought. This would be the *pas de deux* of the last sections; the first two do not, for their part, only hold to "flat" negativity, to appearance without being or again, the "unbeing" of the sequence in question. At the same time, this "unbeing," the repetitive identity of iconoclasm and of iconolatry, which "fuses" two attitudes thus far opposed to all appearance, must have been, "somewhere," an event. Where? We wouldn't have enough space in this entire book to *say* rigorously.

To what does this "permanent cult" of the religion of nihilism, which is Capitalism, consecrate itself, according to Agamben? To the erection of the absolutely divided monument of repetition, to permanently organize, in dull entertainment and tired hatred of everything, the degenerative cult of "the event," where all repetition is always repetition of *a* real event, itself also obliterated in this parody. Which event? Well, it suffices to examine which repetition in order to know.

This cult commemorates an event, which is equality, the entrance of the masses into History, notably with the French Revolution. The profanatory rites

which commemorate equality give us the spectacle of equality (or more exactly "egaliberty," as Etienne Balibar (1989) says), but only its spectacle, because it does nothing further for that which is our real becoming-historical, effective political equality. Nihilist sarcasm quite simply spiritualizes equality in order to do nothing to render it effective. It *dematerializes political equality in its incessant parodic spectacle*. To concrete processes of political equality are thus substituted, under the mode of the categorical imperative of the derision of everyone and everything, a systematic spirituality of *equivalence*.

[Jean] Baudrillard roughly said that in appearance, we were iconolaters, but secretly, we were iconoclasts (1981). This sounds a bit bucolic, as one says, and to tell the truth, totally *dépassé*. We are the first generation to know that now, *iconolatry and iconoclasm have become a one-and-the-same "cultural"*[13] *phenomenon*. We are the first generation to have grown up under a precise cultual form: the identity of iconoclasm and iconolatry in the permanent form of *parodic profanation*. The gigantic permanent machinery of the media consists in a cultual commemoration without respite of "equality" (and of "liberty": of "enjoying without hindrance," by the screen of interposed "profanations"), in order to obliterate generic efficacy.

The messianic-revolutionary iconoclasm of profanation thus seems to stumble, as its very own *aporia*, into the "integrated" iconoclasm of the current consumer. And it's even the absolutely decisive trait of democratic nihilism, a sort of inverted eschatological messianism: the whole truth must appear, there must be no shelter (this is the symptom of the weakest part of contemporary art), nothing can hide itself any longer, that which again inverts the good messianic "drive" into its absolute other side, the real of democratic fascism: all appearance, and nothing but appearance, is the truth: all thus must appear, and it is this *instantaneous* appearance of All which is the truth. A sort of degenerate Hegelianism and "flat" testamentary messianism of absolutely inconsistent Being at the same time as the being hunted down everywhere.

Democratic nihilism is thus this *spite of the inapparent*. The lemma upon which [Guy] Debord predicates the ideology of the "spectacle," "all that which appears is good, all that which is good appears," equally signifies: all that which does not appear is bad, all that which is bad does not appear voluntarily, so for execrable reasons, one thus must not just *summon it to appear*, but to *force* it to do so (1967, 9-10). Without which, it is condemned to disappear, which is completely different from not appearing/unappearing. As [Maurice] Blanchot remarked, on a subject not incidental to [Michel] Foucault, the world which we enter is one where we no longer have the *right* to disappear.[14] He wanted to say, conceptually: not appear/unappear. One sees that which links Big Tech/technological gigantism and, above all, the "democratic" with the precursor spirit/genius of National Socialism: in the form of a circular All, nothing does not appear—there is no inexistent, no site which holds. That which derides the universal demand ("totalitarian") to ceaselessly appear must thus be made to disappear.

Nothing, since democratic nihilism "is" the revealed truth (in [Francis] Fukuyama's sense (1992)),[15] *must not appear*: there is no inexistence in democratic

nihilism, therefore no thinkable site, and thus, to the great relief of the nihilist "democrat," neither event nor being either; and this is the trait by which it has tipped over, at first insensibly (in the 80s) then visibly (in the last 15 years) into "democratic" *fascism*.

But in reality, democratic nihilism is much more radical than Debord suggests. It doesn't say "the good," but rather *the truth*. The real materialism of democratic nihilism consists in saying that *all* of the truth must appear and that *all* of that which appears is all of the truth (the "transparency").

It is real totalitarianism, the last henology: none of the "totalitarianisms," which have always determined their outside and their closure, have succeeded. As shocking as it might seem to delicate ears, there is thus an implacable logic that democratic nihilism commemorates in National Socialism, its primitive stage, and in the "Shoah," its negative cult. The *first religion of nihilism* thought it could consecrate its birth with the Holocaust of the Jews, that is to its eyes the *emptiness of being*, that which opposes *the integral appearance of the truth*. And we don't intend this in the trivial sense, and a false one at that, of a nihilist "religion." We intend it in a much more radical sense of a growth of a mass organized toward nihilism, the omnipresent master signifier of Germany of the years 1932-1945. We cannot therefore exonerate Nietzsche altogether—and Heidegger in the propagation which he ensured for his concept by deepening it—of the responsibility of the formation of such a concept, which could very well be a *pseudo-concept*. And contrary to what Agamben says (Capitalism is a "nihilist religion"), Hitlerian National Socialism had been up until now the only one to make explicit usage of "nihilism" as *mass ideology*.

One therefore senses that one dimension of our thread to be shared with Agamben touches on the extraordinary popularity that has been enjoyed by the concept of "nihilism" among the majority of important philosophers *after* Nietzsche and Heidegger, and, in the form of a chiasm, thanks to the political Nazi apocalypse and the indelible imprint left by them on History.

The chiasm simply enunciates: without the political accomplishments of National Socialism, *it is not at all certain that we would have made such a big deal of the concept of "nihilism."* Stalinism and Maoism haven't done anything; neither has the explicit ideology of democracy (that is to say of assumed Capitalism). But Western democracies, being the place where the National Socialist apocalypse produces itself, have not ceased to bequeath to the majority of the best European intellectuals the saturated usage of this concept. American intellectuals, for example, themselves smitten with European thought (Nietzschean or Heideggerian, for example), have very little recourse. It is clear that sex and money, that is to say [Sigmund] Freud and [Karl] Marx who never use the concept, are the immanent names of the sempiternal "accomplished nihilism" of the Heideggerians, and singularly of Agamben.

Why sex? Why money? Because these are the domains where the dialectic of lack, of excess, and of waste formalizes itself with the most transparency.

At this stage of our reflection, it must be remembered that of the two paradigms that the ancients acknowledged as *jouissance*, food was thus, due to the fact that the manufactured and non-industrialized hunt was in close proximity,

the paradigm *par excellence* of *jouissance*; not sexual *jouissance*, which is a paradigm of the moderns, the credit for which goes to Jean-Claude Milner for having, in a great little book, put into evidence (1997). We will return to it.

Let's admit, provisionally, that the originary paradigm of consumption, and of the *jouissance* which it sanctions, is not coitus, but eating.

The impossible cannibalism, that is to say here the impossible *profanation-event*, this is the ultimate paradigm of *jouissance*. And the essence of profanation is at its base this impossible, that is to say: the imaginary, as we have seen, of the eucharist (and thus of the parodic eschatology that is the essence of pornography, as Agamben subtly sees it: "Pornography, which maintains its proper phantasm in its intangibility by the same gesture by which it reproaches it and renders it unbearable to watch, *is the eschatological form of parody*" (2007, 47 [Kacem's italics]).[16]

The two great paradigms where Agamben will find something to illustrate this tricky logic, which leads him to pose the only political question that is worthwhile in his eyes: how to profane that which is already, that which presents itself as already of itself as profaned, and is therefore "improfanable"—these two paradigms will also be found to be: *the game* and *pornography*.

However, we had contended, from the time when our work was not quite there yet, that our reflections on the game contained a way out of Agamben's *aporias* (2007).[17] In what way? In that the game is the form that we confront in the distinction between Law and rule, that all political philosophy should in the future take stock of in order to clarify its own reasoning (and remove some of its *aporia*, as we do in order to finish with Agamben). Several points must be retained:

1. The Law/rule distinction intersects to a very large extent with that of event and repetition.

2. There are "simulacra" of events, of which National Socialism would be the biggest example: this is what Agamben, in the very centre of his thought, calls "the paradox of the sovereign" (1998): the one who dictates the rules (of the "civic") all the while being above them ("the Führer and only the Führer is the Law," as Heidegger said).[18] This is the distinction that we established between Law and rule in our transcendental analytic of the game (we will come back to this). This paradox—that of the sovereign—has always been constitutive of politics in its entirety, but it's only today that this paradox can be brought to full light, and in some way, to our faces. But Agamben, possibly too stuck in the mental space of contemporary nihilism—like all of us—refuses to say a word about the fact that the event is the example of "good" sovereignty: of the general will which dictates, finally, its Law to the entire space of civic rules.

We are thus reprising the Agamben/Badiou debate on the "tenability"—separated—of the three following statements:

a. Jouissance is the absolute vanishing presence of animal affectual intensity, which is then subjective within the ontological appropriation that the human

makes (by and large: Freud). And as absolute presence is never anything but af-fectual, *jouissance* is immediately presence for the animal which remains, "under" the cut of the repetition, human/inhuman.

b. The site is that "thing" which we hold as closely to itself as possible, that we confine and reduce to its "abject" materiality (saying: Agamben). Absolute ab-sence in the state, whose sudden emergence has the effect of maximal presence, most often in the horrific mode (thus the monstrosity of this abject).

c. The event is maximal identity and vanishing to itself (in total: Badiou). There-fore absolute presence, but this time *objective*.
   The ontologico-anthropological mystery of statement c. being: why does this arrive *only thanks to an event*, and never anywhere else?
   More exactly, why in the event does this identity, which works elsewhere as the being of every situation, come to appear?
   And why, to put more precisely again the central *aporia* of all of Agamben's thought, is the event, while being formally indistinct from the state of exception decreed by fascist sovereignty, nothing of "the state of exception," but rather a "state of grace," where "the abolition of the Law" does not open a return to the state of "natural" barbarism?
   Profanation, itself, is the "event" of democratic nihilism. The mix-up of the event and of profanation is thus better problematized by the following state-ment:

d. The event is the sequence where all are sovereigns.
   But who is *Homo Sacer*? We will see it with "sacred prostitution": the one in relation to whom all men are sovereigns.
   The contemporary *aporia* of "democracies," and nowhere more obvious than in France, consists in the absolute abyss that now exists between the Law of the general will and the *rules* that place themselves in state form. They no longer have *any* relation.

3. The paradox of sovereignty is, to be sure, absolutely complicit in *Homo Sacer*: the sovereign is the Law which dictates all the rules, but who, to give consis-tency to the ensemble of rules that he imposes, must also designate, in *Homo Sacer*, the point where all the rules disapply themselves. The sovereign is above the Law which dictates the "laws," those which we call rules; a rule is a *decreed* Law; meanwhile a Law is an unformulated rule, that is exerted through brute violence; a "force of law" which exerts itself without decreeing itself (except under the mode devoid of content, which exhibits the paradox itself in its pure form: "The Führer is the Law"). *Homo Sacer* is conversely, that is to say symmet-rically, the above-the-law excluded from all protection by normative rules, for example, the Medieval "bandit."

4. Badiou takes us out of the nihilist temptation of Agamben, in not giving up on the fidelity to events, which are the "positive" reversal and as miraculous as

the structure where Agamben seals us in behind double locks. This miracle of the event is evidently, always, the reversal of the damned *Homo Sacer*, this "abject" evental site, in appropriative grace; one of the examples most frequently mentioned—by Badiou—being, at the named point, the revolt of the slaves in Rome, under the command of Spartacus. An unthinkable becomes thinkable there; an impossibility, possible. The axiom which commands to the event, "we, slaves, have the right to return home"; the fidelity to the event is to convert this statement, everywhere and always, into effective possibility. The Law arises there in universal civic *rule*. In *Right*.

5. What is important here is to repair the ontological fault of Agamben's reasoning, and maybe also of all Italian political philosophy ([Antonio] Negri notably, with his tote-bag of "Empire"[19]). What Agamben betrays here is not going far enough in the assumption of the irreducibility of the *multiple* in our epoch; and that his reasoning can only be entirely aporetic *without* this assumption. For Agamben, as for Negri, political thought acts as if there was only *one* world. *Homo Sacer*, the Jew of the 30s, the ancient slave, the Palestinians of today (not to mention the Indian pariah, the Haitian zombie, in other cultures than pagano-judeo-christianity): there are always *worlds*, in state occurrences, and *Homo Sacer* is not simply the "excluded," who can always travel to another world (certain undocumented immigrants "can" return "back home" free of charge, but the majority cannot). This is the eternal paradigm of the "wandering Jew": *he who, from the universal figure of the one who can travel in all worlds, switches and becomes one that can no longer be received in any*. This is what we once tried to define for ourselves as the trickster, a sort of universal "wall climber," an "ecstatic player" susceptible of wearing all masks without identifying with any of them; without even considering the reverse of the "curse" which might risk punishing his game of "divine trickery" (2002).

6. The transcendental structure of the game is that which shows us how, within the frame of the strict repetition of the rules, which rigorously define, so that the game can be one, that which is "beyond-the-game," how the "Law" returns to the *interior* of the rules: in the figures of the "winner" and the "loser." Everywhere we must bypass the decreed rule to make the Law, and it is that which the game teaches us, and this alone. Antic tragedy, for example, which is that which has best nourished the meditations of philosophy concerning the question of the Law, cannot teach us this; neither can any form of art. There is the contemporary resort of the becoming-aesthetic of the game, and of the becoming-game of the aesthetic; the fact itself that the actual phase transition, and again over a very long term, of nihilism, cannot but pass by the form of pure "games" with rules. But this exceeds the aesthetic domain, and begins, with fruition, to penetrate the field of the political, for better and for worse. For example, one can sue a journal for defamation, and it is that which defines the democratic civic rule; but journals quite frequently bypass the rule to denigrate someone from elsewhere more effectively, and sometimes make, with total "democratic" impunity, of someone a *Homo Sacer* reduced to a bestiality worse than

that of the worst dictatorships, because it is without appeal, and, like for the *sacer*, in withdrawing from Death all value for any person whomsoever, for any memory whatsoever.

Or, a "positive" example this time, when 5,000 farmers gathered together in order to revindicate the devastation of transgenic corn fields, they make Law in bypassing the rule, which punishes such acts with harsh penalties; such that the "victims" of such exactions can never punish the guilty. More interesting again, in a spirit inspired by situationism and contemporary art, would be to test an existing Law (that which we call, thus, a rule) which stipulates that if up to 49 people rob a bank, it's a robbery, but beyond this, it is a riot. What would a knowingly willed and demonstrative performance, say, of contemporary artists and intellectuals, of militants and occasional adventurers, who would unite in order to voluntarily rob this bank with more than 50 people be? To test the jurisprudence to the point of failure: we shall in return test the relevance of its metaphysical background, in posing the question of what an act is, a will, with respect to the Law and the rules.

This question of the game with the Law (with the decreed rules) will certainly be the principal of political action in the future: a political action, an event, testing the civic rule *to its limit*. We will see that this question ("ludic") in reality reactivates the Trotskyist (and, we will see, metaphysically "Islamic") question of the precession of the event by its "general repetition."

7. The event is the interruption of a game by the imposition of another. The event is the irruption of a world in another. Profanation has the structure of a cheating; it imposes its Law on the rule, deactivates the rule through a ruse, but stays, like cheating, entirely dependent on the rule it profanes. This is what the philosopher wanted to say in showing that desire is always submitted to "the Law": they meant to say, lacking the conceptual distinction law-rule, to the rule (of the game).

Once more, the event—political to be sure, and nothing else here—seems to *confound itself* with profanation.

Biographies

Mehdi Belhaj Kacem (b. 1973) is a Franco-Tunisian philosopher, writer, and actor. His first novel, *Cancer*, was published in 1994. Among his most recognized philosophical works are *Événement et Répétition* [*Event and Repetition*] (2004), *L'esprit du nihilisme, une ontologique de l'Histoire* [*The Spirit of Nihilism: An Ontologic of History*] (2009), and *Après Badiou* [*After Badiou*] (2011).

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Notes

1. Part 1 covers pages 223-35; Part 2 (235-53) will be published in 2025 in *Janus Unbound.*
2. "Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned,

that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use" (Agamben 2007, 77) [trans].

3. "We must keep in mind that *jouissance* is prohibited [*interdite*] to whoever speaks, as such—or, put differently, it can only be said [*dite*] between the lines by whoever is a subject of the Law, since the Law is founded on that very prohibition. … But it is not the Law itself that bars the subject's access to *jouissance*—it simply makes a barred subject out of an almost natural barrier. For it is pleasure that sets limits to *jouissance*, pleasure as what binds incoherent life together, until another prohibittion—this one being unchallengeable—arises from the regulation that Freud discovered as the primary process and relevant law of pleasure" (Lacan 1966, 821).

4. "The protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life *of Homo Sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*, and whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert" (Agamben 1998, 8) [trans].

5. The Sarkozy bill both redefined prostitution and transformed policy, making solicitation, previously a minor offence, a serious offence [*un délit*] (up to six months imprisonment initially, but amended to two), with stiffer fines, and brought back "passive" solicitation as a crime (Wikipedia N.D., Article 50).

6. Whom you can literally *enjoy without hindrance*.

7. Cf. Adorno (1997) and Lacoue-Labarthe (1999).

8. See *Ironie et Vérité* (Kacem 2009) [*Irony and Truth*, trans].

9. Reference to the conversion of Egypt to Atenist monotheism under the Pharaoh Akhenaten (circa 1340 BCE) [trans].

10. Moods/feelings [trans].

11. The properly *canonical citation* to which Agamben has frequent recourse in the source material of Walter Benjamin: "Capitalism is probably the only case of a non-expiatory yet guilt-ridden cult … a monstrous guilty conscience which ignores redemption transformed into a cult not in order to expiate its failure, but in order to make it universal … and to finish by taking God himself into the failure. … God is not dead, but he was incorporated in the destiny of man" (translator's version, from Benjamin (2004)).

12. This is why, from Plato to [Immanuel] Kant, the birth of mathematics is hailed as one of the primordial events, if not the event *par excellence*, in the foundations of humanity: they are all in their entirety the appearance of Being. This is exactly why, inside themselves, they do not know any event. And it is from this redoubtable paradox, insoluble in appearance and containing in germ the ruin of all subtractive construction, that is the end we must finally account for.

