JANUS HEAD

JANUS HEAD

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Three Essays On COVID-19: Interrelated Perspectives and Methods

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Editor's Note

In keeping with the mission statement of Janus Head, as well as our history, for this issue of the journal we sought out essays on the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate effects on marginalized groups/persons. We were fortunate to receive three excellent essays from very different perspectives that still connect in vitally important ways. In short, these essays gather religious, philosophical, historical, artistic, and sociological insight for the analysis of the global COVID-19 problems. We urge everyone to read these essays together so to see the vital connections between the perspectives and methods.

We have also included, in this round of publication, an open essay section. The essays included have been gathered from far and wide. Most importantly, all the essays fall within our purposes as a journal and are of unusual philosophical interest. Janus Head is a small operation with ambitious goals, and we believe this issue demonstrates our commitment to high standards.

Last, but certainly not least, we have a "featured poet" Arthur Brown. Janus Head continues its commitment to poetry as inquiry.

John Pauley
Editor

Plague, Prejudice, and Possibility: Fourteenth-Century Lessons for Our Own Troubled Times

Maeve Callan

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores connections between the fourteenth-century "Black Death" and the current COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the ways in which prejudice and inequality exacerbate their impacts and considering how the upheaval created by catastrophe creates opportunity for greater equity and community, but also exploitation and oppression, depending on human response.

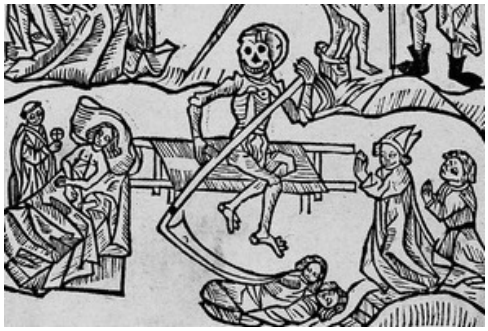
Keywords:
Bubonic Plague;
COVID-19;
Christianity;
Medieval Europe;
Modernity;
Racism;
Anti-Semitism;
United States
Catherine of Siena;
Julian of Norwich;
John Lewis

Plague, Prejudice, and Possibility: Fourteenth-Century Lessons for Our Own Troubled Times[1]

1. Adapted from a Simpson College's Summer Faculty Speaker Series talk given July 29, 2020. Opening image by Philip Culmacher, *Regimen wider die Pestilenz*, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fra5xxxy/images?id=cfaeuh28

As the world wrestled with the COVID-19 pandemic in spring and summer 2020, some turned to the Middle Ages for hope and inspiration. Since "medieval" has become a byword for barbarity and ignorance, the Middle Ages itself didn't provide the hope; rather, it was what people over-simplistically think caused the end of the Middle Ages, the Black Death. Sometimes historians themselves provided fodder for this problematic parallel,[1] but to many it just seemed common sense, given how history has generally been taught in the West: after classical antiquity, we fell into a millennium of ignorance and error until we were rescued by the Renaissance, which ushered in enlightened modernity. In this we loosely follow Petrarch, who is credited with coining the term "Dark Ages" for his own time the decade before the Black Death struck, whereas he saw the Roman Empire as a Golden Age of accomplishment, in part because of all the Roman propaganda claiming the same. Such a narrative, however, grossly distorts the past and follows propaganda of not only the Romans but certain Humanists and contemporary scholars, some with anti-Catholic axes to grind.[2]

In the field of Religion, especially among those of us focusing on medieval European Christianity, we date the



Middle Ages as starting with the "fall" of Rome in 476 (although it fell before that as well, and it got back up again after), and ending with the Protestant Reformation, more precisely October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on a Wittenberg church door, according to tradition. These bookends matter, but dating the Middle Ages as 500-1500 combined with the fifth to fifteenth century, round numbers that don't quite match (the latter specifically means 401-1500), helps convey the sense that these dates are somewhat arbitrary. People didn't wake up on November 1, 1517, take a look around and say, "oooohhh, we're in early modernity now!" These eras are created centuries later , by historians trying to make sense of past patterns. Moreover, Martin Luther was far less revolutionary than people often assume. Countless other heretics laid the groundwork for his successes over the previous centuries, and what really enabled him to succeed (apart from the protection of Frederick of Saxony's army) was a development the previous century, the printing press.