13. Kacem's portmanteau neologism of cult and cultural [trans].

14. "Through a strict parceling out of the contaminated space, through the invention of a technology for imposing order that would affect the administration of cities, and through the meticulous inquests which, once

the plague had disappeared, would serve to prevent vagrancy (the right to come and go enjoyed by 'men of little means') and even to forbid the right to disappear, which is still denied us today, in one form or another" (Foucault and Blanchot 1990, 84) [trans].

15. This book, quite far from being as mediocre as its numerous adversaries would say, has the great merit of explicitly assuming the doctrinal hegemony of the last three decades, that is to say, the placid and "pacific" assumption of Capitalism as the "best in the world" by and for all (one wonders where the overwhelming humanoids who don't "profit" from it have gone, not to mention the "humanity" "at its best" that unfolds as Capitalism in the United States, for example, or Japan). Fukuyama structures the rest of his decree like a wise theologian, a sort of atheosophical St. Augustine, who identifies in California the celestial Jerusalem, and the last word of humanity. The part of this thought, coming from [Alexandre] Kojève, that must be taken very seriously, is in effect the hypothesis of "the end of History," that is to say, of a post-war, post-political humanity, having nothing further to which to devote itself except the *jouissance* of games, of sexuality, and of luxury. It already exists in Western Europe, in Canada, and in Japan. The shadow of this "pretty" tableau (or on the contrary totally despairing, since post-historical humanity would just "return" to a sort of pacified animality), it's evidently the phenomenon of subjective unification of the human species, vulgarly named "globalization": and thus the leading dialectic, of the United States, which we have not mentioned among the others as they still find ways of assuming the historical, thus warlike, dimension of their planetary domination, of which one knows quite well that the ecological question, or the large scale return of famine, for example, is entirely the responsibility of the countries which consume the most and thus "soar," at the risk of manic-depressive fallout in the paradise of the end of History.

16. Cf. also Agamben (1993) [trans].

17. The chapters of this book that we retroactively consider successful and useful are "eXistenZ," "*De l'ontologe du lieu à l'appropriation du jeu*" ["From the Ontology of Place to the Appropriation of the Game"], and with reservations which this book clarifies, "*L'événement impossible*" [The Impossible Event].

18. Cf., for example, Heidegger (2013) [trans].

19. Kacem is referencing Empire as Negri's apparatus, not the Hardt-Negri (2000) book exclusively [trans].

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Benjamin C. Dugdale

hornlet

after s.weil's G&G

in so far as she was 4months unemployed, attention
serves as paint-mixer violent rattle

Cat-girl Coriolanus shakes thru Sievespeare + startles upon thwart Cordelia
Make you a levee, leaden weight of me
grave ebb drummed out me

take from me that I might inflict that doubly on yer enemies

no-see-ums throb black gossamer the cop-white cab ferrying us to safety
from the awkward executorship declaration post-carving of t'erritories

no, no unlike yer siblings and dear old da,
I am not one to take advantage of an aside
no, no I've just always been so shy
sure, opaque is a word for it

no, no I think most wills devolve into this
a sister is just a stranger who hasnʹt estranged you yet

yes, the chiggers and beach fleas and many-kneed ants lead a blessed life
I wish you could drop to the grass and become a nymph as well
yes, sure you can touch me there

excuse the lanolin render frothing up the base the hornlets
it helps with the light sensitivity
it helps with the scent triggers
it helps with the second puberty
it helps with the Covid puppy socialization
it helps with the being a tits farmer
it helps with the *it helps with the* anaphora
        forming at the base of the ablaze, faceted, swarthy
        diamond horn that is your company

Benjamin C. Dugdale

sure, you may pat my phytoestrogenized gut, so long
as neither of us derive pleasure
      (under the crown, under the sweatwet hand swap
      'neath mutual negligee and mothgot nigh'gown)

my volunteered arms gently nick no ledger
I imagine you imagine   I owe you nothing
and, agreed, we meet in willowwacks of this advanced forgiven debt

no no it's just a blooded dribble
the 'lets still growing in

Biography

Benjamin C. Dugdale (they/them) is a writer, lapsed filmmaker, and fiber-artist based in rural AB [treaty 7 territory], at this very moment drinking a slimy matcha drink and working on a CCA-funded sci-fi suite of stories about vat-grown superqueers fighting against their handlers on a dying Earth. Benjamin also publishes as bonnyCD. Their book-length poem of cum and vampires, *The Repoetic: After Saint Pol Roux*, is available from Gordon Hill Press.

Martha White

Slide 9. Hypatia

Astrolabe ἀστρολάβος *astrolábos*;   : ستاره‌یاب : آلأَسْطُرلاب *al-Asṭurlāb*; *Setāreyāb*i

 astronomical instrument   handheld   universe.   functions inclinometer and   analog calculation   device   problems in astronomy.   simplest   metal disc
        a pattern   wires, cutouts,   perforations   to calculate astronomical positions precisely.   to measure   above the horizon
 time (and vice versa),   survey,   to triangulate.   used   classical antiquity, the Islamic Golden Age, the European Middle Ages and the Age of Discovery for all these purposes.

*This fragment, which we believe to have come from one of the latter day entries in what was known as 'Wikipedia' (circa 2000-2030), gives valuable insight into Hypatia's legacy. We believe this instrument, which she likely helped to design, was ultimately what removed her from history.

Biography
Martha White studied Comparative Literature and Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and is currently studying a Masters in Reparatory Justice, taught between Glasgow and the University of the West Indies. She likes to use poetry and music to respond to and explore the themes she is working on in her academic life.

Sonja Boon

forgettings

origins seep from tidal pools
and I tangle with seaweed,
a stinking inheritance washed smooth,
tumbled in waves of knowing

my tongue weeps
                    a sourness –
violence cries
and dreams in languages I've never spoken

come home, the wind whispers,
and I imagine four walls and a door,
windows and a floor,
a deadbolt, dark curtains,
a roof sealed
        tight –

pull deep, this horizon
bones scattered along shores

and I sink, swallow the ocean
my mouth filling quick
sand gritty with salt,
gasping at a trick of light.

Biography
Sonja Boon is a writer, researcher, flutist, teacher, and stitcher of stories. She lives in Kjipuktuk (Halifax).

Ozayr Saloojee

The Little Things

Zurich is cold in January. The raclette and coffee at the airport were expensive, but the city was pretty, an obsidian lake and a broken sapphire sky; a sun with no warmth but lots of light. Our Airbnb host met us exactly on time, coming out of the apartment to let us in the gate, ignoring our earlier door knocks. We were on the way to Rome, via Milan, Tirano and the Bernina Express across the Alps, then to Istanbul, for a term of teaching abroad. We wandered the cobblestone city for a while. We bought chocolates and little Swiss Army knives - one for each of the four of us. The girls have them to this day. Mine was confiscated - it was part of my key ring - at a security check for a hockey game years later. The blade was little and dull, about an inch long, hardly sharp enough to prick a finger, let alone make a meaningful, or purposeful cut.

The apartment was strange and sweet and small. A ground floor - I think? - on a quiet street, not far from the lake. A short walk to the train station. Two rooms, low ceilings. Cat-print cushions. Old Hollywood posters; the poetics of bricolage. Straight in, a bathroom to the right, immediately off the little lobby, with an old chair and tiny artefacts on old desks, magnets on the fridge, frames on the wall. Audrey Hepburn + Cat, embroidered in bold colours on a pillow. Two bedrooms, pinwheeling off a main room - a combination of kitchen, living room and dining room. Everything just curated enough to be a modest ad in a local city magazine. In the dining room - in the very middle of everything - a table.

The girls - little, tired, but with new energy to take this new thing and place in - scattered. Backpacks dropped, shoes off, jackets and mitts and hats on the floor. A new, little soundtrack from all corners of the apartment now: "ewwww," "so cute" "Is that a butterfly collection?" "It smells funny" "I want that bed." "Can I put my lego there?" And so on. وهكذا وهكذا. The table in the middle of the room was artfully piled with little things. Kitchen things, eating things. Dried flowers. Some books. Art. Travel. Zurich. Switzerland things. It had a metal top, sloped from each side to a drain near the bottom. A small, narrow channel, all around. A solid base. A Medical examiner's table, an autopsy table, a coroner's table. I stared. Jen stared.

We didn't tell the girls of course. One would have been immensely and immediately fascinated at the macabre nature of this thing in the middle of our room, and that we were now eating our cereal at. The other would have paled, declared immediately that we (A), leave; (B), remove the table from any possible

perspective where she might see it, or (C), cover it with a large enough blanket (impossible - it was huge), where she would give it side-eye and walk around the edges of the room not looking at it for three days. It stayed, and so did we, doing little things in little Zurich, waiting for our train to Chur, and then across the mountains. We stayed, eating meals out of our little coroner's table.

Today, maybe? I don't know anymore. In Gaza, Dr. Hani Bseiso, at a kitchen table, in a room with little things, in a house with cushions and curtains, and an armchair, and cold bright light streaming in from windows, and surrounded by tanks and Israeli soldiers, amputated the leg of his 16-year-old niece, Ahed. He used a saw, and a needle and thread.

I downloaded a video of this scene - after the amputation, because it felt important to have, to watch. In it, a young girl lies on a table, she blinks and turns to the camera. A hand reaches down to brush her cheek. A tear, maybe? Her right leg bandaged by the knee. Six men - I think? - attend to her. The camera pans left. A bottle on the table, a blue bag. A young man with an Adidas hoodie brushes her face, looks down and smiles at her.

This was the first thing I saw today in the social media litany. Wake up. Stay in bed. Check the feed. Sit up. Check the feed. Make some coffee. Check the Feed. Check. Check. Check. Like. Like. Share. Share. Like. Break apart.

It's the little things now, today, then, tomorrow, that I cannot look at anymore. I look at the kitchen table I built, that we had dinner at. That the cat jumps on. Piled with books, a few letters. A bank statement. A bottle of vitamins. A rock my nephew painted with "I Love you" on it. My little daughter, a year older than Ahed, sits at it, in a black BTS hoodie, eating a cupcake. It's cold outside, in Ottawa, in January.

I look at the little cardboard box on it, full of my not-so-little daughter's crochet supplies. A kufi she was hoping to make for her uncle (it's too small); spools of yarn from her Grandmother's secret stash. Needles. Thread. A sharp pair of scissors.

I condemn chocolates and Swiss Army knives. I condemn raclette and expensive coffee. I condemn key-rings and cat cushions, and desks, and Audrey Hepburn. I condemn butterflies, and butterfly collections. And I condemn pillows and dried flowers. Trains, too. I condemn cobblestone streets. I condemn blunt saws and sharp scalpels, and purposeful cuts. I condemn houses, and rooms, and cameras, and bags, and bottles and hoodies. I condemn yarn and needles, and rocks that say I love you. I condemn language. All those little things.

Biography

Ozayr Saloojee (b. Johannesburg, South Africa) teaches architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa. His research and creative practice is pre-occupied with the search for architecture enacted *otherwise*, where design is a process of tender epistemic repair and dreaming.

JUST FUCKING GETTING HER DONE (2024)
(Mixed Media, Digital)

ABYSSAGAIN (2024)
(Black and White Photographic Print 8"x10")

HOWTORUNFAST (2024)
(Mixed Media, Digital)

uminoko

So … you want us to talk about images? However, quite frankly, we have only begun to scratch the surface of the real potential of the image. There is yet to be a master of the image, as far as we can see, although attempts have been made. Our aim for this statement is to present a constellation of four different images; we hope this framework may further illuminate the potential of the image.

Let's begin with the image we have all seen before: a picture of the sunset. This image falls under the category of the Natural Image; having all been armed with this ability to capture, these images result from an instinctual reaction to the Beautiful. But have you ever seen an image of a sunset, of the ocean, of a mountain that was so beautiful that you would prefer the image to the real thing? The best the Natural Image can do for the viewer is to bring on the feeling of "I wish I was there." This feeling is an awakening; it can get one out of the door and under the slowly fading sky. It can ignite the desire to capture one's own sunset, and it has the potential to turn the viewer into the Artist. This Natural Image plays a valuable role in the quest for Art, as recognition of the Beautiful is an important skill to cultivate. But we at uminoko watch the sun come and go at least twice a day; we never stop seeing the Beautiful. Thus, we have outgrown the need to produce such an image. Sorry, Mr. Adams. But what if one has never seen the sun's furious exit from the sky? Their experience of the Natural Image would be fundamentally different.

This brings us to our next image: the Image of the Black Swan. This one screams, "I exist" to underdeveloped eyes; by giving visual form to the previously unthinkable, it creates a possibility of seeing the world from a new angle. The idea here is that the image of the Black Swan calls into question the notion that "All swans are white"; by doing so, it may lead the viewer towards a broader worldview, one in which swans might be black, or even pink. Awe, wonder,

fear, and terror all colour the experience of this image; they disrupt our world-view by expanding our idea of what could possibly exist. In the context of art history, this kind of image attempts to expand our notion of "This is art," it points the finger in a new direction. This is Duchamp's fountain and Warhol's soup cans; this is our image of the construction worker labouring on the telephone lines. The value of the Black Swan Image is twofold: in challenging our previous worldview, it introduces a potentially new way to see. Additionally, this image can offer comfort and encouragement to ever-searching eyes; their guidance reminds us that there is always something more to see. This kind of image is far more complex simply because our eyes have been searching at different intensities throughout different durations: "Everything you like, I liked five years ago." RIP Virgil. But remember, we at uminoko have inherited Ocean Eyes; we already see everything as "Art™."

Perhaps the older, wiser brother (or maybe the younger, impatient sister) of the Black Swan Image is the Image of Nothing. This image almost isn't an image because it cannot be captured using traditional methods. It points because we inherently want the image to point, but its contents cannot be commodified. Brought on by a strong disdain towards the hypnotic tendency of the image, at the least, this image seeks to annoy or disrupt, and in extreme cases, it obliterates itself. It can be a 4-minute-ish-long song of silence or it can be a wall of text that refuses the reader's readiness. This image wants to say, "Hello??? You fucking idiot, I was always right here"; sometimes it is better to let the image—and the eyes that seek it—rest. After all, the harder one seeks union with God, the more distance one creates.

But we are afraid this isn't always possible; sometimes we are trying to get back to a place we have been, and sometimes we are trying to get to a place we have dreamed of. If so, the Guru Image can be of help. We have heard that some yogis take a photograph of their Guru when they depart from their Presence; the image offers itself as an object of meditation, an entry point into a certain state. A return to a state, this kind of image is the first thing the LSD subject sees after breaking through into emptiness. It is the sight of "I Am That." An image can remind someone who they are or who they might be by pointing back toward a certain state. This image offers itself as an object to cling to, and it can provide shelter from the storm. Are the dream image and the created image any different? At uminoko, we don't think so; the image itself is inseparable from the flash that brought it into existence. This image can be a portal into a new world, reminding us of the Garden of Eden from which we sprung.

All of the images we have described so far seem to have different purposes, so naturally we are curious about what happens when you combine them into One. Maybe the potential of the image can only be seen when this synthesis occurs in a breathtaking flash. Maybe the Image of the Soul can be seen. We have caught enough glimpses to believe it is possible but are not arrogant enough to say the quest is complete.

Even so, we at uminoko still can't help but ask: will these images ever be enough? We wish we could give you more than this, this question filled with

equal amounts of despair and ecstasy. But to tell you the truth, this question is all we have; we are still searching for the real potential of the image. Maybe you can help us.

So, I will leave you with this true happening. Before I sat down to finish writing this statement, I got a text from my mother. It read, "Beautiful sunset tonight. … Thought of you." It was the kind of text where you feel someone's love for you, but it was just a text; there was no image. At that moment, I was left wanting only one thing: a picture of the sunset.