In the Middle Ages, literacy was reserved for the privileged elite, in part because communities couldn't spare the labor to allow more people the time to learn. And writing generally depended on an arduous process that turned an animal—or more precisely its skin—into vellum, or what was used for paper in medieval manuscripts.[3] The entire process was done by hand and took exponentially longer than creating a book did with a printing press, which also standardized content in a way hand-copying couldn't.[4] The printing press and its impact aren't particularly relevant for the plague, but they are for their similarities with our current time of transition, when people can communicate all around the globe in seconds through a computer that fits in our pockets. Martin Luther's ability to spread his ideas relatively quickly to others who were receptive to his views was essential for the success of the Protestant Reformation and the end of the Middle Ages, in partnership with a million other developments—just as our ability to

1. For example, Dr. Gianna Pomata, early modern historian of medicine and professor emerita at Johns Hopkins University, in Lawrence Wright's "How Pandemics Wreak Havocs and Open Minds" (*The New Yorker*, July 20, 2020). See also Adam McBride's more nuanced but still oversimplified analysis, focusing on economic aspects in Salon.

2. For additional context, see Ada Palmer's useful critique of "the myth of the golden Renaissance and bad Middle Ages.", See also Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

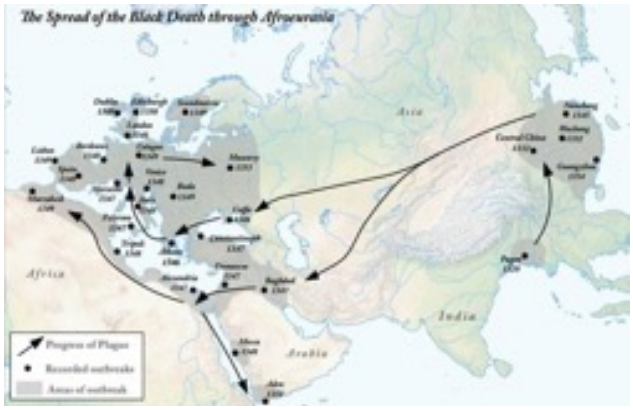
3. For an example of the process, see https://www.bl.uk/medieval-english-french-manuscripts/articles/how-to-make-a-medieval-manuscript.

4. The Chinese had invented something similar roughly four centuries before, so this wasn't new to humanity, but new for Europeans.

share information, innovation, and ideas all around the world in seconds is combining with a million other developments as we transition into a new age.

But, returning to the fourteenth century, the Black Death clearly had a major impact on European civilization. After all, it killed at least a third of the population. But it didn't prove as decisive an end to the Middle Ages as it seems to people today, stuck in their own far less deadly pandemic, desperate to make sense of their world and its future. And any consideration must be prefaced with an awareness of how limited our sources are. We tend to rely primarily on written records, but perhaps 15% of the population was literate, the vast majority of those privileged few male , so we see things through a very selective lens when we're fortunate enough to have surviving written records at all. In contrast, the U.S. literacy rate is currently 99%, with some of the greatest resources in the world. And yet, so much still remains unknown about our current pandemic, with conflicting information given. For example, we were first told not to wear masks—not by conspiracy theorists, but by the CDC. We were told instead that if we washed our hands and didn't touch our faces, we'd be fine. We were told the virus didn't arrive in the U.S. until February, but it likely was here by December—before the rest of the world was even aware of its existence in China. And while various organizations and agencies have been carefully documenting identified COVID-19 deaths, "excess mortality" rates indicate that these deaths have been woefully undercounted. We don't know if people who have recovered from the disease have acquired immunity, and unknown numbers of us have the virus without even knowing it, because we're asymptomatic but still contagious. I note all this not to be alarmist but to emphasize that if this is how little we know about our own current circumstances, with all the resources we have available, consider how little we must know of the events of nearly 700 years ago. Hindsight might be 20/20, but only if the picture is complete. This picture has a great many gaps—and not just because a third to a half of our potential witnesses died within days, if not hours, of their community coming into contact with this disease.