Biography

We are uminoko (u-me-new-co). uminoko is a network of writers, painters, photographers, and designers; we are a network of teachers, janitors, butchers, bankers, and welders; we are a network of thinkers, dancers, actors, and architects; we are a network of anarchists, capitalists, communists, and criminals; we love this world but hate its ways. What unites us is that we share a common hope; the goals we mark for ourselves stem from this wish. We bring ourselves into form when that wish may be fulfilled. We still are not quite sure what this wish is, but we all know it is there. We bring it with us wherever we go. Maybe you do too.
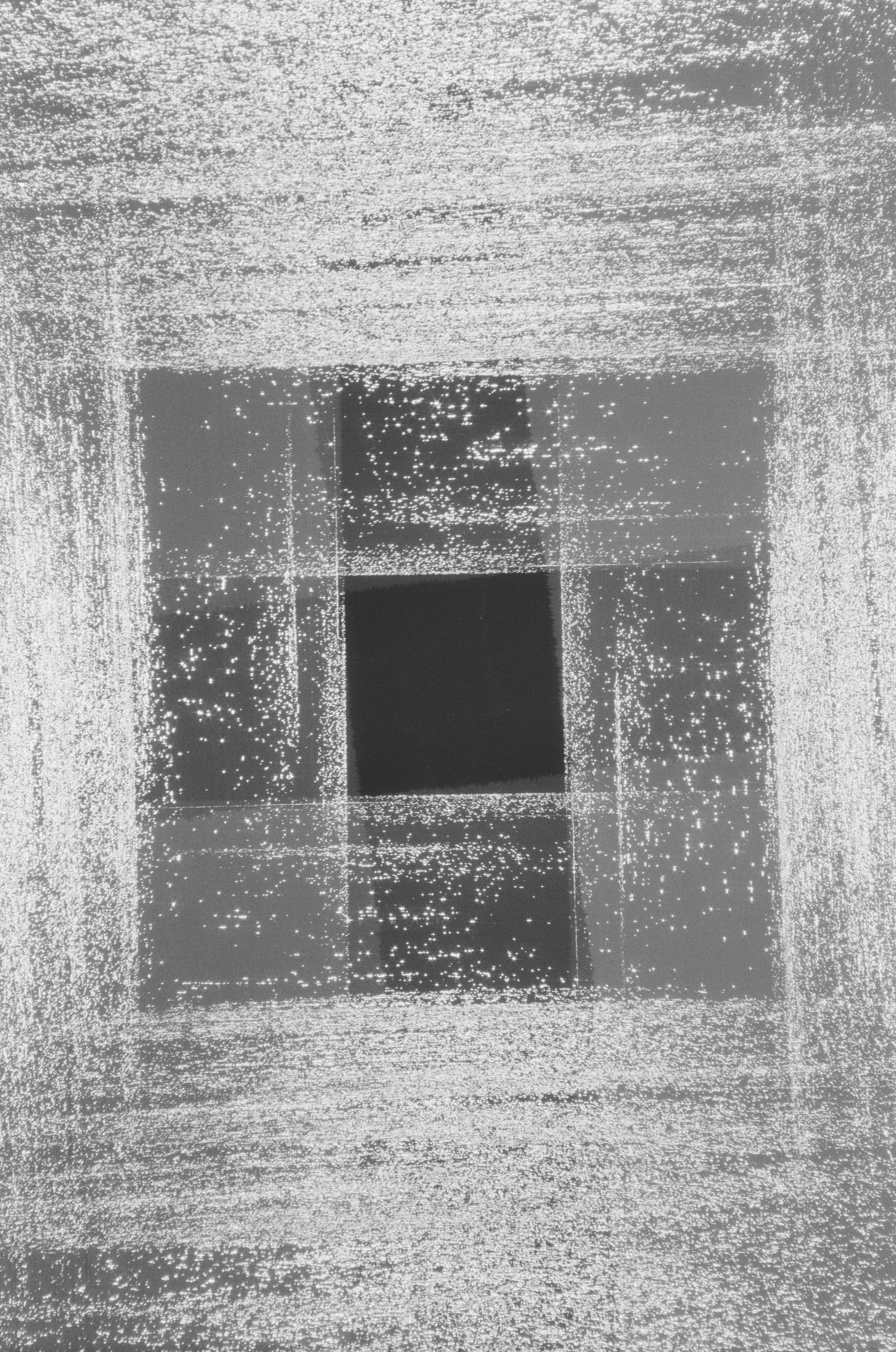
The Translator's (In)visibility in Julio Cortázar's "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris"

Asala Mayaleh and Bilal Hamamra

Abstract

Julio Cortázar's "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris" (1951)—a short story written in the form of a letter that the narrator, a translator, leaves for Andrea, the owner of the apartment he has moved into while she is in Paris—is a commentary on the (in)visibility of the translator. The protagonist of the story, a nameless translator (signifying the marginalized role of translators), relinquishes control over the apartment/text that he temporarily inhabits. The translator expresses his anxiety over his unsettling visibility in the apartment/text, where he anticipates staying for a maximum of four months, "perhaps with luck three," the estimated time arguably required to finish his translation project (43). Rosemary Arrojo points out that the story reveals "the translator's gripping narrative of his failure to protect the author's textual space from his agency and relentless creativity" (2018, 7). The story, we contend, is a metaphor for translation, a word mentioned only twice in the story (46-7), pondering the translator's impossibility of shielding the absent author's textual space from his inevitable manipulation and destructive creativity.

Keywords: (In)visibility, "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris," Transgression, Translation, Julio Cortázar

Julio Cortázar (1914-1984) was a key figure in the Latin American Boom, a period of remarkable literary innovation in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside luminaries like Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. This era is celebrated for its experimental narrative techniques and the fusion of diverse cultural themes, marking a significant moment in global literature. Cortázar's work, notably *Hopscotch* (1966), exemplifies the creative spirit of the Boom, influencing an array of Spanish-speaking writers and readers worldwide (Poblete 2019).

We propose reading Cortázar's "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris," originally published in Argentina in 1951 and translated into English by Paul Blackburn in 1967, as a metaphor for translation or the problems faced by the translator,

specifically the tension between creativity and the expectation of faithfulness to the "original"/source text. The story, written in the form of a letter addressed to the owner of an upscale apartment in Buenos Aires, Andrea, is about the mounting anxiety over the visibility and agency of the translator. The protagonist's/narrator's/translator's movement into Andrea's apartment represents his immersion in the "original" text and his attempt to translate it into another language. The narrator, a translator, starts experiencing a surge of unconfined creativity, represented by the appearance of a bunny (coming out of his mouth) upon his arrival at Andrea's apartment, which signifies the textual space he is temporarily occupying. He decides to keep the bunnies in a wardrobe during the day. As time passes, the number of bunnies gradually increases, and so does the resulting chaos and disorder in the apartment/text. When the eleventh bunny appears, the translator writes a letter to Andrea, telling her about the bunnies, how he cannot contain the mess, and insinuating he might kill himself along with them. In this article, we employ Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization, shedding light on the translator's visibility and his unsuccessful efforts to remain (in)visible. Venuti criticizes domestication for its "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values" (2017, 20). He challenges the notion of fluency, contending that it diminishes the text's foreignness and uniqueness, thereby making the translator (in)visible. On the contrary, Venuti applauds foreignization, which he describes as "an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, thereby transporting the reader abroad" (2017, 15). Venuti's translator (in)visibility paradigm can thus be summarized as follows:

> A translated text is judged successful—by most editors, publishers, reviewers, readers, by translators themselves—when it reads fluently, when it gives the appearance that it is not translated, that it is the original, transparently reflecting the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text. (2018, 4)

In light of Venuti's paradigm of (in)visibility, we contend that Cortázar's "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris" highlights the challenges and complexities inherent in the act of translation, and the narrator's obsessive concern with concealing the bunnies and repairing the damage they caused can be understood as a metaphor for the translator's efforts to reconcile the demands of faithfulness and artistic expression. As we will see, the narrator/translator embodies the concept of (in)visibility. While he expresses his creativity symbolized by the bunnies, he commits suicide at the end of the story once he loses control over the bunnies—that is, over the original order of the apartment/text.

The translator affirms that it is impossible for him to keep the original order of the apartment, the source text on which he is working: "How much at fault one feels taking a small metal tray and putting it at the far end of the table, setting it there simply because one has brought one's English dictionaries and it's at this end, within easy reach of the hand, that they ought to be" (40). The use

of dictionaries emphasizes the role of the translator as an intermediary between language and culture. The translator's feeling of fault or guilt in moving the objects/words of the apartment/text shows that he translates under the constraints of the original apartment/text that he is supposed to keep intact. However, the protagonist/translator finds it difficult "to stand counter to, yet to accept with perfect submission of one's whole being, the elaborate order that a woman establishes in her own gracious flat" (40). The fact that the owner/author of the apartment/text, Andrea, is a female shows that Cortázar undermines the author/translator opposition, which is based on the production/reproduction paradigm: original/translation, masculine/feminine. Putting the dictionaries that he needs for translation "within easy reach of the land" marks the beginning of the change to the original order of the apartment/text (40). Later on, the narrator/translator repairs a lamp that a bunny has broken: "The crack where the piece was broken out barely shows, I spent a whole night doing it with a special cement" (46). This quote is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's argument about translation:

> Fragments of a vessel, which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest detail, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (1968, 78)

While the translator fixes the broken lamp, his attempt to make the visible (in)visible is thwarted. What "barely shows," just like the "fragments of a greater language" proposed by Benjamin, is visible (78). Indeed, the translator asserts that his touching of any object in the apartment is a token of transgression: "I can hardly change a lamp's cone of light, open the piano bench, without feeling a rivalry and offense swinging before my eyes like a flock of sparrows" (40). The translator's feeling of rivalry and offence reveals the impossibility of a pure, unmediated relation between the original text and its translation. The apartment is Andrea's textual space and "a visible affirmation of her soul" (39), which reflects her feelings and thoughts, or, in the words of Venuti, "the individualistic conception of authorship" (2017, 6). Relocation becomes a metaphor for translation. The protagonist moves into Andrea's apartment and occupies her physical and textual space, representing his immersion in the original text and his attempt to reproduce it in another language. Any translation is, therefore, associated with the indecency, violation, or transgression of the original text.

A translated text, according to Venuti, is considered acceptable when "the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original' " (2017, 1). This means that the absence of any stylistic or linguistic additions from the translator makes the text seem transparent. The (in)visibility of the translator means the visibility of the writer and fluency in the reading, as mentioned earlier. This illusory transparency conceals any necessary interventions in the original text that the translator might attempt. Therefore, the translator gets trapped in his struggle

for transparency, objective reproduction, and detachment from the text he is occupying/translating. Adriana Pagano perceives the theme of translation in Cortázar's writing as "a locus of violence and tension: a violence resulting from the imposition of words and meanings to translate reality" (2002, 82). The translator is in a constant state of tension and ambiguity, living in an apartment and translating a text without being allowed to intervene in its original order/meaning creatively. There is the assumption that the narrator/translator should temporarily inhabit both spaces, the apartment and the text, without interventions or traces of his being or creativity. The protagonist/translator is aware that any alteration to the existing order will have ramifications, even if it goes unnoticed. A simple adjustment like moving a tray "alters the play of relationships in the whole house, of each object with another, of each moment of their soul with the soul of the house and its absent inhabitant" (40). The tension builds up as the translator violates the established order by "conceiving" the bunnies and then fruitlessly trying to conceal his violation by hiding them.

The translator's oral conception of the bunnies, which are associated with uncontrollable verbal expression and creativity, reveals his unsettling feelings about his unwanted visibility in the author's apartment/text. In other words, the bunnies represent the translator's creative impulse, the irresistible desire to deviate from faithfulness to the original order of the apartment/text and unleash his creative expressions, expressions (bunnies) that come from his mouth, highlighting his inability to repress his creativity. Indeed, the bunnies that come out of the translator's mouth are associated with poetic creativity. He compares a newly born bunny to "a poem in its first minutes" (43). The translator's growing bunnies destroy the authorial, textual space of the author, whose books are the first target of the bunnies: "They've nibbled away a little at the books on the lowest shelf" (46). The translator feels embarrassed by the birth of the bunnies, telling Andrea that "always I have managed to be alone when it happens, guarding the fact much as we guard so many of our privy acts, evidence of physical selves which happen to us in total privacy" (41). The tension between loyalty to the original and the irrepressible desire for creative expression is reflected in the protagonist's struggle to maintain order while allowing the bunnies to exist within the apartment. He releases and tends to his bunnies from the wardrobe at night, clears their mess, and keeps them locked in the wardrobe during the day to protect them from Andrea's housekeeper, Sara, who, as a critic, tries to keep the original order of the apartment and the textual space: "That way Sara always finds everything in order, although at times I've noticed a restrained astonishment, a stopping to look at some object, a slight discoloration in the carpet, and again the desire to ask me about something" (47). The protagonist's concern to eliminate the changes created by the bunnies is at the crux of the translator's desire for (in)visibility.

The story shows that the translator is unable to exercise authorial control over the text he is translating. Rosemary Arrojo (2018, 26) points out that "Cortázar's conflicted protagonist invites us to rethink the impossible position of translators in a culture that idealizes originals as unmediated expressions of their author's thoughts while it expects translators to be neutral and invisible in

their work." The translator expresses his lack of control over the bunnies that "hop about on the carpet, into the chairs, then tiny blotches shift like a moving constellation from one part to another" (45). He writes in his letter: "I'd like to see them quiet, see them at my feet and being quiet—somewhat the dream of any God, Andrea, a dream the gods never see fulfilled" (45). One can say that faithful translation adhering to the original text is a dream that cannot be realized.

The translator's anxiety peaks with the appearance of the eleventh bunny: "ten was fine, with a wardrobe, clover and hope, so many things could happen for the better. But not with eleven, because to say eleven is already to say twelve for sure, and Andrea, twelve would be thirteen" (49). For the protagonist, ten is an even number; it resembles a controllable arrangement, but the eleventh symbolizes infinite possibilities and a lack of order and control. His loss of control is further substantiated by his releasing himself from the responsibility of destroying the apartment and, by extension, the authorial space that he initially pledged that he would protect from any intervention, writing that "I was not all that responsible for the unavoidable and helpless destruction of your home" (48).

Both the author and the owner of the apartment are absent, and they are, therefore, unable to prevent the translator's interventions. However, both of their spaces are extensions of their "self" that have an enigmatic power over the translator and make him feel guilty for claiming a sense of authority over them. This aligns with Venuti's argument that "work-for-hire contracts alienate the translator from the product of his or her labour with remarkable finality" (2017, 9). Such contracts bring forth the *aporia* of "death-in-birth," where the birth of the translator's authority and presence in translation signifies his death (Spivak 2021, 410). At the end of the story, the protagonist loses the literality and textuality of the text/apartment and "surrender(s) [himself] to linguistic rhetoricity" of the original order of the apartment/text (45). Through his suicide note, and presumably his death, the translator erases himself and his non-compliance with the apartment/text. While it is the narrator's/translator's awareness of this subordinate position and his desire for (in)visibility that spur him on to jump to his death with the 11 bunnies, Maria Guzmán suggests that his suicide "may signify exposure, mutation, metamorphosis, even liberation—a translation of the self into another reality" (2006, 83). The ambiguity of death, a transcendental expression of creation, unshackles the translator from the alienating conditions of his expressive post. Death appears as the last resort to the exiled protagonist, who, in the story, has prepared and closed many suitcases "that never manage to get moved anyplace" (40). The translator, who occupied two spaces simultaneously, failed to belong to any.

The (in)visibility of the translator is also apparent in his name. Even though the whole story revolves around him, Cortázar did not give his protagonist a forename or a surname. Namelessness suggests a loss of referentiality and identity. Recognizing and acknowledging a person's existence starts when he/she is designated or identified by a name. It is Cortázar's way of inscribing and making sense of the exiled translator's life. Since the translator, to quote Sam Sacks

(2015), "has no proper home, he can also have no proper name." Names have a role in creating one's identity and belonging to a community. Places where names are connected and recognized by society include jobs, marital status, opinions, and personal habits. While the translator is nameless in these places, his striving to be visible goes unexpressed and remains insignificant (Kakade 2020). The translator is not granted a name in life or in his translation. According to Theo Hermans, copyright law could reduce translation to "reproduction" where the translator's agency bears repercussions of ethics and accountability (2014, 293). Similarly, the protagonist's namelessness suggests the supposedly prescribed role of the translator as a mouthpiece of the writer.

Accordingly, the translator's suicide can be read as a defeat, as self-destruction in the face of the impossibility of resolving the tension created by the uncontrollable reproduction and activity of the bunnies, which the translator also eliminates, and the concern to leave the order of the apartment/original text intact. In other words, the translator opts for a faithful or servile translation of the original, denying his impulse for creativity, an attitude Venuti calls "self-effacement" (2017, 41). It is significant that the letter lacks a signature; we know the name of the recipient/author/(Andrea) but not the name of the narrator/translator/(nonexistent). The protagonist's absence at the end of the story corresponds to the lack of a signature on the letter; the translator has disappeared, concealing his passage through the work. However, one can argue that the translator's suicide continues the transgression of boundaries initiated by the bunnies, throwing himself from the original text/apartment into the unknown, without limits, into the liberating dynamics of translation. In this act, the translator embraces the transformative power of language and breaks free from the constraints of fidelity to the original. The act of translation becomes a creative and liberating process, allowing for the expansion and growth of language.

Conclusion

Cortázar's "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris" is a commentary on the inevitable presence/visibility of the translator whose desire to be (in)visible is thwarted by his conception of the bunnies. This conflict between loyalty to the established order and the drive for creative expression evolves as the translator grapples with maintaining the status quo while accommodating the presence of the bunnies. His efforts to conceal the changes caused by the bunnies emphasizes his desire for (in)visibility in the translation process. Moreover, the translator's anonymity mirrors his struggle with visibility and identity due to the prescribed role restricted to embodying the author's voice. His suicide note marks his attempts to escape confinement and glorify the transformative prospect of translation. In other words, the story shows that translation is a transgression and violation of the original/source text.

Biographies

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Becoming Homeless in Language: On Ontological Terrorism

Julia Sushytska

If language is the house of being, what does it mean to be homeless in one's mother tongue?

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, several prominent Ukrainian writers who wrote in Russian and have received literary prizes from Russia decided to switch entirely to Ukrainian. Some of them declared that they will never again write in Russian.

Most Ukrainians are fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian, but the overwhelming majority speak one language better than the other. One of the two languages is their mother tongue, even if they grew up speaking both. It is not impossible, but also not insignificant, for them to switch entirely to Ukrainian. The switch is even more significant for a writer whose identity and professional life are intimately linked to language. It is painful to think of contemporary Ukrainian writers—Anastasia Afanasieva, Maik Yohansen, Olena Stiazhkina, or Volodymyr Rafeenko—who have decided to cut off their mother tongue. As someone who grew up speaking Ukrainian and Russian, and then slowly and painfully grew several more tongues, while fighting to retain the first two, I was shocked to read in a poem by Afanasieva from 9 April 2022 (a month into Russia's full-scale invasion): "I am glad to forget forever that language/In which all my poems were written" (2022). Afanasieva's poem describes and enacts a movement: away from daily bombardments, from home, and from the Russian language. The poem begins in Russian, but toward the end switches to Ukrainian. Rafeenko stated in an interview, "[t]he Russian language in its entirety has become obscene" (2022).

The decision to "forget" Russian is completely understandable because Ukrainians have been living in trauma for the past two years—but also since the initial invasion in 2014, and since the 17th century—a trauma brought on by Russia, Soviet Russia, and the Russian Empire. Their decision is easy to understand, but also dangerous: it might entail literary (if not literal) suicide. After fleeing his home city of Donetsk due to the Russian invasion in 2014, bilingual Rafeenko decided to study Ukrainian in order to continue writing novels. He admits, "[i]t took me a while to master the Ukrainian language at a level sufficient for writing" (Rafeenko 2022).[1] The second, Ukrainian, part of Afan-

asieva's poem is of inferior artistic quality—most likely by design. She does not seem to have written any poems since then.

The situation of a writer forced to flee their mother tongue in order to survive, who risks forever remaining homeless, suggests a violence that is inflicted not just on a particular language but, more fundamentally, upon *logos* and being. This violence, of an altogether different level, destroys not only particular human beings but the very possibility of becoming human. My argument here relies on a distinction that appears in four philosophical frameworks: Heraclitus, Aristotle, Martin Heidegger, and Marcel Proust.[2] All these thinkers acknowledge the difference between natural languages and *logos*, or the structures that house being and enable human beings to become human. Working with this distinction, I argue that Russia must be held accountable not only for the war crimes it commits around the world—including Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine—but also for acts of terror against us all: the crimes against *logos* and being. These are crimes of ontological terrorism.[3] Aimed against *logos* and being, acts of terror destroy the possibility of becoming human. I use such a forceful term because of the scale of the unprecedented violence we are witnessing: on the one hand, the destruction of the structures that support thinking and becoming human is systematic and state-financed, and, on the other hand, social media and now also artificial intelligence accelerates and amplifies the damage.

Theoretical Framework

Martin Heidegger famously claims that language is the house of being (1993, 217). By "language" he means something different, yet not distinct, from a particular language. It is something that all of the natural languages share. It is also something that we, as human beings, share with each other when we make the effort to speak or think. Heidegger's claim and the image on which it relies—that of a house—is especially meaningful, but it could also be explained through several other concepts and images discussed by Heraclitus, Aristotle, and Proust. I propose a constellation or a layering of concepts to convey my argument, rather than an in-depth analysis of Heidegger's theoretical system.

Heraclitus' notion of *logos* illuminates and expands Heidegger's notion of "language" as something that is neither distinct from nor reducible to natural languages. Heraclitus's texts, rarely longer than a sentence, are carefully crafted to be both semantically and syntactically ambiguous. Through this ambiguity, Heraclitus seduces the reader into the *process* of thinking. A reader must work to decipher his text's meaning. In his longest extant aphorism, Heraclitus points out that one is able to speak well, that is, according to being, but most of the time we are not attentive or alert enough, and do not hear what is actually being said:

> Although this *logos* holds always humans prove unable to understand it both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For although all things come to be in accordance with this logos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each thing in

accordance with its nature and saying how it is. The other humans let slip away what they do while awake just as what they do asleep escapes them. (DK1)[4]

I leave the Greek word *logos* untranslated to invite thinking beyond the English translation of "word" or "reason." It also evokes resonances with the English word "logic," while still distinguishing the two. In Heraclitus's time, *logos* and *mythos*, although not synonymous, overlapped and enhanced each other, so *logos* is not what we ordinarily mean by rationality or logic.[5] *Logos* is not reducible to reason, but it is logical. *Logos* is structure, which is why the image of a house is so appropriate. This order or structure "houses being," but it also supports becoming: "all things come to be in accordance with this *logos*." *Logos* reveals difference because it helps distinguish "each thing in accordance with its nature." Heraclitus's saying throws the distance between *logos* and human beings into relief—humans are "inexperienced" even while experiencing, they are "unable to understand" even when they hear, they "let slip away" what they are actually doing.

Yet, this aphorism also reveals a connection between human beings and *logos*—it has to do with the "always," namely, with time and eternity. The first sentence of the saying is an example of syntactic ambiguity: the word "always" might be referring to *logos* (*logos* always holds), or to the fact that humans are not able to understand it (they are always unable to understand). The ambiguity exposes the link between humans and *logos*—the two are implicated when it comes to time and eternity.[6]

Heraclitus also writes: "Although the *logos* is shared, most live as though thinking were a private possession" (DK 2). *Logos* is not subjective, nor is it separated from human beings and their particular circumstances or experiences. This is why *logos* cannot be possessed or controlled in the way a natural language is controlled in authoritarian states, as exemplified in George Orwell's *1984* (1949). *Logos* is always more than any set of linguistic and cultural constructs, so it can never be mastered or weaponized by human beings. Yet there is not only a history of treating natural languages as weapons, but we currently face a large-scale systematic attempt to compromise our relationship with *logos* and each other. The Russian state has launched a state-sponsored campaign to discredit *logos*, and is dedicating considerable financial resources to promote the false and illogical idea that thinking is private or subjective. This is much more dangerous than forcing a poet to flee their mother tongue.

In another aphorism, Heraclitus writes: "Not from me, but from the *logos* hearing, it is wise to say-the-same-as-*logos* (*homologein*) that all is one" (DK 50). Occasionally, if I make an effort to hear *logos*, what I say will coincide with it. I can understand and express something that goes beyond my limited "I"— something that is shared with other human beings and also corresponds to the structures that support or "house" being. In other words, if I make an effort to hear *logos*, I might say something that does not reproduce my personal or cultural limitations. Whenever I speak, I use a natural language, and frequently this language is tainted with violence. Yet, even in a colonizer's language, I can say something that does not reproduce or reinforce this violence.

Logos is also a key element of Aristotle's conceptual framework. *Logos* indicates or clarifies what is just (*dikaios*) and unjust (*adikos*). Human beings can distinguish between the two. (Contra Aristotle, I propose to extend the notion of the human being to include other beings, such as elephants or whales.) The words translated into English as "just" and "unjust" are equivalent to the Ukrainian (and Russian) *pravda* and *nepravda*, which can be translated in English as "truth" and "lie."[7] In other words, there is a connection between justice and truth that is less discernible in English, but easier to track in Greek and Ukrainian. So, if we give Aristotle the benefit of doubt, we get the following: a human being is a being who senses or perceives (*aesthēsis*) the difference between true and false. *Logos* enables me to perceive truth (Aristotle 1932, 1252b30-1253a3). The emphasis is on *aesthēsis*, as opposed to intellect. Developing one's sensibility, educating one's feelings, and developing aesthetic sensitivity enables one to better distinguish between truth and falsehood.[8]

Aristotle points to a key structure of *logos*—the principle of non-contradiction: "It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same thing and in the same respect" (1960, 1006a1). I cannot assert both A and not A at the same time and in the same way. If I refuse this principle, I refuse language—I have to remain silent because any utterance presupposes this minimum of logical consistency. This silence is different from the silence a poet faces when fleeing their mother tongue. There is no refuge from the second kind of silence. The principle of non-contradiction might be the best, most fundamental example of the structures that support thinking and being human.

Proust's term for *logos* is "the language of an unknown homeland." In the fifth book of Proust's novel, *La Prisonnière*, the narrator points out that "[e]ach artist thus seems like the citizen of an unknown homeland, which has been forgotten, different from that from which will come, setting sail for the earth, another great artist" (Proust 1954, 257). Consider this with another of Proust's ideas—"[b]eautiful books are always written in a sort of foreign language"—to better understand how *logos* is different from a natural language without being separate from it (1971, 305). The language of Proust's novel is and is not French. A human being who makes an effort to hear *logos*—an artist in Proust's formulation—remembers or re-collects themself and the "homeland" or the "house" they came from. The unknown homeland is the house of being, and each artist will recollect a different part of it. They will express a different region of being, yet it is one and the same being that will be recollected, and the recollection will be supported by the structures of *logos* that are shared with all human beings who decide to undertake the effort of thinking (Deleuze 2000, 42ff.).

Language and *Logos*, Applied to a War

Saying-the-same-as-*logos*, or distinguishing between the true and the false, always happens in a natural language. Some natural languages have colonial histories, and some not only have such a history, but are languages *in which* and *for the sake of which* a genocidal war is currently being fought. Orders to bombard

civilians are given and obeyed in Russian, as are the orders to rewrite history, burn books, abduct children, and force them to forget their mother tongue. Russia attempts to justify this war by claiming that it is trying to "protect" the speakers of the Russian language, while killing Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

Every natural language, including Russian, is more than a tool to be manipulated and abused by individuals, or even, as is the case with Russia, by the majority of the population who thoughtlessly repeat, and therefore give life to slogans and propaganda, or remain silent and indifferent. A language is always more than a weapon, if only because one can say-the-same-as-*logos* in it. No language is inherently obscene, no matter how many obscene crimes are committed in that language. Even so, idiomatic, grammatical, and syntactic structures of natural languages set directions in which one thinks; they help open or close different ways of being in the world.

Ukrainian and Russian languages distinguish between animate and inanimate objects differently than in English. All nouns in Ukrainian and Russian have a grammatical gender: an owl, for example, is not an "it," but a "she," and so is the earth or soil. The wind or a stone is a "he." This grammatical feature does not prevent a person from inflicting violence on the animals or a river, just like a speaker of English is not prevented by the grammatical structures of language from killing a human being. Still, these structures make it easier or more difficult to anthropomorphize a river or extend the notion of the human being to include other beings.

Here is an example from Ostap Slyvynsky's *The Dictionary of War* (2023), which compiles the stories of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's violence. One of these is "Earth," told by Galyna Dmytrivna from the town of Bilopillya in Eastern Ukraine:

> Of course, I planted seeds, what else could I do? I dug and planted here. The house is about gone, but you have to sow. The soil has already suffered enough. At first *she* was covered with missiles, then the sappers came and said: "Go, lady, wait at your son's, we will cure your land." That's how they said it. They are local, they know and understand everything. And now it's time to plant. Because digging and sowing the soil is like stroking and scratching a person. I think to myself: "It's good that the biggest shelling was here in March while *she* was still sleeping." (Slyvynsky 2023, 69, my emphasis)

It is natural in Ukrainian and Russian to refer to the earth or soil (*zemlia*) with the feminine pronoun.

If certain features of a natural language might bring us closer to *logos*, some others, often seemingly innocuous or inconspicuous, reinforce violence or make it more likely. A natural language may be used in subtle ways—invisible for most native speakers—to achieve ideological supremacy, as argued by Lee McIntyre (2018). For instance, to indicate location, English uses the preposition "in," but Russian and Ukrainian must choose between two prepositions: "*v*" and "*na*." The preposition "*v*" is used with independent states: "*v Ger-manii*" (in Germany) or "*v Polshe*" (in Poland). The preposition "*na*" is used with de-

pendent and unclearly delimited territories. See Olesia Kompaniiets (2017, 23) summarizing Ivan Ohiyenko's essay:

> when talking about the defined, clearly outlined territory as a whole entity, or an independent state, the usage of preposition 'v' ('in') is required: 'v Frantsii' ('in France'), 'v Rosiyi' ('in Russia'), 'v Rumunii' ('in Romania'), etc. As for the preposition 'na' ('on'), it is used with geographical names in response to the question 'where?' only when the territory is not clearly delineated or is not an independent entity, rather a constitutive unit of the state: 'na Volyni' ('in Volyn'—correct translation, but following the analogy above—'on Volyn'), 'na Bukovyni' ('in Bukovyna' or rather 'on Bukovyna').[9]

Historically, both prepositions have been used with "Ukraine." The preposition "*na*" carries with it distinct or intentional colonial implications. This difference between "*v*" and "*na*" is equivalent to saying in English "in Germany," or "in Poland," and "in the Ukraine." As Heiko Motschenbacher (2020, 3) explains:

> With those country names that show variation, the unmarked variant is usually considered preferable, as it is normally free of undesirable associations that the article-marked version may possess. Using a country name with a definite article is often perceived to point back to times before the respective geographical entity became an independent nation and may therefore possess a colonial or out-dated flavor (e.g. the Congo, the Ukraine).[10]

The preposition "*na*" or, in English, the definite article suggests that Ukraine, unlike Bulgaria or Romania, is not a real country, but a dependent territory. The idea is often not explicit—I don't think it, yet it shapes my worldview. Lydia Starodubtseva (2017), a professor at V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, points out that since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, "the choice of the preposition cannot be ethically neutral." It can no longer be explained by or reduced to following a habit formed in one's childhood. If a native speaker of Russian does not know the difference between "*v*" and "*na*" Ukraine, then this indicates their imperial privilege.[11]

Russian language textbooks sometimes place an asterisk beside "Ukraine": in France, in Russia, in Guatemala, but in *the* Ukraine, but do not explain this exception or acknowledge Russia's 300-year colonial history.[12] Every time a speaker of Russian says "*na*" Ukraine, they are breathing life into a construction through which one ethnic group asserts supremacy over others. This way of speaking—still dominant in the Russian media—does not accord with *logos*: it does not distinguish according to nature, obscuring the difference between the just and the unjust.

Words, phrases, and metaphors can be turned into *glyby*—massive clods or lumps, to use Merab Mamardashvili's term—that desensitize us and distort or compromise our ability to *homologize* (2019, 232). The *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (Language of the Third Reich) discussed by Victor Klemperer (2021) and the language of Soviet propaganda described by Mamardashvili consist of:

> otherworldly immobile blocks resembling cancerous growths. How can we think with phrases such as "the vegetable conveyor of the country?" Monstrous muscular model workers out of a propaganda poster emerge from behind this language, but to see or to think about what happens to the vegetables at that moment is decisively impossible. It is as though you immediately fall into a magnetic field and cannot escape its force. (2020, 171)

It is impossible to think when surrounded by lumps of dead language. They clutter and numb one's mind, and make public thinking impossible. The *Lingua Tertii Imperii* is destitute, Klemperer argues (2021, 19). It makes things immediately "understandable," and so discourages us from making the effort of thinking. There is no need to exert yourself, and even if you wanted to, it is not possible to think with these clumsy clods.[13]

These methods of asserting "ideological supremacy" are not new, but they were perfected by the Soviet and Nazi regimes, and have recently taken a "postmodern" turn. Today's strain of propaganda appropriates many of the conceptual tools and practices developed in the 20th century to liberate people from oppressive intellectual and political regimes. This is an appalling example of authoritarian regimes misusing the notion of a heterogeneous, complex identity. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999; 2000; 2002; 2009; 2015) and several Latina philosophers, including María Lugones (1987; 2006) and Mariana Ortega (2016), theorize a multiplicitous self that must juggle contradictions. I have argued that these contradictions are seeming, not actual, and that the act of holding them together is a creative one (Sushytska 2019). Still, this balancing act is risky and dangerous: I might not be able to sustain the differently-directed tensions threatening to tear me apart, and I need the support of various structures—familial, professional, and civil-democratic, such as the rule of law—to perform the necessary work to create my self out of this heterogeneous material. So-called "postmodern" propaganda aims to destroy a self by overwhelming it with both seeming and actual contradictions, and also by destroying the structures that support thinking. Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseyev wrote about the concentration camp in occupied Donetsk, where he was held prisoner from 2015 to 2017, pointing out that the goal of extreme physical and psychological torture inflicted on him and other political prisoners by the guards was to break the self by depriving it of the ability to make sense of what is happening—by making violence absurd and suffering meaningless (2023). The goal of contemporary propaganda is the same: to break people by making it difficult or impossible to understand what is happening to and around them.

"Postmodern" propaganda's most terrifying strategy is the direct attack on *logos*. It targets Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, while relying on it in order to speak. It claims that A is not A at the same time and in the same respect. For instance, Russian state-controlled media disseminated multiple mutually incompatible and often absurd accounts of who and what shot down the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 Boeing-777. Some sources claimed that the plane was shot down by an Ukrainian missile aimed at Russia's president's plane; others maintained that the airplane was packed with dead bodies before it was shot

down, so this was an operation set up to discredit Russia; and yet another source declared that aliens took down the plane.[14] There is now clear evidence that Russia is responsible for shooting down MH17.[15] "Postmodern" propaganda does not aim to construct an internally coherent narrative, but revels in contradictions and logical fallacies.[16] As Klemperer (2021) claims, propaganda is derelict; today it is also particularly brazen. The multiplicity of fantastical and incompatible explanations clutters thinking, distracts from other urgent issues, and, most problematically, it leaves people feeling disheartened and nihilistic. They may renounce the effort of listening to *logos* and trying to perceive truth. When my sensibility is numbed by a barrage of logically inconsistent information, it becomes even more difficult to distinguish between the true and the false, the just and the unjust.

Post-truth ideology destroys the house of being with several truth claims: "everyone is for sale," "might makes right," and "each has their own truth." Notice that the last claim is logically incompatible with the first two. It is also the one that most directly attacks *logos* and instigates indifference and nihilism. Behind these truth claims stand centuries of tsardom and serfdom propagated by the Russian Empire. They matured in the criminal worlds of Soviet prisons and gulags, and came into big money after the fall of the Soviet Union. So-called "postmodern" propaganda has a narrative, but it is incomplete and incoherent because its goal is not to convince or even deceive, but to demonstrate authority—to rule.[17] The current strain of propaganda aims to remake the world by asserting its authority over truth and being. Russia forces the hypocrisy of Western Europe and the US into existence,[18] it empties out the "never again" of the "free world," and convinces democratic societies that they are morally bankrupt, their highest priority is economic well-being, and their political elites are thoroughly corrupt.

A striking example of "postmodern" propaganda is Russia's use of the term "denazification" to name the crimes that it has been committing in Ukraine since 2014, but especially since the full-scale invasion in 2022. According to Denys Azarov (*et al.* 2023, 245), "immediately after the full-scale aggression against Ukraine had begun, Putin declared that 'denazification and demilitarization' of Ukraine was the goal of the so-called 'special military operation,'" that is, the war.[19] Timothy Snyder, a historian of Central and Eastern Europe, emphasizes that the term "denazification" has a very specific meaning: it refers to the attempts to remove Nazi officials from public life in the immediate aftermath of WWII in East Germany (ctd. in Waxman 2022). Russia's misapplication of this term is meant to confuse the discourse surrounding its war and obscure the understanding of the war's colonial character.

More importantly, Russia's use of this term is an act of terror. In 1946 Klemperer writes: "Germany was almost destroyed by Nazism; the task of curing it of this fatal disease is today termed denazification [*Entnazifizierung*]. I hope, and indeed believe, that this dreadful word will only have a short life; it will fade away and lead no more than a historical existence as soon as it has performed its current duty" (1). Klemperer further notes: "If a piece of cutlery belonging to orthodox Jews has become ritually unclean, they purify it by burying it in the

earth. Many words in common usage during the Nazi period should be committed to a mass grave for a very long time, some forever" (16). Only 70 years later Russia exhumed this "dreadful" word to name its genocidal practices. It is using "denazification" to grossly misname the crimes it has been committing in Ukraine. This is an obscene act: not merely a crime, but an act of terror that compromises our ability to distinguish the just from the unjust, and strips us of our humanity. Where will we bury "denazification" once Russia is defeated? And what might happen to a human being's relationship with being if it is not defeated?

It is unsettling enough to have poets become refugees from their mother tongue. It is much more dangerous to abandon the house of being to criminals. In his "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger claims that "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells" (1993, 217). Human beings, oblivious of being, have made themselves homeless: "homelessness," for Heidegger, "consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of Being" (242).[20] Oblivion of being is bad enough, but today we are threatened by a new kind of homelessness that can result from the systematic attack on *logos*. Human beings are becoming homeless not because of a forgetting that carries with it the possibility of recollection, but because of the crimes committed against *logos*. This is true ontological terrorism.