Nevertheless, we know far more about the medieval plague, or the Great Mortality, or the Great Pestilence—it went by a few names; its most common name, Black Death, was given to it only centuries later—than medieval people themselves did. It first hit Europe in 1347, after emerging in China a few years earlier, spreading over trade routes, as seen in this standard transmission map that clearly omits a lot to focus on Europe:[5]



Its spread possibly followed an earthquake which dislodged a significant number of rats and the fleas that lived upon them. The specific bacterium, Yersinia pestis, can be contracted by humans in various ways , but a dominant theory is that humans were bitten by fleas who had fed on infected rats, both fleas and rats traveling over trade routes, and especially through grain supplies. A close contemporary source offers a far more sensational account of how it entered Europe, however. Tense relations at the Genoese trading outpost of Caffa (now Feodosija, Ukraine) led to a two-year siege of Caffa by Jani Beg, Khan of the Golden Horde, during which time plague struck his army. Before the Tatars withdrew, they launched their soldiers' corpses into Caffa via trebuchet.

This vivid picture comes from Gabriele de' Mussi's *Historia de Morbo*, *c.* 1348, which may have derived from Caffa survivors when they arrived—along with the plague—to Piacenza.

> "Oh God! See how the heathen Tatar races, pouring together from all sides, suddenly invested the city of Caffa and besieged the trapped Christians there for almost three years. There, hemmed in by an immense army, they could hardly draw breath, although food could be shipped in, which offered them some hope. But behold, the whole army was affected by a disease which overran the Tatars and killed thousands upon thousands every day. It was as though arrows were raining down from heaven to strike and crush the Tatars' arrogance. All medical advice and attention was useless; the Tatars died as soon as the signs of disease appeared on their bodies: swellings in the armpit or groin caused by coagulating humours, followed by a putrid fever.
>
> The dying Tatars, stunned and stupefied by the immensity of the disaster brought about by the disease, and realizing that they had no hope of escape, lost interest in the siege. But they ordered corpses to be placed in trebuchets and lobbed into the city in the hope that the intolerable stench would kill everyone inside. What seemed like mountains of dead were thrown into the city, and the Christians could not hide or flee or escape from them, although they dumped as many of the bodies as they could in the sea. And soon the rotting corpses tainted the air and poisoned the water supply, and the stench was so overwhelming that hardly one in several thousand was in a position to flee the remains of the Tatar army. Moreover one infected man could carry the poison to others, and infect people and places with the disease by look alone. No one knew, or could

5. Available at multiple sites, but copied from "World History for Us All" https://whfua.history.ucla.edu/eras/era5.php .

discover, a means of defense.

Thus almost everyone who had been in the East, or in the regions to the south and north, fell victim to sudden death after contracting this pestilential disease, as if struck by a lethal arrow which raised a tumor on their bodies. The scale of the mortality and the form which it took persuaded those who lived, weeping and lamenting, through the bitter events of 1346 to 1348—the Chinese, Indians, Persians, Medes, Kurds, Armenians, Cilicians, Georgians, Mesopotamians, Nubians, Ethiopians, Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, Saracens and Greeks (for almost all the East has been affected)—that the last judgement had come.

… As it happened, among those who escaped from Caffa by boat were a few sailors who had been infected with the poisonous disease. Some boats were bound for Genoa, others went to Venice and to other Christian areas. When the sailors reached these places and mixed with the people there, it was as if they had brought evil spirits with them: every city, every settlement, every place was poisoned by the contagious pestilence, and their inhabitants, both men and women, died suddenly. And when one person had contracted the illness, he poisoned his whole family even as he fell and died, so that those preparing to bury his body were seized by death in the same way. Thus death entered through the windows, and as cities and towns were depopulated their inhabitants mourned their dead neighbours."[6]

While the corpse-launching may not be accurate,[7] such reports might underestimate rather than overdramatize the impact . Consider, after all, our own pandemic, with an approximate mortality rate of 3-5%,[8] its fatalities surviving for weeks if not months after their first exposure; the Black Death killed 80-100% of those who contracted it, an estimated third to a half of western Europe's entire population, claiming its victims within days if not hours. And as much as still remains unknown about COVID-19, we understand the basics of our pandemic's transmission. Medieval people did not.

Gabriele de' Mussi lists multiple ethnicities and geographical areas devastated by plague before it came to "Christian areas," by which he means western Europe: "the Chinese, Indians, Persians, Medes, Kurds, Armenians, Cilicians, Georgians, Mesopotamians, Nubians, Ethiopians, Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, Saracens and Greeks (for almost all the East has been affected)." Yet studies generally ignore the impact beyond Europe, and the "Black Death" most specifically applies to the European outbreak between 1347 and 1352.[9] While Europe had endured plague before and would again, repeatedly, the scope and scale of these five years place it in a unique category. Virtually all of Europe was impacted, with the exception of Iceland (as plague literally missed the boat when trade was halted), with standard estimates deeming that a third to a half of the entire population perished, with some communities at 90-100%, although again records are far from exact. In 1346, Europe was overcrowded with about 150 million competing for limited land—by 1353, the population was about 75 million, and wouldn't recover to pre-plague levels until the seventeenth century. 80 to 100% of those who contracted plague died from it, depending on the form. Bubonic, the most common, attacks the lymphatic system, causing pus-filled swellings or "buboes" (hence the name) in the armpit, neck, groin, with an estimated 80-85% mortality rate—far higher than today's COVID-19's estimated 3-5% mortality rate, but far lower than its fellow plague travelers, both of which killed nearly everyone who contracted them. Pneumonic was the most contagious, as it caused severe coughing and could pass from person to person in ways similar to COVID, inhaled through aerosols. The third kind, septicemic, could develop out of the others and seems to have caused the most severe suffering, but on the positive side, it killed fast, claiming effectively 100% of its victims within hours. People who appeared healthy at breakfast could be dead by dinner, and no one knew why.

Every sector of society appears to have been equally hit—plague, like God (Acts 10:34), was no respecter of persons, although again it needs to be stressed that records prioritize the privileged. Medieval people made sense of the cataclysm through their main interpretive lens, divine providence, seeing it as the judgment of God and a punishment for ever-present sin. They also accepted the miasma theory that dominated epidemiology efforts in the West until the end of the nineteenth century, when it was displaced by germ theory. Miasma theory held that disease spread through foul air, prompting the plague doctor costumes of early modernity (not the Middle Ages, and so not a "Black Death" doctor as people often assume). Such doctors would stuff their beaks with fresh-smelling herbs or flowers to keep out the stench that often accompanies disease and death, which would have offered protection similar to that offered by today's masks. To escape this "bad air" and rampant death, people with means fled cities for the countryside, as Giovanni Boccaccio describes in his *Decameron*, often spreading the contagion. While fourteenth-century folks didn't understand bacteria, they did recognize the condition was contagious. They thought people brought bad air or divine punishments with them, so country folk sought to keep outsiders out, as shown in this 1625 pamphlet relating to one of sev-

6. Gabriele de' Mussi, *Historia de Morbo*, *c*. 1348; translated in Rosemary Horrox, ed., *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 14–26.

7. See Mark Wheelis, Biological Warfare at the 1346 Siege of Caffa," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 8 (2002): 971-75, (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12194776/) and Hans Ditrich, "The transmission of the Black Death to western Europe: A critical review of the existing evidence," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 32 (2017): 25-39.

8. As discussed below, mortality rates vary based on differing factors, but 3-5% has been a standard estimate worldwide.

9. Scientific breakthroughs have expanded our understanding of the Black Death as a global pandemic; see, for example, Monica H. Green, ed., "Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death," *The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014): entire double issue.

eral early modern outbreaks of plague.[10] This same dynamic surfaced today as well, when wealthy New Yorkers seeking refuge in their second homes outside of the city were met with hostility.