Biography
Julia Sushytska (PhD Philosophy, SUNY Stony Brook) is a Resident Assistant Professor in Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture at Occidental College. Her areas of expertise are Ancient Greek and 20th century European and Eastern European philosophy. Her research focuses on *metics*—those who place themselves in-between major cultures, languages, or ethnicities. Together with Alisa Slaughter, she translated and edited *A Spy for an Unknown Country*—a collection of essays by Merab Mamardashvili, a Soviet-era Georgian philosopher (Ibidem Press, 2020).

Notes
1. See also Luke Harding (2023).
2. I am following Gilles Deleuze by including Proust alongside philosophers. See his preface to *Difference and Repetition* (1994, ixv).
3. Over the past decades, several scholars have used the term "ontological terrorism" (James 2007; Tsala Mbani 2008; Warren 2018). Although there are points of intersection between their ways of using it and the meaning I develop here, the differences are significant. Nick James uses this term to name a form of anarchism that aims "not to abolish authority through direct confrontation, but rather to awaken oneself and others to the realization" that language is used to create "illusory dualisms which become the source of all control and restriction" (2007, 438). For James, "ontological terrorism" is an "attack upon *assumptions* about the nature of being" (439, my emphasis). My argument concerns the attack on being and its "house," that is, the structures of thinking that

support becoming human. For James, "ontological terrorism" is a liberatory practice, whereas I discuss the organized and concerted effort to promote nihilism and incite human beings to abandon the effort of becoming human. Finally, my use of the term "ontological terrorism" differs significantly from the way it is sometimes used in discussions about human cloning. See, for example, André Liboire Tsala Mbani (2006).

4. DK refers to Diels-Kranz numbering. All translations of Heraclitus' aphorisms are adapted by me from Charles Kahn (1999).

5. See Roman Dilcher (1995).

6. At this point, Heraclitus' and Proust's projects intersect: in the final book of *À la recherche du temps perdu I, II* (2022), the narrator experiences eternity and realizes that death does not exist.

7. See the entry for "Pravda" in Constantin Sigov (2014, 813-18). The English "right" (and the adjective "upright") approximates *pravda* as justice.

8. Merab Mamardashvili (2014) discusses the significance of "sentimental education." He points out how dangerous it is—for an individual and a nation-state—to remain immature. Russia has been showing extreme immaturity over the past centuries by using "they don't respect us" as an explanation and justification for its colonial expansionism. See Mamardashvili (2014, first and sixth lectures).

9. See also Ohiyenko (1935), especially pages 216-27.

10. See also Tadeusz Piotrowski (1998).

11. See Ivan Tolstoi (2017).

12. Some of the most authoritative grammar textbooks list two possibilities while continuing to prioritize the "*v*": "Note *na* (*v*) Ukraine." For example, Terence Wade and David Gillespie (2011, 424).

13. Mamardashvili (2020) gives an example of a simplistic formula, the repetition of which absolves the speaker from thinking: Why are there poor?—Because there are the rich. How do we eliminate poverty?—We eliminate the rich.

14. For some purposefully contradictory explanations, see Ray Furlong (2020) and Reuters (2023).

15. The official website of the Government of the Netherlands states: "The Netherlands and Australia have established that Russia is responsible for the deployment of the Buk installation that brought down flight MH17 and that this constitutes a violation of international law" (2018). See also this summary of the Bellingcat open-source investigations (2015).

16. See Peter Pomerantsev (2014; 2019). See also my discussion of this issue (2022).

17. Cf. McIntyre (2018, 113) and Jason Stanley (2016).

18. I say "forcing into existence," or "making it become true," as opposed to "revealing as true," because neither individuals nor states have a pre-established essence and each can change the course of their becoming.

19. This study shows that Russia's "invocation of 'denazification' provides evidence of the genocidal intent behind Russia's military attack on Ukraine and the acts taken in pursuit of its genocidal policies aimed at destroying the Ukrainian nation at least in part" (Azarov *et al.* 2023, 246).

20. It is tragically ironic that Heidegger who discussed the intimate connection between language and being was unable and unwilling to acknowledge the damage that the Nazi regime inflicted on both.

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Borders, Phenomenology, and Politics: A Conversation with Edward S. Casey

Edward S. Casey Interviewed by Michael Broz

Interview

Michael Broz (MB): It is my pleasure to be speaking today with Edward S. Casey. Casey is an Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University. Beginning his philosophical work as an undergraduate at Yale University, Casey went on to earn an MA and a PhD from Northwestern University. He has since published dozens of articles and several books on edges, emotion, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, spaces, and art in philosophy, to name a few ideas. He is also one of the founding members of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) and was selected for the Dewey Lecture by the American Philosophical Association. Casey has written extensively on many subjects. What interests us today is his work on borders and boundaries. Casey is now retired from teaching but remains active in the North American philosophical and phenomenological scene. Thank you for speaking with me, Professor Casey.

Edward Casey (EC): Thank you for inviting me, Michael.

MB: I want to start out by talking about how you first got involved with boundaries and borders. Your most illuminating work for me was your chapter "Borders and Boundaries" in *The World on Edge* (2017). Can you give us a run-down of the nature of borders and boundaries and how they are described phenomenologically? Are they an abstraction or a physical reality?

EC: Let me start with the distinction between borders and boundaries, to which you refer yourself, and which is the opening chapter in my book *The World on Edge*. That itself is a strategic move on my part; *The World on Edge* begins with a chapter on borders and boundaries. In other words, to open up this vast array of edges to which human beings are subject and some of which they themselves create, I thought that I should address this particular difference, which turns out to be all over the place. Very vast. More so than you might think if you heard the word "border" or "boundary" alone. It's much, much more extensive.

Borders and boundaries are two main forms of edges—edges that actually have everything to do with how human beings, animals, and plants occupy space and the worlds they inhabit. Edge is not merely the limit of a solid. That

phrase "the limit of a solid" is Plato's, and my interpretation of edges is more dynamic. I instead argue throughout this book that edges, like borders and boundaries, have a life of their own, a historicity, a power, a dynamism—that allows them to be regarded as anything but static.

My effort here is to argue that borders and boundaries are formative factors in human lives, and far more so than has been usually admitted by philosophers or even by geographers. So just to give a flavor of where I come from on this, I'm going to quote from the first chapter of my book, *World on Edge*. I'm not trying to sell the book, but there it is. It gives a sense at least of the difference that I'd like to talk about with you:

> Borders are clearly demarcated edges that serve to distinguish one place (region, state, territory) from another. An international border, such as the one between the United States and Canada, is an obvious instance, but so is the footprint of a building, the building's precise profile on the ground. The precision of borders, the fact that they can be traced out by a simple line (the "borderline") is a function of their having a shape regular enough to be describable in geometric terms (as straight, curvilinear, and so on) while also being easily projected (for example, envisioning a given borderline as traversing rugged terrain). (7)

I will come to the examples, in this case, the US and Mexico and Palestine and Israel.

I continue:

> Thanks to this dual aspect, the one ideal and the other imaginary, borders often approach a certain formal perfection, as when the founders of a city decide just where the city limits should be. Borders are often the basis of such representations as maps afford: for example, a map of the state of Kansas after its statehood was established in 1861, as it borders on Colorado to the west and Missouri to the east. Cartographic representations make clear that the comparative abstractness of both the imaginary and the ideal dimensions of a border readily invite literal delineation, the exact determination of where public or private lands (or bodies of water) begin and end. (7)

I'm going to quote here another passage, as it sums up this basic difference: "borders serve to delimit and to define, whereas boundaries act to ground, to receive, and to open out" (15). The paradigm cases of boundaries are really the edges of natural phenomena for us. Such as meadows or forests.

MB: Something like the Rio Grande—a river or a mountain range, or another type of imposing geography?

EC: Yes, I take up the case of the Mississippi River, which has a peculiar character, as the Rio Grande does, of being both a border and a boundary. These major rivers on maps act as borders—borders between the US and Mexico in the case of the Rio Grande. Or, in the case of the Mississippi, between two American States: Mississippi and Arkansas.

The Mississippi River delineates and literally bifurcates two landed areas, and yet, even though this river shows up as a line delineated on maps, in perceptual reality it is anything but a line. That is, if we put ourselves at those rivers or in those rivers, we find something else: amorphous, ever-changing, and altering edges that change with the seasons, change with age, change from flooding or the opposite. They are thus incredibly variable. As boundaries, they are saying that we comprehend a given river, such as the Mississippi, as a coherent single natural entity.

This river happens to be the longest in the United States, so it's quite a major river. The Rio Grande, or the only part of it that's relevant to what we will soon discuss, is between Brownsville and El Paso. But in that stretch of the Rio Grande is found both the border between the US and Mexico and a perfectly natural boundary of its own. This is found in its twists and turns, thus in its own idiosyncrasies and vagaries.

MB: Its mutability changes over time but that change isn't necessarily due to humans, as would be the case with a border. A boundary responds to the natural formations driven by movement, animals, plants, etc.

EC: Yes, exactly. That's right. The Mississippi has a life of its own, and a world of its own. We humans unfortunately have the habit of interfering and intervening in natural boundaries. As, for example, when we cut down a forest and the edges become completely amorphous, then no longer can we say this is a forest. You could say it was once a forest, but it's no longer such.

The comparative autonomy and self-generation that natural boundaries have do not apply to borders, which are subject to changes both historical and political in character. In the case of the Rio Grande, we have an incredibly overdetermined, fiercely ferocious circumstance, where, as you know, to cross it is to incur not only danger, but arrest, detention, expulsion, deportation, or worse—involving direct physical violence as is happening in Texas, under governor Greg Abbott, who, tellingly, put barbed wire right at and on the border. This was to assert the autonomy of Texas. This is to call into question the federal government and its role there. Well, you know about this, it's even part of the world that you have experienced yourself as I recall.

Borders and Borderlands
MB: I did! I grew up in Texas when the cartels were, you know, shooting over the border, and there were all these violent actions happening and things like that. The US government told us not to go to Mexico, at least don't go to the border towns. We were told that if you're a white person who goes to a border town, you're going to be kidnapped and held for ransom. But I would like to point out that the danger is overblown. It feeds into that kind of xenophobia again. Nonetheless, there was a very real threat there that we kind of lived with growing up in a border state and understanding that border towns were not safe places to be, even if they're on the US side of the border.

EC: In other words, it really is a matter of local history. It changes, and, as you yourself say, is more dangerous at certain points, less intense at others. Therefore, it takes on the characteristic of any boundary, which is to be variable by its very nature, whereas a border, as I understand it, is fixed once it's determined, as with the US-Mexico border regarded as a line that goes down the middle of the Rio Grande. This border cannot be changed. The river may flow over its banks or even cease to exist. And yet, that line, imaginary though it may be, in fact delineates the different perimeters of the US and Mexico, and will do so until another treaty comes along after the 1848 treaty that established all this. Until that happens, the border will actually remain at certain longitudes and latitudes in its curving course.

No matter what happens to the river, it is a convenient carrier of the border—a carrier not only visible, you know, but something literally tangible that you can touch. But its fate as a carrier is highly, highly variable, as you know better than I having lived down that way. The Rio Grande is subject to drought and flooding. It is sometimes quite wide, sometimes very narrow. So, we have an extraordinary situation here if you think about it. Many just take it for granted as when we say casually, "Oh, the Rio Grande. Well, that's just the border between the US and Mexico." Well, it's more than that. It's a very complex boundary between two landmasses as they are made contiguous through a body of water that courses through them—at least when the weather allows for that to be the case, and it doesn't dry up even though it has dried up in certain historical periods. That's okay. Yeah, it can dry up, but the border will remain.

Here we have an extraordinary situation where there are two kinds of edges, between them bearing an incredible amount of historical and political force. And a border is always mappable in one sense or another—that is, projectable in two dimensions, whereas boundaries are always three-dimensional. They obtain for concrete beings, live bodies, human or not human, it doesn't matter which, so, in their case matters are always three-dimensional.

Borders have a strange way of being just one-dimensional and this gives to them, ironically, an authority and an ideology that makes them ideal for drawing national state difference with a stroke of a pen. Between these two kinds of edges, the difference is massive. Boundaries take centuries to evolve over time, and they're always changing, depending upon the actual state of the natural phenomenon we're discussing. They can be established and determined in a few minutes by rain. The people who gathered in 1848 at the end of the US-Mexico war were in a kind of cabinet situation, and they discussed whether the border should be determined in language, thus in something altogether human, regarding something that was meant to be an international, lasting, permanent difference, a literal de-lineation between two major countries, the US and Mexico.

This was a very powerful historical act if you think about it. We are still living with the consequences of this. Just last week both [Donald] Trump and [Joe] Biden visited the border. It was a wholly symbolic action. Neither one had anything intelligent or interesting to say about being there, but nevertheless they considered it important that they bring their bodies, their actual physical

bodies, down to the border to witness it from and in their live body perception—[Maurice] Merleau-Ponty would call it its "lived reality." In fact, Trump and Biden know very little about the border and its history and are only focusing on it for the sake of gaining political credit. Here we have an example of something very tenuous, a fragile one-dimensional line. Nevertheless, it has had massive effects on the history of the two countries, and it's by no means resolved, it will probably not be resolved in this particular case for a very long time. We know that.

I'm going to pause here and ask you, Michael, whether you want to say more about this border/boundary difference that I really consider incredibly central to understanding the current immigration situation—including international, local, and state politics—and much more.

MB: Yeah, I mean, if I'm understanding you correctly, there's something very human about borders. And if I can clarify, if you don't mind: would you say that borders and boundaries are categories of edges (edges being like an umbrella term) or are they something completely separate and different?

EC: I would call them two major kinds of edges that nevertheless coinhere and collaborate with one another—and with historically, existentially, and politically highly significant results.

MB: On that point, I personally find your US-Mexico border analysis fascinating as someone who grew up being told to be afraid of immigrants who cross the US-Mexico border and watching politicians demonize those coming for a better life. That said, I think *Janus Unbound* readers would love to hear about how borders and boundaries apply to the ongoing Palestinian and Israeli conflict, and maybe some of the lessons we could learn from the US-Mexico border. Clearly, there are important differences, not least those that concern a kind of traditional colonialism that we don't see on the US southern border. Palestine's borders have been continually subverted to build settlements for the Israeli state, and I am hoping we can talk about not only the geopolitical cost these levies have on Palestine but also the psychic and cultural destruction wrought on Palestinians in Gaza. How do we understand borders and boundaries in a situation of settler-colonialism?

EC: If you start with the difference between borders and boundaries, it seems rather abstract. It is abstract. Particularly since borders are abstractions. They're abstractions from lived history, including war. They, in some sense, reflect (although in an incredibly economical and compressed form) the juxtaposition of two countries—two countries whose differences drive them to war.

This is the paradox: something as tenuous, as fragile, as an edge manages to be definitive in the juxtaposition, the common fate, of these two countries. And that continues in the case of Palestine and Israel. Here's a contemporary example of a situation where within the state—whether Israel or Palestine—there are many boundaries formed by natural formations, mountains, orchards, but

olive gardens in particular. Olive gardens are prominent in Palestine—I have been there and witnessed this, and this means, of course, that they have many gardens. We can say that an olive garden has a boundary for its edge. It can't be entirely abstractly mappable because it can grow over the edge. It has its own autonomy.

And yet it features in contemporary politics in a powerful and tragic way. I'm just now reading a remarkable article by Shane Bauer (2024) in *The New Yorker*. Titled "The Israeli Settlers Attacking Their Palestinian Neighbors," it refers to Palestinians in the West Bank who are being displaced by settlers, focusing on a particular case of one family whose father was killed at random as he was culling his olive trees—peaceably, in no way breaking any rules—just working in his garden. He was killed in an arbitrary shooting by an Israel settler, leading to a devastated family scene in that circumstance.

We can say that the differential histories of Israelis and Palestinians are colliding at the edge in this case, an edge that is a boundary. In and through that boundary violence was enacted in a way that had tragic consequences, although in this case, this particular case, it's a story of the effect on one family only. And this incident was not in Gaza, but in a West Bank area of Palestine.

I'm here arguing that there's something uncannily extensive and powerfully generic about those two edges that I call borders and boundaries. They are, as it were, complimentary to each other, even as they differ from each other. And if you think about it that way, you begin to see that both are needed, you can't do without some sense of border, so that in the American West we used to talk about *border*lands; but these same borderlands featured many naturally given boundaries.

"Borderland" is a very interesting term. If you think about it, the term actually combines borders and boundaries in one expression. "Land" belongs to the world of boundaries, as I have here been arguing. But borders configure these same boundaries, notably in the American West. So, it's as if this compromise—this ambivalence about the question of the expansion of this part of the world—had everything to do with breaking through established borders and setting up new and artificial ones. This was due to the local power and ambitions of settler colonies, as with my own ancestors who moved to Kansas in 1851. These ancestors, I'm pretty sure—though there were no surviving family stories—literally ran out the Kaw, an indigenous people who were dominant in that part of Kansas.

And they dispossessed them! Here we have an important word. The *dispossession* of land settled over many centuries now taken away by new settlers. Think of it as Palestinians, on the one hand, and the Kaw Indians in Kansas on the other—both being dispossessed of that to which they can argue they had a very special kind of right. This right had to do with their cultivation and care, and living on a land that was not quantified or considered up for sale.

As we know from the famous saying of chief Seattle: "the earth cannot be sold." When you turn it into a quantity that has a price, notice what you're doing, you're actually invoking monetary borders. Dollars and cents. These are delineations within a vast capitalist game. So they count in my language as bor-

ders—monetary borders, which do not cohere with the boundaries of the lands both Native Americans and Palestinians can be said not to own, but where they have a right to remain. To stay, to continue the lives that have depended upon the cultivation of that land one way or the other. We're dealing here with a rather vast phenomenon where we can see that the Israel-Palestine conflict re-enacts what's been happening for a long time—at least in the Western world as well as in many other parts of the world. This is a dislodging of native peoples from land on which they have lived for centuries.

I take land to be the surface of the earth. Land is where native peoples are grounded literally and metaphorically. It has a powerful hold on human beings, particularly those who have cultivated it over generations. Much of one's empathy for Native Americans and for Palestinians has to do with respecting the way they have tended the land beneath their feet. This is not just a matter of manual labour: what we call "agri-culture" in a limited sense. This is a profound connection between human bodies and the earth. And it's exactly the converse of John Locke's notion of the labour theory of value where you can be said to own land when you have simply stuck a shovel into it. This basic action establishes your right to own it and therefore eventually to sell it.