Prejudice (warning: disturbing content)

The worst prejudice, of course, wasn't against city folk by country folk. Medieval Christians' hatred of Jews lurked barely beneath the surface throughout much of Western Europe, repeatedly erupting into bloody violence without provocation. Plague-induced terror caused staggering levels of violence, in a history already written in blood and fire, especially in the parts of the Holy Roman Empire now known as Germany. This makes it ring exceptionally hollow when contemporary Christians claim that the Nazis weren't "real" Christians and Christianity had nothing to do with the Holocaust. One of the basic lessons of Christianity is that if you don't take responsibility for sin, you can't repent for it, and consequently can't be redeemed from it. True, some Nazis were not themselves Christian, but the vast majority were, and their hatred was fed by Christian scriptures and built upon centuries of Christian persecution of Jews, including specifically in connection with the Black Death. Lest other Europeans feel superior on that score, however, note that England expelled all Jews in 1290, and France did the same repeatedly, most recently before the plague in 1322 (as it had in 1182, then again 1306, and then again in 1394, this time permanently—at least during the Middle Ages), always after extreme persecution. The German response wasn't so severe due to some inherent German quality, but because their fear increased as the plague took longer to reach them. Most of Germany didn't have an outbreak until 1350/51, but they knew it came ever closer. Rumors that the plague was caused by Jews poisoning wells spread wildly, even though Jews died at similar rates as Christians, and desperate Christian Germans turned on their neighbors and other Jews who had sought refuge near larger towns, burning them alive.

Heinrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, a former chaplain of Pope John XXII, offers a particularly disturbing account. He lists seemingly limitless massacres across Germany in 1348-49, including one in Horw on December 20, 1348, when the flames burned out before all confined in a fiery pit had died: "when the wood and straw had been consumed, some Jews, both young and old, still remained half alive. The stronger of them snatched up cudgels and stones and dashed out the brains of those trying to creep out of the fire, and thus compelled those who wanted to escape the fire to descend to hell." Heinrich then remarks that this fulfills Matthew 27:25, in which Jerusalem's Jews are made to say that Christ's blood should be upon them and their children. He continues, "Once started the burning of the Jews went on increasing," including in Strasbourg, "where it took six days to burn them because of the numbers involved." He claims that within the year "all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt—and in Austria they await the same fate, for they are accursed of God." Only babies were spared death, then subjected to baptism and raised as Christians amidst their parents' killers. Heinrich says the annihilation was so extensive he almost "could believe the end of the Hebrews had come," but since not all biblical prophecies had yet been fulfilled, "it is necessary that some be reserved" until God's appointed hour should arrive.[11] While the scale of devastation is unquantifiable, an estimated 340 towns in Germany had pogroms, with 80 Jewish settlements wiped out entirely.[12]

Christian persecution of Jews has continued down to this day, with what often gets called "anti-Semitic" attacks on the rise especially over the past four years in the United States, and some now blaming today's pandemic on a Jewish conspiracy—as Christian racists have blamed catastrophes on Jews essentially since their start. But the main scapegoats for the virus are Asians and especially the Chinese, with even the then-president of the United States calling the disease "Kung flu." Hate crimes against Asians had been declining for at least the past two decades, with one hate crime against Asians in the US per 200,000 people—compared with over ten for Black people, over sixteen for Muslims, and nearly 35 for Jews reported in 2017 (although hate crimes are notoriously undercounted). COVID-19 has already impacted those numbers, with multiple attacks across our nation related to fears about Coronavirus and older prejudices about Asians plotting against Westerners, who are generally seen as generically "white."

When Americans speak of a pan-European "white" identity, however, they often reveal their ignorance not just about medieval European history, but also more recent American history as well as

10. Title artwork from a seventeenth-century pamphlet on the effects of the plague on London, "A Rod for Run-awayes," by Thomas Dekker, from https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-51904810 .

11. Heinrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, canon of Constance, in Horrux, *The Black Death*, 208-10.

12. Theresa Finley and Mark Koyama, "Plague, Politics, and Pogroms: The Black Death, Rule of Law, and the persecution of Jews in the Holy Roman Empire," Munich Personal RePEc Archive (2016).

today's Europe. Those who identify with England have dominated in the US and jealously guarded admittance to their so-called "Anglo-Saxon" identity—even though modern inhabitants of England, let alone white Americans, have a tenuous connection with the Germanic tribes that invaded England starting in the fifth century and established their own kingdoms in the sixth century, which became unified as "England" in 927 and was overwhelmed by "the Norman Conquest" the following century. Essentially every ethnicity in medieval Britain stands at odds with common contemporary assumptions. The original Britons who gave the island its name are now better known as Welsh, a word that ironically means "foreigner," bestowed by the Germanic Angles, Saxons, and Jutes upon the indigenous inhabitants of the land they invaded in the fifth and subsequent centuries.[13] Scots originally referred to Irish people, including those of Dál Riata, a kingdom encompassing parts of northern Ireland as well as western Scotland starting in the sixth century, combining with Picts in a new kingdom in the ninth or tenth. The "Anglo-Saxons" were a Germanic blend intermingled with Britain's other inhabitants, the name "Angles" (Latin *Angli*) giving rise in English to "English," whereas in their own languages the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh referred to them and their increasingly ethnically mixed descendants as variants of Saxon. Then there were the Norse, commonly called Vikings today, who established strongholds on outlying islands as well as in certain cities in Britain and Ireland in the ninth and subsequent centuries.

A related branch of Norse raiders converted to Christianity in the tenth century as part of the terms for their settlement of northern France, which became known as Normandy, and integrated so thoroughly into French Christian culture that when William, Duke of Normandy, invaded England in 1066 to claim its throne, he did so as the pope's chosen champion. Similar dynamics repeated a century later, when William's great-grandson Henry II and his vassals invaded Ireland ca. 1169, initiating more of a colonization than a conquest that took more than the rest of the Middle Ages to complete. This often gets called the "English" invasion of Ireland, but those who invaded Ireland were an ethnic mix whose dominant language was French, and England itself continued to have "Englishry laws" legalizing discrimination against those identified as and speaking English into the mid-fourteenth century—ending just a few years before the plague. The Normans at least initially considered "the English" in terms similar to how English colonists in what would become the United States regarded indigenous people here, with prejudice, disdain, and contempt,[14] and the pope and other leading ecclesiastics backed them in this bigotry, just as they would do the following century, when England's Norman nobility set imperialist eyes upon Ireland.

Ethnicity is often perceived to be a product purely of genetics and ancestry, but it is a "situational and strategic" construct,[15] a group's self-perception of its own identity informed by its culture, language, ancestry, and geographical location, among other factors, and defined in opposition to those seen as dangerously different, a threat to be eliminated, subdued, or avoided. While physical characteristics like skin color, hair texture, and eye shape would eventually come to dominate in determining ethnicity, Europeans regularly subjected each other to such racializing treatment even in the absence of such distinctions, and further added religion to the mix, even when all involved were Catholic Christians, as seen in Ireland's colonization as well as England's conquest. William and his Normans invaded England with papal support, even though the Normans had converted to Christianity only in the previous century, after centuries of raiding Christian communities throughout Britain, Ireland, and the Continental coast as the hated heathen "Vikings." The English, on the other hand, had been Christian since at least the seventh century, partly thanks to the missionary work of the Irish, who had been Christian since the fifth century and served as missionaries in Britain as well as on the Continent throughout the early Middle Ages. Yet in the twelfth century the papacy identified far more with the Norman rulers of England than the people of Ireland and endorsed Ireland's invasion, saying the Irish had become false Christians who needed to be restored to the faith by Henry II, a man whose Christian failings are too many to name—suffice it to say he's the man responsible for the murder of Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury, in his own cathedral, and the pope actually proclaimed Ireland's invasion part of Henry's penance for Becket's martyrdom. As this papally-endorsed invasion indicates, the definition of Christian could depend on power and authority rather than actual belief or behavior, and such is similarly true with ethnic identity, which frequently shifted, especially at broader levels.

Throughout most of the Middle Ages, people didn't think of themselves in terms of "nationalities," but in terms of their kin-groups. "England" didn't even become a lasting unified kingdom until the century before William conquered it. When I referenced the first Europeans to contract plague and bring it back to Europe, I spoke of *Genoese*—not Italians, as Italy didn't exist as a country, but as a collection of largely independent city-states, and it wasn't until the fourteenth century that the Florentine dialect of Dante and Boccaccio—who was a key witness to the plague, especially in his *Decameron*—became formalized, eventually becoming the Italian language. As modern events like Brexit and repeated efforts to establish Scottish independence as well as continuing ethnic tensions related to Northern Ireland indicate, the people of the so-called "United Kingdom" are far from united and don't think of themselves simply as one people.