We can see something like this happening in Israel, where the whole notion of settlement on the part of Israelis is linked to Western capitalism because it has to do with owning or claiming to own a certain piece of land, including a house on that land, all of which is a very different thing from cultivating the land itself. The long arm of Western capitalism reaches right into the Israel-Palestine tragedy and has for a very long time, and has now come to a climax in Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Dispossession is paired with destruction, as we can see all too vividly in the case of Gaza—where we witness the destruction of human habitations and of human beings themselves as part of a single mono-maniacal struggle on the part of the Israelis. From dispossession to destruction is a short step and all too easy to take.

I'm going to pause there for a moment because I've been covering a lot of territory. (Note that "territory" derives from *terra*, meaning earth.)

I hope that I've been developing a coherent point of view whereby if we distinguish between boundaries and borders, we can enter into both prior and contemporary history in telling ways. Not because it gives us all the answers. It doesn't. It's a matter of being descriptively adequate and this, of course, is the aim of phenomenology, a form of philosophy that I have espoused and pursued in my written work and teaching.

Borders and boundaries are quite central to what is happening in a given historical period and in a given part of the earth. Let me add that *frontiers* are edges of exploration that have not yet become known to those who are invading or wishing to own and possess land. They are the first gate through which settler colonialists establish themselves.

It really refers to American imperialism. Israel's violent seizure of land in the West Bank is continuing today at a very high rate. Indeed, a tragic amount, which gets a little covered over by the violence and manifest destructiveness of

Gaza. It's been going on almost under the cover, so to speak, of the manifestly cruel and violent war that's now occurring in Gaza.

If *frontier* is one term that we need to add to our vocabulary here in this discussion, another is *territory* itself. Territory really has to do with something that is not only to be entered, to attract dispossessing invasions, as a frontier does, but a territory is something that has become comparatively settled, or settled enough, to have a rough map made of it. I'm thinking, for example, of the Kansas-Nebraska territory which was established in 1854 before the two parts of it became separate states in the 1860s. Territory is something that is mappable and yet retains amorphousness and indefiniteness, and is what turned out to be very attractive to settlers, like my own Swiss ancestors in Kansas. They heard that you could go there and simply claim land for yourself, and that's exactly what they did, I'm afraid to say. And this happened along with millions of other early settlers in the American West.

A third key term is *border*land. We've touched on this before. Borderland is a very interesting term. It has to do with a margin that is lingering at the outer edges of something that is better known and is likely to be already mapped and/or mappable. A borderland can become a scene of generation of activity that can be creative, but it also can be very violent. In many instances borderlands become areas that are comparatively protected. To which one can retreat and feel safe. In this case, they become a kind of natural sanctuary around land that's better known and better described and mapped than frontiers or territories. So they're very important. *Regions* refer to any landed world, but borderlands can become the very center of creative activity, or violent activity—and sometimes both together. Yet notice that like frontiers and territories they combine borders and boundaries in a unique mix that makes them elusive and difficult to pin down, difficult to map. Nevertheless, one has a feeling that if it weren't for borderlands, we wouldn't have the world as we know it. They offer a special kind of creative edge.

This is part of my general thesis on the power of edges in human life, and, indeed, in non-human life as well. Edges are not merely endpoints, limits, but they have, as it were, a force, history, and efficacy of their own. Think of them in terms of Russia invading Ukraine. Russia wishes to add Ukraine as a constitutive outer edge of its empire. It wants to conquer it, take it over, and call it its own territory. Apart from the particular political, economic, and military goals, it has to do with recognizing, and in this case to disastrous effect, the power of expanding edges of nation states. One could say that [Vladimir] Putin's obsession with invading Ukraine, conquering it, and adding it to the Russian world, has to do with his own obsession with *edge aggrandizement*.

Being a nontrivial, very powerful human motive as in this case particularly, and in many other cases, can have disastrous effects for those who live on the edge. As with both Palestine and Ukraine, thanks to the battles and the militarism that has become part of any contemporary means of warfare.

MB: Well, there's a lot here to ponder. In particular, I find myself returning back to Israel and Palestine and asking: can you weaponize borders? Is that

what Israel is doing with settlements when they bulldoze everything to build settlements and then call it another extension of Israel's border? So I guess my question is, can you weaponize a border and make it amenable to your needs, depriving others of theirs?

EC: The answer is, sadly, yes. The declaration of borders that serve the interests of the invading force is definitely a case of the inflation and expansion of those edges we call borders. In this case, the borders of Israeli settlements. The many thousands of borders that crisscross the whole West Bank are established, often by very violent means, on the part of new settlers and, as you know, they have been quite militaristic. And after October 7th, unfortunately thousands of arms have been distributed to these settlers by the Israeli government. These have not been used to fight Hamas and they never get to Gaza, but they're used locally to expand and inflate the borders of where people think they have a right to live and that because of a certain history and a certain Zionist belief that Israel is their homeland and it is in principle all theirs to possess, to cultivate, and to dominate.

We have here an incredibly powerful circumstance—it seems almost mythical, but it's also a very real set of beliefs—that claims biblical sanction, such as the Holy Land being that which properly belongs to Israel, not to Palestine. One of the most revealing things to me from my visit to Palestine and Israel a few years ago was the fact that many Palestinian villages—long before the current struggles—many ordinary towns in Palestine had no water supplies whatsoever. Their water had been cut off or syphoned to the larger cities. This left the Palestinians with a very heavy obligation: water had to be literally purchased by current citizens of Palestine from central sources in Israel. This was both expensive, but even worse it was a way of being belittled—begging at the feet of the major power. This, by the way, is still continuing. Water supplies are still cut off, and those Palestinians who do remain are forced to buy it at very high prices. We're talking about ordinary water here, not anything fancy. It's one sign of the way settler power can infiltrate and dominate the lives of ordinary people, even short of military violence.

It's a form of control and a form of domination. Here in reference to a perfectly natural, plentiful—well, fairly plentiful—resource that becomes an instrument of power. It's an extension of the power claimed by Israel in that part of the world. This was very striking to my partner and I, and as we traveled around, we saw dilapidated and impoverished villages, and this had nothing to do at that point with any war or any particular active violence. October 7th was far in the future. And Palestine was again being dispossessed: this time of water. It's an extraordinary form of control through the deprivation of a natural element.

We see here how the natural world can be employed in the pursuit of power and be manipulated and moved in directions that have nothing to do with peaceful inhabitation of the land itself. Well, the story goes on from there, you see, but it's a striking thing to see. This is outside of Jerusalem; this is way out into Palestine. My partner and I could see worse coming. There was a sense of

tension and of drama about to unfold; we felt it. Nothing in detail, but we felt catastrophe was lurking.

Again, I return to my obsessive theme: it's a matter of the position and the authority granted to borders and boundaries in a given geographical area, and how these are determined and have everything to do with the political disposition, the fate of lands in the Middle East.

I'm trying to bring the discussion around to you, Michael, because some of your suggested topics really had to do with contemporary politics, and I think that the phenomenological distinction between borders and boundaries has relevance and clarifies much. It doesn't alter the tragedy, it doesn't even give us any political solution. It's not that that we're talking about. We're talking about the phenomenological force of edges in human lives. Hence my argument in my 400-page book, arguing that the world is on edge—indeed structured by edges and continually changing in terms of new edge structures, whether these are proposed by capitalism or those recognized by Native Americans: both being very different edges, but edges nonetheless.

There's no other term in my vocabulary other than "edge" to describe this particular dimension of the life world that human beings sustain. I would add animals along with plants: my most recent book is on the fate of plants on our planet. Co-written with Michael Marder, it is called *Plants in Place* (2023)—a phenomenology of the vegetable world. It's easy to overlook when we focus ourselves entirely upon politics and militaristic dramas. But we must pay attention to this pre-human dimension. It helps to explain why I was so very struck by what I consider an archetypal act of settler-colonialism in Israel: an ordinary Palestinian man, 40 years old, carrying no gun, just culling olives from his own orchard, was shot for no good reason by a settler who had a long-distance rifle. Note that the Palestinian was interacting constructively with the plant world. He wasn't engaging in anything related, even remotely, with violence in the human world, and yet he was gunned down. I single out this incident in contrast with the vast destruction of buildings and hospitals in Gaza. These are, naturally enough, preoccupying images and realities that we are confronted with today and probably for a long while.

Politics and Philosophy

MB: Yeah, I don't mean to change gears, but we're coming up on this subject, so I was going to ask: these issues, like the US-Mexico border, Israel and Palestine, and even Ukraine and Russia, have all been oftentimes played out in exclusively political and economic terms. But as somebody who has been observing and working with it from a philosophical perspective, I'm interested in your take on philosophy in situations like this. Specifically, if you don't mind, I ask that we focus on European continental philosophy because I think that has an interesting arc to it that we can get into.

EC: Yes, thank you. I think that continental philosophy has a lot to say—not about the directions of the next two weeks in the war in Gaza, but something quite different. It isn't topical, and doesn't pretend to be. What it does pretend

to do is to single out structures of the life world that have everything to do with the dramas that unfold on the surface of the earth.

These are structures—call them Essences as [Edmund] Husserl did—or essential structures, combining the terms. And regarding which as philosophers, we need to make responsible and comprehensive descriptions. To do justice to something that otherwise gets passed over as trivial. Edges for me are the perfect example of this, given my preoccupation with them over the last ten years. It's something many take for granted, something we think is the literal end of something material. Or, for that matter, something conceptual, after which there's the abyss. There's nothing. You fall off the edge, and you are plummeting into the unknown and into the unknowable. I am trying to reverse all this as a phenomenologist and argue that we are always existing at the edge, even when we think we're in the center of things, the center of power and domination, as when we claim the right to possess lands that properly belong to others. Such a claim fails to respect the way native populations have been living and working at the edge creatively long before settler-colonialism and capitalism invaded them and took them over. I'm thinking here of the way in which Native Americans in New England, as is described in the great book by Lisa Brooks called *The Common Pot* (2008), lived by moving between the edges of forests, fields, and other parts of the natural world. Not to dominate, not to claim property rights of any sort whatsoever, but to make creative use of largely agricultural edges. This is tied in with the nomadism that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have brought back to our attention in the form of what they consider the true nomad—someone who moves from area to area and edge to edge in ways that are creative and life-sustaining and not destructive.

Native Americans were nomadic in the sense that they moved seasonally and did not simply settle in a given place lastingly, as Europeans and those of European descent tend to do. Many of these populations seek to settle in a "perfect" place, or at least a place they can call their own—where "place" signifies a home, a city, a district, or a neighborhood. This embodies a failure to pay attention to the creativity of moving between edges. Operative here is the search for security, tranquility, and permanence. Edges complicate this search. Think about painting and how the most creative painters of a given generation can be said to be working at the edge of the current state of their media.

Such artists are not trying to make something merely familiar, but to disconcert, attract, and captivate precisely because their work is edgy. We can take inspiration from this in philosophy, which is far too often centrist. This has everything to do with the critique of presence as given by Martin Heidegger and especially in Jacques Derrida. Presence really means settled fact or a settled theory—settled anything, including land that has been settled. How to live as it were *between* settlements—at their edges—instead of settling into settlements: this becomes the challenge. I don't mean necessarily uprooting yourself and literally moving from one place to another. That's one way to do it. You yourself, Michael, have experience of moving recently from the far east and north of Canada to Toronto. That's one edge world to another, I'm sure. The difference

has been challenging and inspiring and doubtless difficult sometimes, but that's part of what living on the edge brings with it.

MB: When I first read your book, and now talking to you, I see it more readily that there's something rather revolutionary at stake here, right? Like the idea that maybe borders can be expanded at will, as with the settlements in Israel. But, you know, I think it's interesting that even despite the fact that Palestine is at least, militarily, nothing compared to Israel, posing no real military threat, yet they continue to fight back anyways.

EC: Yes, that's true, I think.

MB: It speaks to a kind of rejection of the myth you were discussing earlier, and I think it has something to do with the fact that with the very creation of Israel, there were 750,000 Palestinians displaced overnight. So, I guess what I'm saying is I think it's impressive that Palestine continues to fight when, once again, in terms of military supplies, they're far, far outnumbered. But for them, it isn't a matter of math. It's a matter of something far more significant, which is the power of a truly reflective border: a border that reflects the wish to dominate and subdue.

EC: Yes, very well put—I like the term "reflective border"—as opposed to a dogmatic static border. Living on the edge creatively is something that Palestinians have been doing for a very long time. The Israelis who surged forth in 1948 put them on edge, unfortunately the edge of catastrophe and destruction. But since then, they have been living on the edge. You're certainly right about that. This is really extraordinary. They've survived as a people with a real commitment to creative and family life. For example, the same story that I keep referring to from *The New Yorker* is all about such disruption, as with the family whose male member was killed. And this, of course, is replicated now thousands of times in Gaza.

Here a kind of disaster Israel is visiting upon the Palestinians not just in Gaza, but long before that everywhere in Palestine. Not just by way of military invasions, but in daily life in which there is deprivation of water (and other necessities). It's extraordinary. Palestinians are interested in peace and in having a government of their own. The Palestinians are a people from whom we should really take many lessons. Let's hope that this will become true and that they survive in some viable way.

The invasion and destruction of Gaza is the larger drama that is circling around us in this very conversation. I think philosophers have an obligation to pick out the elements and factors that really make up such a tragic circumstance. There is no question that a lot of it has to do with the misalliance, misunderstanding, and misuse of the edge world. But it would take another book to spell this out adequately, Michael.

MB: Hahahaha.

EC: Maybe *you* can do it! I'm writing only short books now, and I'm only writing them with other people. Because I'm in my retirement years, I'm no longer interested in being the sole author of books as I was in my more ambitious youth. I just want to write things with others, as with the book *Plants in Place*, to which I referred earlier. I'm now writing another book with a colleague in the philosophy department at Stony Brook University, which has the puzzling title *Thinking in Transit*. It's about the creative thinking that occurs when you are in between places, traveling between or walking between places. We have tried to single out many contexts where you're disrupted from sedentary life and have creative thoughts that would not otherwise occur. Both books are instances of thinking on the edge.

MB: You have just retired from teaching. Looking back, are there any ways your career has changed over time? I know you love the classroom, but how are you staying busy now that you aren't teaching? Is there anything you would have done differently?

EC: Yeah, I think I should have been more politically active than I was. I think I sublimated and displaced political activism into philosophical writing and into teaching itself. I've tried to correct that more recently, Michael, even while I was still teaching in the last few years. I created a group at Stony Brook University that is helping asylum seekers in the Northeast. And now in Santa Barbara I'm working as a tutor of English as a second language for Mexican migrants.

So those are things I have been doing, Michael, and I am now moving in these directions at the very end of a career in which I have been teaching for the last 50 years. I think philosophers should be in the front ranks of those who come forward actively to address issues in the larger political and social world.

MB: Thank you so much for your time and insight, Professor Casey. It has been an absolute joy to speak with you today. Everyone at *JU* wishes you a wonderful retirement!

Biographies

Edward S. Casey is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, emeritus, SUNY at Stony Brook. He is the past president of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) and has given the annual John Dewey lecture at the same Association. Chair of the philosophy department at Stony Brook, he is the author of 12 books: among them are *Imagining, Remembering, Getting Back into Place*, *The Fate of Place*, *Representing Place*, *The World at a Glance*, *Up Against the Wall* (co-author), *The World on Edge*, and *Plants in Place: A Phenomenology of the Vegetal* (co-authored).

Michael Broz is a doctoral candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland. He has published articles and book reviews dealing with Marx, Capitalism, and

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Muslim Women's Representation, Religious Identity, and Politics: On *River Spirit*, by Leila Aboulela

Amany Abdelrazek-Alsiefy

Aboulela, Leila. *River Spirit*. (London: Saqi Books, 2023), 307 pages.

Leila Aboulela's latest historical novel, *River Spirit* (2023), is a ground-breaking work, that represents a significant period in the modern history of Sudan. *River Spirit* is also a notable departure from Aboulela's preceding novels, which primarily dealt with intricate psychological dimensions of religion by depicting politically unaffiliated spiritual female protagonists. Aboulela's latest main characters have explicit perspectives (supporting or resisting) on the Mahdist revolt (1881-1899) and the concurrent religious and political challenges faced by the Mahdist Sudanese, led by Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdullah. The novel offers a valuable interrogation and subversion of conventional Western and Muslim depictions of Muslim women's marginalized and erased roles in the public sphere, highlighting their contributions to the political history of the region.

Beginning in 1877, *River Spirit* reveals the poignant journey of Akuany and Bol, an orphaned girl and her younger brother, as they navigate the aftermath of their father's murder and the devastating impact on their village inflicted by slave traders. Rescued by a merchant from Khartoum named Yaseen, who later departs for Cairo to study at Al-Azhar University, Akuany and her brother are entrusted to Yaseen's sister, Halima. However, as Halima has only daughters, she becomes possessive over Bol, envisioning him as her future son-in-law. Meanwhile, Akuany, who has developed deep affection for Yaseen and feels a strong connection to him, faces a harsh twist of fate when Halima sells her to Nazli Hanim, the wife of a Turkish governor. This marks a major turning point in Akuany's arduous journey, characterized by enslavement and humiliation in the household of the Turkish ruler. The narrative then takes another compelling turn as Akuany's journey continues with a Scottish painter named Robert until she eventually reunites with Yaseen, who is in hiding from the persecution of the Mahdi fighters due to his steadfast refusal to acknowledge the Mahdi's authority. Akuany's story involves diverse households that showcase the intricate social and political conflicts within both Sudanese Muslim society and a Western household. The narrative skillfully provides readers with a nuanced exploration of historical and cultural landscapes dur-

ing the Mahdist revolt era while also navigating themes such as enslavement, discrimination, religious extremism, and imperialism.

Exploring Diverse Representations of Muslim Women Beyond the Harem Stereotype

River Spirit introduces readers to a rich array of complex and diverse female characters. These characters not only draw inspiration from scholarly historical studies but also actively challenge prevalent Islamic, colonial, and Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women. Subsequent discussions explore these narrative elements, particularly through the lens of characters like Rabiha (a historical figure) and Sahla, culminating in the portrayal of the protagonist Akuany. Akuany, a Black South Sudanese woman, suffers the dual marginalization of her historical narrative and cultural identity, both overshadowed by the veneer of civilization, whether Islamic or Western.

Rabiha is an orphan, whose father "died worn out of the Tyranny of the Ottoman invaders, their cruel incessant taxes, their disregard to people's circumstances" (2), and she is depicted as a symbol of faith and liberation, driven by her belief in achieving social justice and dignity. Faced with the oppression of the Ottoman invaders, she bravely confronts challenges to warn Mahdi and his followers of an impending ambush, altering the course of a crucial battle. Despite the superior numerical and logistical strength of the Turkish forces, Rabiha's courageous actions lead to their defeat, solidifying Mahdi's triumph in Sudan. The historical triumph of Mahdi's forces is primarily attributed to Rabiha, as Mehdi's wife says: "Rabiha you saved us. Strengthened and saved us all. We will drive these foreigners out of our lands" (9).

Aboulela's story of Rabiha aligns with the scholarly work of Moroccan sociologist and feminist Fatima Mernissi, who challenged patriarchal norms in Muslim societies by revealing the overlooked history of assertive Muslim women involved in political life.[1] The depiction of the historical female character Rabiha both aligns with and challenges the representation of Muslim women in mainstream medieval English romance literature. On the one hand, unlike the common portrayal of Muslim women who often abandon their faith for a Christian hero, transforming into obedient wives and conservative Christian women, Rabiha stands out by steadfastly adhering to her faith and actively engaging in liberating her community from the unjust actions perpetrated by corrupt Muslim leaders. On the other hand, Rabiha's character conforms to the conventional portrayal of Muslim women's otherness in Western medieval literature as assertive and daring figures. These audacious Muslim women symbolized the contrast between the sensual pagans who adhered to a false creed and the supposed rational, civilized European Christians who upheld the true religion.[2] Elizabeth Archibald (1990) delves into the categorization of female characters in medieval romance, identifying two primary groups: the female protagonist and minor characters such as maids and servants. The archetypal female protagonist is depicted as beautiful, frail, lacking agency, and awaiting rescue or the return of the male hero. Conversely, pagan

Muslim female characters exhibit some degree of autonomy within the second category. Archibald notes that the "Otherness" of these Muslim women is accentuated through their contrast with the passive, sexually conservative, and virtuous Christian heroine.

Two particular scenes showcase Rabiha's resilience and determination: one is her arrival at the masculine space of Mahdi's forces, suffering from and enduring a snakebite. She refuses to be silenced or disregarded, transcending societal expectations of femininity. The other is at the conclusion of the narrative with Rabiha on her deathbed, surrounded by family. She remains a rebel until the end, rejecting the tradition of seeking forgiveness from her husband for her actions in support of Al-Mahdi. In her last breaths, she strives to be more than an obedient wife, solidifying her legacy as a woman who changed the course of a revolution. Overall, Aboulela's portrayal challenges the official historical records and emphasizes that the role of women in warfare and political life has been either overlooked or relegated to marginal mentions and footnotes, as Aboulela mentioned in her interview with *Brittle Paper Magazine* (2023).

Muslim Women, Religious Identity, and Violence

River Spirit avoids offering a singular image of Muslim women in response to the Turkish-Egyptian presence and the "Mahdist Revolt" in Sudan. Aboulela refrains from providing a single interpretation of Islam and its values within Sudanese society under occupation. Instead, the narrative introduces characters like Salha—an educated woman from a wealthy Muslim family who insists on teaching her the Quran, reading, and writing. Salha, the wife of Yaseen, educated at Al-Azhar, engages in discussions with her husband and those around her. She rejects the leadership of Muhammad Ahmad Al-Mahdi bin Abdullah, viewing him as a pretentious and extremist figure who doesn't truly represent Islam, especially after the uprising turns into a violent and extremist movement.

Salha finds herself in the clutches of the Mahdists when they raid their home, branding them as enemies of the Mahdi. Compelled to marry one of the Mahdi's followers, Salha experiences a psychological release upon learning of the Mahdi's demise. Alongside her father, uncle, and husband, she harboured doubts about the authenticity of the Mahdi, despite being aware of the corruption and injustice under the Ottoman ruler. Salha articulates a profound skepticism, asserting that religion was merely an external facade—a potent tool of manipulation with powerful slogans aimed at enticing the impoverished and illiterate masses. Salha says: "But religion was only the outer shell, powerful slogans to attract the poor and the illiterate. Shining rhetoric to whip up support. The Mahdi was never the Mahdi, and this was a revolution happening under our noses and not only a religious deviancy" (287). Her words shed light on how religion could turn into extremist ideology within the framework of three key factors: corruption, social injustice, and ignorance. The portrayal of Al-Mahdi and the effectiveness of this extremist ideology in

garnering support are attributed not solely to Mahdi himself or Islam per se, but rather to the contextual milieu surrounding Mahdi's call.

Thus, in contrast to her novels *Minaret* (2005) and *The Translator* (1999), where the conclusions symbolize allegories of the "left's defeat," portraying Marxists being overcome by Islam (Abbas 2011, 445), *River Spirit*, aligning with historical eras, depicts the defeat of Islam as a political extremist ideology. Although the narrative challenges the notion of Islam's defeat by emphasizing its cultural, historical, and spiritual identity, it portrays Muslims who are open to embracing progress and diverse social life while rejecting the extremist ideology of Islam. However, the narrative underscores the challenges they face, particularly in combating the spread of corruption that undermines their progress. In this context, religion is depicted as being misused, resulting in the fracturing of Sudanese cultural and social unity.

Modern European Painter, Political Harem, and Muslim Woman

The protagonist, Akuany, is initially portrayed as a seemingly uncomplicated girl who appears incapable of taking a stance on the intricate political and religious divisions within Sudan. However, the narrative unfolds with a subtle understanding of the domestic life of Muslims in Sudan during the 19th century through Akuany's lens. In this historical context, European painters and travel writers engaged in a competitive discourse, vying to depict Muslim women, with a particular emphasis on the private sphere commonly referred to in Western literature and discourse as the "harem." The representation of Muslim women in Western art, such as paintings and postcards, stands out as a pivotal medium for shaping the Western perception of the East and Islamic culture, particularly since the 19th century. These depictions not only contributed to a discourse aligning with political interests and ideological concepts in the region, but also served as a veneer for colonial and imperial projects from the 19th century onward (Said 1979; Zine 2006). Prominent European museums, such as the Louvre in France, showcase many of these artworks, including Eugène Delacroix's "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's "The Turkish Bath." In these pieces, Muslim women are often portrayed reclining on cushions in various states of undress, symbolizing the submissive figure in the harem, awaiting the desires of Muslim men (Mernissi 2002). This imagery propagated the notion that the "civilized" white European man had a duty to rescue these women from Islam and the allegedly misogynistic Muslim man (Said 1979). Critiqued for reflecting the sexual fantasies and imperial aspirations of European men, these paintings also result from artists who never set foot in the designated "harem" for women. Instead, inspiration came from accounts of European women travel writers or images captured by colonialist photographers. These depictions, however, did not accurately represent the real-life situations of ordinary Muslims, as highlighted by Algerian literary critic Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* (1986). Parallel with Alloula's argument, *River Spirit* portrays the ambitions of a Scottish shipbuilder and amateur painter aiming to depict

Akuany, not just to showcase the unseen to his people and gain fame in his country (197).

Ella Shohat maintains that "it is this process of exposing the female Other, literally denuding her, which comes to allegorize the western masculinist power of possession, that she as a metaphor for her land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge" (1993, 53). However, taking an anti-colonial stance—in contrast to Europeans who had the capability to capture semi-naked images of painted Muslim women or imagine them in provocative poses for the European audience's voyeuristic gaze—Akuany defiantly tears apart the canvas. This act not only shatters the young painter's dream of immortalizing Akuany in a painting for her daughter, Christina, but it also extinguishes his desire to paint again.

Aboulela demystifies the mysteriousness of Muslim women's private spaces, describing the beauty of Sudanese women with braids, tattoos, beautyfying rituals, and body adornments. Beauty products like kohl, henna, and skin moisturizers, forced upon the enslaved woman in the Turkish governor's palace, become items used by Muslim/Sudanese women for personal hygiene and beautification for their husbands. The narrative navigates this private realm without resorting to explicit sexual imagery, a departure from colonial literary works and Orientalist paintings. Notably, Aboulela avoids using the term "harem," with its sexual and patriarchal connotations in Western imagination, opting for "women's area" to refer to the space where women usually gather and a space inaccessible to male strangers. The singular mention of the term "harem" in the text comes from the Scottish painter, Robert, who associates it with notions of "going back" and a "jungle," subtly insinuating a sense of backwardness and an unsuccessful attempt to emancipate these women. Robert, perplexed by Akuany's apparent lack of appreciation for the opportunity to work and earn money with him, questions her preference for returning to Yaseen's possession, even after he offered her freedom due to her perceived mischievousness and uselessness. As the narrator recounts:

> One morning, after another burnt porridge, he gave in and freed the girl. He signed the necessary papers. She grabbed them and left without a thank you. What made her even more of a fool was that she was going back to the same Sudanese man who had first taken her out of the jungle. Robert was offering freedom with offers of paid employment, and she was choosing a harem! (214-15)

While this scene acknowledges the unjust practice of slavery in Sudanese Muslim society during this period and recognizes the enslaved individual's desire for freedom, it also showcases Akuany's successful strategy to liberate herself from a foreigner and achieve her goal of returning to her Sudanese roots, specifically through her connection with Yaseen. This connection is emphasized by Yaseen's wife, who regards Zamzam/Akuany as a "member of the family" who must stay with them (206). Moreover, the narrative suggests that even without Yaseen's wife welcoming Akuany, the orphan girl did not wish to stay at the European house. She cleverly deceives the painter, telling him that she has family and relatives to whom she could

return after gaining her freedom. This interpretation challenges and subverts the Orientalist representation of non-Western women escaping from Muslim men and culture.

Aboulela skillfully portrays instances of forced marriages and polygamy among the followers of the Mahdi, despite their claims to represent true and just Islam. The narrative also explores the stories of women who attempt to resist these practices, juxtaposed with those who succumb to them. Furthermore, in the public sphere, Muslim/Sudanese women are portrayed wearing colorful clothing, engaging in market activities, and raising and teaching their children after the death of their husbands without assistance. Aboulela challenges Orientalist narratives that depict all Muslim societies as forcing women to veil themselves, emphasizing that veils were typically worn by upper-class women in most Muslim societies, while ordinary women often covered their heads without necessarily veiling their faces, allowing their necks and breasts to be visible.

Nonetheless, the significance of the portrayal of non-Muslim characters in imperial Islamic culture and Western civilization is paramount in *River Spirit*. The novel explores the dehumanization and rejection of cultural identity and history experienced by non-Western, non-Muslim Black females. In the narrative, Akuany, a Black girl from South Sudan, witnesses the devastation caused by Arab/Muslim slave traders who destroy her village, massacre its inhabitants, and traffic survivors into slavery in the North. She grapples with the loss of her name, traditions, and the life she once knew along the White Nile. Repeatedly dressed, redressed, and renamed under the directive of the Turkish governor's wife in the North, Akuany's identity undergoes a coercive metamorphosis, symbolizing her journey from perceived primitiveness to the perceived civilization epitomized by Islamic culture in northern Sudan.

The narrator contemplates Akuany's roles within the Muslim Turkish ruler's household and later as the muse of a Scottish painter, saying:

> There followed a great deal of bathing and delousing. Nazli scrubbed Akuany so hard that she scratched her skin. She made her try on outfit after outfit and then marched her to see her in the mirror. Akuany preferred how she had looked the first time, like a girl who could be her friend. But Nazli Hanim did not care about her opinion. She gave her a new name, a Muslim one. Akuany became Zamzam. (55)

Akuany realized that the Scottish painter and the affluent Turkish Muslim household represented by the governor's wife, Nazli Hanim, shared a similar essence despite their differences in nationality and gender. Both were restless and felt entitled to a better life. They both treated her as a mere plaything, a decorative part of their lives. Eventually, Robert would discard her as her allure faded, her exoticism preserved on canvas for someone else to enjoy (206).

Conclusion

Aboulela's *River Spirit* represents a notable departure from her previous literary works, particularly in the portrayal of her fictional heroines, thus presenting a paradigm shift. Muslim women are presented as politically engaged and assertive agents actively reshaping the political landscape in defense of their beliefs and the well-being of the Muslim community. The novel also

aligns with Aboulela's postcolonial project, aiming to deconstruct the mono-lithic representation of Muslim women and societies found in Orientalist texts and imperial discourses. *River Spirit* acts as a counter-narrative to Western art (such as Rudolf Sultan Pasha's autobiography *The Fire and Sword in the Sudan: A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes, 1879-1895* (1898) and the British film *The Four Feathers* (1939)) that unfairly depict Sudanese women as oppressed, subordinate, and brainwashed Darwishes following extremist religious leaders. Instead, *River Spirit* features a diverse range of voices, ex-tending beyond the central characters, Akuany and Yaseen. It introduces nine characters representing various dimensions of gender, social class, skin color, and cultural perspectives. By centering the narrative on ordinary Sudanese characters, the text intricately explores the dynamics within the struggle for both political and religious authority during the Mahdist revolt era. This per-spective transcends the conventional focus on political and religious leaders. The deliberate inclusion of individuals aligning with or resisting prevailing re-ligious and political views contributes to a more comprehensive understand-ing of the broader societal dynamics at play.

Biography

Amany Abdelrazek-Alsiefy is a writer and lecturer at the Zentrum für Trans-disziplinäre Geschlechterstudien at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. She holds an MA in English Literature and a PhD in English Literature and Language, both earned from German universities. Her academic pursuits en-compass a broad spectrum of fields, including gender studies, postcolonial lit-erature, secularization, and fashion theories. With a substantial portfolio of publications in Arabic, English, and German, she is the author of *Modern Egyptian Women, Fashion, and Faith: Discourses and Representations* (2023).

Notes

1. See Mernissi (1987; 1993; 2002). Mernissi, a distinguished feminist and sociologist, played a pivotal role in reshaping perceptions of Mus-lim women's roles through her groundbreaking scholarship. In her seminal work, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), she challenges the en-trenched notion of confining women to the private sphere and ex-cluding them from political participation, a concept deeply ingrained in Islamic traditions. This pioneering research laid the foundation for Mernissi's influential examination of the often-overlooked contribu-tions of Muslim women to political life, confronting the marginaliza-tion they endured in male-dominated societies. Her acclaimed work *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993) sheds light on the significant politi-cal agency of women in early Islamic history, dispelling widespread misconceptions. By uncovering the leadership roles held by 16 Mus-lim women who governed states between 1,000CE and 1,800CE, Mernissi enriches our understanding of women's historical contribu-tions. She not only challenges the patriarchal narrative perpetuated by

Muslim male elites but also addresses the Western marginalization of Muslim women's history of resistance and their role in the public sphere before Western modernity. In her book *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2002), Mernissi challenges the 19th century Western discourse that portrays Muslim women as oppressed through practices like the harem and veiling. She argues that this Orientalist view, depicting Muslim women as passive and hidden behind veils or within harems, ignores their history of resistance and reflects Western men's suppressed sexual desires and obsession with unveiling Muslim women.

2. See Mohja Kahf (1999).

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Review of *Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy*, by Catherine Malabou

Conor O'Dea

Catherine Malabou, *Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 268 pages.

Anarchism—so diverse, so difficult to reduce to one authority, including its own—is the privileged theoretical and practical constellation of a situation in which the non-governable bears witness everywhere in idioms unknown to the language of principles. (219)

Catherine Malabou has been reworking the history of philosophy in incredibly potent and novel ways for over three decades. This reworking frequently takes form under the powerful reconception she has developed of the term *plasticity* (defined most simply by Malabou as the capability of "both giving and receiving form" (2005, 8)):

> Something shows itself when there is damage, a cut, something to which normal, creative plasticity gives neither access nor body: the deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes anyone, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers herself. These types of beings impose a new form in their old form, without mediation or transition or glue or accountability, today versus yesterday, in a state of emergency, without foundation, bareback, sockless. The change may equally well emerge from apparently anodyne events, which ultimately prove to be veritable traumas inflecting the course of a life, producing the metamorphosis of someone about whom one says: I would have never guessed they would "end up like this." A vital hitch, a threatening detour that opens up another pathway, one that is unexpected, unpredictable, dark. (2012, 6)

This fluid (dis)continuum, which invites both destruction and change while offering a capacity or a channel for persistence, marks her surgically precise but reconstructively bold transfigurations of Heidegger (*The Heidegger Change* 2011), Hegel (*The Future of Hegel* 2005), and Kant (*Before Tomorrow* 2016). I cite this trilogy of works, in particular, to underscore Malabou's fearless proficiency as a reader of the history of philosophy. This is a mantle she takes up once again in

Stop Thief!, an eviscerating exposure of a hidden metabolism in 20th century European continental philosophy, one that consumes and uses anarchy as fuel for its thought but refuses to acknowledge its indebtedness to the anarchist's banquet. While the negative moment of this book is about forcing a confession from a variety of ways in which philosophical anarchy has been deployed, pushing those concepts to admit the lineage of political anarchism, the broader construction here is to think "[t]he absence of government. This book was sparked by the question of how to understand this phrase. It invites readers to look at anarchism anew, forgoing hegemonic habits and the evaluative gaze" (2), an invitation that leads the reader to confront the concepts of the ungovernable and non-governable. Malabou asserts that:

> The non-governable is not the ungovernable. The ungovernable refers to something that is out of control, like a vehicle that cannot be driven. In terms of morals and politics, it evokes a lack of discipline and disobedience, insubordination. The ungovernable is, and remains, nothing but the opposite of the governable. It resists and opposes what it assumes, namely, the priority of government. By contrast, non-governability refers neither to a lack of discipline, nor to errancy. And it does not refer to disobedience; rather, it refers to that which remains radically foreign to commanding and obeying in both individuals and communities. The non-governable is neither the opposite, nor a contradiction, of the logic of government. It is other. The other to (not of) government. The mark of its impossibility. The anarchist critique of government is not, in fact, a bias. It is not based on the idea that governing is "bad" but rather that governing is not possible. This impossibility is inscribed differently in the real, as a network with connections that are at once ontological, psychical, practical, artistic, and biological. Its landscapes are not those of a state of nature, nor of a space of uncontrolled outbursts of passion. Nor can they be summarized as a cartography of resistance. They correspond to regions of being and psyche that governing can neither reach [n]or manage. (23)

Particularly critical to the tracing of the absence of government is a painstaking examination of *archē* from Aristotle onwards, one perpetually haunted by its "unfoundability," which Malabou describes as "a critical examination of the archaic paradigm reveal[ing] that *anarkhia* haunts *archē* upon its emergence, as its necessary flaw. Anarchy is originary, inscribing contingency in political order" (11). Malabou continues her discussion, maintaining that "[t]he anarchic virus infecting *archē* from the start is the inability of political order to found itself. This order thus reveals its dependence on that from which it is supposedly cut off." Finally, Malabou states that "even though it is concealed, the contingency of *archē* thus derives from a paradoxical revelation of its heteronormativity" (12).

But this absence is also a doubled absence; the denegation of *an-archē* by *archē* is echoed in the distancing from anarchism by the very philosophers who strive to think of anarchy: the ontological anarchism in Reiner Schürmann, Jacques Derrida's *archē*-writing, Emmanuel Levinas's anarchic responsibility, Foucault's anarchaeology, Agamben's profanation and destituent power, and

Rancière's democracy and disagreement. Malabou characterizes this absence as a wilful three-part absencing. There is an unthought in it, perhaps deemed unthinkable, whereby philosophy has not yet come to terms with the anarchism that forms part of its very ground. Then there is profound theft:

> Is it too much to claim, then, that there has been a *philosophical theft* of anarchy from the anarchists? A theft concealed, knowingly or unknowingly, by an apparent concern for theoretical and political distance? Something dangerous, shameful, explosive, enclosed in the underside of consciousness, something that philosophers have shifted from hand to hand? How else can we understand their silence? The concept of anarchism is not just any concept. One cannot claim to invent it, to play on the privative prefix (*an-arkhia*) or simply borrow it from the dictionary without knowing how it was innovated by political anarchism. (19)

Finally, and importantly, there is a *disavowal*: this unthinking theft is made possible only by denial and repression, by the philosophical unconscious's trenchant and viscous kettle logic.

This triple of absence/absencing is read across and through these six figures who philosophically engage anarchy, each of whom is in turn investigated as a philosopher of anarchy and then interrogated as a denier of anarchism. Reiner Schürmann, who claims that "metaphysics stands upon an 'ontological anarchy' … [and that] [t]he destiny of metaphysics is, throughout, the destiny in which principles wither away," both explicitly distances himself from what he sees as the inadequacies of political anarchism, and still reads the entirety of philosophy's history from within a singular archic paradigm:

> "Why should [the] ford of philosophy be a single stone?" Schürmann asks, via René Char, on the final page of his book. Why, indeed, wouldn't there be several stones, several fords? Meanwhile, it seems that the uncemented stones in the walls of Cuzco, those stones that hold together by themselves and whose mystery has never been fully solved, are, for Schürmann, still essentially, in principle, caught up with the foundations of a Greek temple. (60)

Anarchic responsibility is the auspice under which Malabou engages Levinas, for whom "the possibility of deposing the archic paradigm can no longer stem from either the fragility of its foundations or an inner exhaustion. The paradigm, in and of itself, is never exhausted. This possibility comes from elsewhere, from this outside, which is the ethical injunction as exposure to an Other [*Autrui*]. An absolute outside without negotiation or compromise" (63). But Levinas also maintains a careful distance, as exemplified by his use of "anarchy," a distance that is ultimately founded on his substitution of the logic of election for that of government, one that fatally misunderstands the figure of the slave:

> But slaves are not ruled or governed. Slaves can only be dominated. The master never "governs" his slaves. Slaves are non-governable. Levinas's ethical anarchy

might have taken an entirely different course than the destiny of a future state if the two test cases of the non-governable—ethical responsibility and slavery—had been thought through together without the misleading mediation of the concept of servility. Ethical anarchy might have found in this thought of the non-governable the missing anarchist political orientation. Non-governability is not, and never can be, soluble in the state. (82)

For Derrida, Malabou attests, "[t]he 'deconstruction' of metaphysics is first of all a deconstruction of the value of *archē* that not only governs it, but also, in return, makes it an instrument of domination. *Archē* … names at once the commencement and commandment" (89). Derrida's thought, however, falls victim to a quietist sort of messianism that ultimately props up a core of governability:

> The beyond of the beyond is invested with a messianic dimension. Without a messiah, without even messianism, of course, but nevertheless available to a redemptive coming. … In this way, "pacifist" nonviolent anarchism stages its (re)entry. Deconstruction is saved from evil—and it turns out democracy is "undeconstructible."… The undeconstructible nature of democracy would then simultaneously both mark and mask the undeconstructible nature of the drive for power. Nothing can be done to prevent it except installation of the governmental guard rail. (107)

In this way, Derrida either refuses or has forgotten "the very possibility of the non-governable" (110).

The last three thinkers move much more closely to a direct acknowledgement and deployment of anarchism; their "distancings" are thus much more subtle, nuanced, and veiled. Foucault, for instance, does not explicitly differentiate (as the other thinkers thus far have done) between anarchy and anarchism, but did state that he was not an anarchist because he could "not accept this entirely negative conception of power" nor "the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression" (112). But Foucault's thought, particularly towards the end of his life, was richly threaded with expressions of political anarchy:

> The anarchist bios of the Cynic remains extra-economic, outside of it. But does it incarnate, as has so often been argued, a narcissistic individualism, detached from all political concerns and busy only resisting that which threatens it? Obviously not. The Courage of Truth implies that the withdrawal from the political scene, made necessary by corruption and the devaluing of *parrēsia* [bold speech], is but the prelude to a rebound, an awakening that announces a new category of action. (140)

Somehow, however, Foucault stops short; even here, at the end, his own *parrēsia* a silent history:

> Now, why didn't anarchism, why didn't this "great utopian rage" of a soul-body without *archon*, irreducible to all principles and all drives, appear more clearly?

> Why did Foucault conceal the most revolutionary aspect of his philosophy beneath the well-behaved features of an apparently inoffensive ethic? Far from the polish of immanence, or a full form of life, Foucault's subject, wrenched from itself, reveals a troubling truth despite itself: the limit-experience of politics is anarchism. (144)

Agamben's profanation, the deactivation represented by the destituent state, offers another political gesture towards the opening of anarchy and anarchism:

> Profaning is firstly a matter of suspending a power, an implementation, an actuality (*energeia*). The issue is, then, of understanding how the suspension of a power to act cannot be an action in itself. How profanation is not an act. How deactivation, destitution, neutralization can remain possible without actualization. For Agamben, authentically profanatory anarchy sits right in between potentiality and actuality. (146)

Agamben does not draw on the habitual synonyms of the word "profanation": desacralization, disaffection, execration, violation, or blasphemy. Nor does he deploy common equivalents of the verb to profane: to degrade, to sully, to soil, to violate. He instead deploys terms like "deactivate," "destitute," "neutralize," and "render inoperative." These verbs and associated nouns have nothing to do with common associations with the term "profanation," whose most extreme meaning is the violation of the sepulchre. Rather, they refer to a suspension of action, a reduction of pressure in each case.

Importantly, for Agamben, traditional anarchism failed to "deactivate" the sacred and thus could not desacralize government because it "failed to disclose the true political meaning of profanation, to identify the mechanism of exception as 'the originary structure and limits of the form of the State'... it was not aiming at the correct target in its desacralizing operation" (149). But where Derrida's quietist messianism leads us to a problematic core undeconstructability, neither can anarchy "be reduced to a summary execution of God. Despite everything, to do without the symbolic murder of God perhaps always amounts to paradoxically deifying this economy of saving, subtracting it from the possibility of a non-governable" (177). In this position of destitution, Agamben's anarchy is one "without transgression or revolution, interminably stuck in an irreducible sacred zone, 'lucid' anarchy, cut off from all anarchism. … [It is] only a version of the 'unprofanable absolute.' And its signifier above all: God" (177).

Jacques Rancière, our final figure, is, for Malabou, "the only contemporary philosopher who has clearly reformulated the core idea of anarchism" (181). For Rancière, several key concepts are tied to his rethinking of anarchy, among them democracy, disagreement, the distribution of the sensible, politics, and the police. For Malabou's purposes, perhaps the police and politics axis is the most salient:

> Politics is exactly that which disturbs police distribution, that is, the party political distribution of "politics." But it manifests as an "unpredictable sub-

ject," "in eclipses," "intermittently," sometimes it "occupies the streets," and it is "born of nothing but democracy itself." The confrontation between politics and police is always unexpected, emerging momentarily, temporarily. Therefore, "if politics implements a logic entirely heterogenous to that of the police, it is always bound up with the latter. The reason for this is simple: politics has no objects or issues of its own. Its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political. (182)

In Rancière's thought, the act of staging becomes an incredibly important part of this distribution, one that is understood metapolitically:

Metapolitics therefore refers not only to that which is happening, but also causes what is happening in the staged metamorphosis, or staged distribution of politics. ... Metapolitics "shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise, it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise." (Rancière 1999, 16, ctd in Malabou 2024, 196)

Malabou concludes here that, despite the capacity for the ungovernable to be staged in such a manner, "the non-governable remains unpresentable. The idea of the non-governable—the anarchist dimension of politics—eludes the archipolitics of proof, evidence, verifications, and exhibits. It can appear only as memory, that is, in the future. But this does not mean that it is unreal or phantasmatic" (207).

So, where does that leave us? In closing, I note two surprising absences in the set of figures Malabou confronts. The first is intentional, as he is woven through several other chapters, notably the ones on Foucault and Agamben: Gilles Deleuze. While Deleuze did not identify as an anarchist, Chantelle Gray's exceptional *Anarchism after Deleuze and Guattari* (2022) exemplifies why this is an important interrogation. The second is Bernard Stiegler, whose understanding of default and of technics, whose thinking on *eris*, *stasis*, and *polemos* so beautifully complement Malabou's plasticity and could further what it would mean to be non-governable (perhaps non-calculable). What I hope for most is that this excellent book is not her last on the subject, and that perhaps the next one is her reckoning with the plasticity of the non-governable.

For me, this text is at once an irruption and an explosion: an internal rebellion and the excision of a carefully hidden kernel. It is both forcefully discomfiting and deeply liberating, as if what seemed like an invidious ache, an ontological infection, actually conceals a more fulsome, granular truth around which a tissue of disavowal has formed. The swollen tongue becomes a split tongue—an unbinding of Janus. Against the foundation and backdrop of Aristotle's *Politics*, Catherine Malabou offers both a hidden history and a way out—a becoming-plastic of the stultified and stillborn potential of a philosophical anarchism that would live up to its name and calling.

She accuses these thinkers of robbery and theft. What she masterfully undertakes here is a break-and-enter—one that leaves something behind instead

of taking something away. When thought wakes up to itself, it must confront this statue, this destructively explosive plastic anti-icon:

> When it becomes as urgent as it is difficult to assign the non-governable to its place even as it is knocking ever more loudly at the door of consciousness, unconsciousness, bodies …? That's when we understand that these uncertainties are already openings toward other ways of sharing, acting, thinking. Of being an anarchist. (221)

Biography
Conor O'Dea is an independent scholar.

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Review of *Music in Colonial Punjab: Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800-1947*, by Radha Kapuria

Hamad Abdullah Nazar

Radha Kapuria, *Music in Colonial Punjab: Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800-1947*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 410 pages.

Radha Kapuria's *Music in Colonial Punjab* narrates the history of musical traditions in Punjab during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The book opens with the central role of courtesans and female bodyguard dancers in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839). Moving onto the colonial period, it excavates the accounts of *mirāsīs* (local performers) in colonial folklore ethnographies like Anne Wilson's *A Short Account of the Hindu System of Music* (1904) and various song textbooks written by female Christian missionaries in the local musical *ragas* for proselytization. It then describes multiple colonially-induced, urban, middle-class reformist movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which were bent on "purifying" the earlier musical traditions. Finally, the book's last section discusses the patronage of music in the courts of Patiala and Kapurthala during the early 20th century.

Bringing such diverse social locations and histories of musical traditions together has enabled Kapuria to provide a critical insight into variously enmeshed colonial, modern, religious, and cultural categories and identities that we have inherited today. For example, while female dance performers occupied a central strategic place in Ranjit Singh's court and popular shrine-related performances of piety in Punjab in the 18th century, the reformist movements like the Punjab Purity Association, inspired by colonial, anti-*nautch* gaze, were anxiously snubbing this "embarrassing," "immoral" cultural power of female performers by the end of the century (209).

Along with female dance performers, the *mirāsīs* were another group that was ubiquitous to the earlier musical landscape of Punjab and outlawed under this newly gentrified cultural order. Kapuria reads into colonial ethnographies to highlight the socially liminal space these *mirāsīs* occupied and to describe how routinely they would disrupt the boundaries of classical/folk, piety/sensuality, urban/rural, and Muslim/non-Muslim. Their liminality caused a threat to both the colonial order bent on fixing social identities and the reformist movements, like Arya Samaj, bent on making music more "respectable" and Hindu devotional (237).

It is these cultural obliterations, as entailed in the figures of female performers and *mirāsīs*, which led to the formation of new urban, "respectable" musical publics in Lahore, Amritsar, and Jalandhar during the early 20ᵗʰ century (278). Many schools also started emerging to train middle-class Hindu women to sing "purified" devotional songs/*bhajans*. The book situates reformist song-writers like Devraj Sondhi and Devki Sud and famous musicians like Pt. Vishnu Digamber Paluskar within these urban, reformist contexts.

Similarly, Kapuria indicates how the neighbouring court of Patiala, despite its more complex and hybrid engagement with the musical traditions, also started patronizing a more devotional, Sikh, *Gurbani*-oriented music by the early 20ᵗʰ century. The female performers who were markers of cultural and symbolic power in the court of Ranjit Singh were now replaced by male musicians who mostly performed "Sikh liturgical music" (338). Consequently, there was a shift from older terms like *mirāsīs* and *dhadhis* to the new terms of *ragi* and *rababi* in the employment records of the court. The century-long anxieties, embarrassments, and opprobrium for "sensuous" female performers and *mirāsīs* in the colonial ethnographies and reformist movements, assiduously captured by the book, had finally transformed the musical and cultural landscapes of Punjab by this period; the beast of music had finally been tamed into the categories of Hindu and Sikh, "respectability" and morality, etc.

By offering such a holistic overview of musical transformations in Punjab, Kapuria invites us to rethink the various cultural and social identities we have inherited today. Instead of taking these identities for granted, as natural and harmless, the book encourages us to critically reflect upon how they have been informed by colonial experiences and exclude other cultural expressions that do not fit into them.

Taking my own example, growing up as a Muslim in an urban center of Pakistani Punjab, I was taught by my school, mosque, and family that good *sharīf* Muslims do not indulge in music. The figure of Junaid Jamshed, Pakistani pop icon turned evangelist, loomed large over my childhood for leaving the "sinful" world of music and pursuing the "righteous" path of Islam. Reading *Music in Colonial Punjab* reminds me of how musical traditions must have historically enriched and liminalized ideas of Islam in the past, ideas which are no longer available to me and so many other young Muslims growing up in today's urban Punjab due to the colonial, reformist casting of music as "Hindu" and "Sikh" only.

The book encourages such a critical historical inquiry, which is especially appreciative because of the paucity of archives available to write such a history today. Scattered in various bordered locations worldwide, such as Pakistan, India, England, and North America, archives outside one's geographical location can often be inaccessible. Moreover, most of the accounts about Punjab available today were written by British colonial officials and distorted by a colonial gaze. Lastly, previous works about the history of Punjab are often limited by their religious, communal, and/or nationalist focus.

Music in Colonial Punjab bravely tries to grapple with these issues by radically expanding its array of archives across languages and locations, on the one hand,

and using different ways of reading them on the other. It engages with manuscripts, paintings, colonial ethnographies, Punjabi poetry, pamphlets, song textbooks, court cases, music primers, court records, advertisements, law bills, and newspaper reports; sometimes situating them within their social contexts, other times using them to understand the social contexts; sometimes closely engaging with different parts of the same text in detail, other times analyzing only a line, a reference, a paragraph from it to tell the story. Therefore, Kapuria also suggests methods and archives that we can use to recuperate our lost, marginalized, colonized, and bordered Punjabi pasts.

Biography

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Errata
Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies III.I
Feminist Resistance

• p. 1 For "The Warrior I" read "the Warrior I."

• p. 3 Add "Burgin, Timothy. 2021. 'The 5 Warrior Poses of Yoga.' *Yoga Basics*, 11 March. https://www.yogabasics.com/connect/warrior-poses/" to References.

• p. 9 Omit repeated "in school" 5 lines up from the bottom.

• p. 53 For "Kalonaitye" reference read "Kalonaityte."

• p. 63 Add "Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press" to References; for "Altamorano-Jiminéz" read "Altamirano-Jiminéz."

• p. 73 Add "Guardabassi, Veronica, Alberto Mirisola, and Carlo Tomasetto. 2018. 'How is Weight Stigma Related to Children's Health-Related Quality of Life? A Model Comparison Approach.' *Qual Life Res* 27 (1): 173-83"; "Hunger, Jeffrey, Brenda Major, Alison Blodorn, and Carol Miller. 2015. 'Weighed Down by Stigma: How Weight-based Social Identity Threat Contributes to Weight Gain and Poor Health.' *Soc Personal Psychol Compass* 9 (6): 255-68"; "Hunger, Jeffrey, Joslyn Smith, and Janet Tomiyama. 2020. 'An Evidence-based Rationale for Adopting Weight-inclusive Health Policy.' *Social Issues and Policy Review* 14 (1): 73–107"; and "Tomiyama, Janet, et al. 2018. 'How and Why Weight Stigma Drives the "Obesity Epidemic" and harms health.' *BMC Medicine* 16 (123): 1-6" to References.

• p. 80 For "*écriture* feminine" read "*Écriture féminine*."

• p. 85 Add "of" after "Madonna-Whore-complexing."

• p. 88 Add "Khazan, Olga. 2017. 'A Viral Short Story for the #MeToo Moment.' *The Atlantic*, 11 December 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/12/a-viral-short-story-for-the-metoo-moment/548009/" to References.

• p. 91 For "chains" read "expresses."

• pp. 101-02 For "Pourmoktari" read "Pourmokhtari."

• p. 107 For "Koc Michalska" read "Koc-Michalska."

• p. 124 Add missing "[" and italicize "hypercorrection."

• p. 138 Add "Yaguello, Marina. 1978. *Les mots et les femmes*: *essai d'approche sociolinguistique de la condition feminine*. Paris: Éditions Payot" to References.

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