13. Indigenous does not mean they were the first inhabitants of the land known as Britain, however; Britain's first human inhabitants died out long before the Britons, let alone the Angles and Saxons, arrived on Britain's shores.

14. Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066-C. 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

15. Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 51.

Extending the example to Europe generally, twentieth-century European history, including its bloody world wars, makes the point unmistakable—"Europeans" aren't a unified people, let alone a "race" that generally gets called "Caucasian." Moreover, the term Caucasian is mostly meaningless when applied to anyone except those who originated around the Caucasus region; it became the term for certain western Europeans during eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racist attempts at anthropology. Up until relatively recently, some western Europeans were deliberately excluded from this so-called "race," especially the Irish and Highland Scots, along with southern Europeans like Greeks and Italians, Eastern Europeans of any kind, including those with the most claim to "Caucasian," and of course the perennial European "other," the Jews. "White" emerged as an invented ethnic identity especially among the European mix that called the United States home, but one that only goes skin deep.[16]

Being only skin deep doesn't stop that identity from being weaponized against others, especially people of color, however. As Ta-Nehisi Coates notes, "race is the child of racism, not the father."[17] People think race is genetic, but it's a social construct created to justify pre-existing ethnic prejudice, intensified in connection with the slave trade. Racism is a reality, but race is an invention to perpetuate the prejudice and discrimination that prop up economic, military, and legal systems that allow dominant groups to exploit others based on perceived ethnic differences. This happened in medieval Europe, and, as we're all painfully aware, it happens today. The most common name for the fourteenth-century plague is "Black Death," a name that should reverberate especially among Americans in 2020, as our country reckons with its racist legacy and its perpetuation, which disproportionately impacts Black Americans, including with respect to victims of COVID-19.

As medievalist Mary Rambaran-Olm has noted in her article "Black Death Matters," which takes inspiration for its name from the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movement, profound parallels exist between the fourteenth-century Black Death and 2020 America. Dr. Rambaran-Olm critiques the common view (more common among modernists than medievalists) that the plague ended feudalism and other oppressive aspects of the Middle Ages to enable society to progress into modernity, which often gets painted in a far more positive way—consider, for example, how many people still call the Middle Ages the "Dark Ages"—while the ways in which the plague increased persecution often gets ignored:

> people writing about COVID-19 have pointed to the Plague to argue that COVID-19 may marshal in a new economic model. Basing this idea on a false sense of history is problematic enough but there is also something more sinister at play: these false narratives of plague-born social change ignore that one of the biggest social changes that the Bubonic Plague *did* cause was a rise in racial violence
>
> …This current pandemic has ravaged the Black and Latinx communities, where numbers of deaths in both groups far outnumber any other racial group in the US and beyond… The virus does not make distinctions between race and class, but we do and that ends up costing lives. This pandemic has exposed the underbelly of racism, particularly, but not exclusively, in the West. What scholars in my predominantly white field have largely failed to see as humanists devoted to understanding the value and agency of humans is that this pandemic has exposed a racial crisis that the world has generally refused to acknowledge… We have taken the "pan" out of "pandemic" in our discussions, just like as medievalists, we had taken the "pan" out of pandemic-narratives about the Plague that ravaged beyond Europe in the 14th century. This is how we have white-washed history repeatedly, and this is how we have neglected to draw closer human parallels between the 14th-century Plague and Covid-19. This lack of discussion in our scholarly community reveals how much white America (and beyond) is not ready to discuss how they regard BIPOC as nothing more than dispensable commodities… We have refused in our courses, research, and public-facing work to examine who the targets of this racial violence are. We are neglecting to confront whom the targets of these crises are now, whether it be COVID-19 or the Bubonic Plague, and we have not acknowledged the correlation between modern capitalism and white supremacy.

Dr. Rambaran-Olm then names some of the Black deaths that have fueled a massive outpouring of support for the BLM movement, even while people understand the dangers of the pandemic. Racism is so toxic and pervasive that it too is a pandemic, and she closes with referencing some of the things its victims have been doing seconds before they became a headline, including sleeping as Breonna Taylor was, before invoking the last words of George Floyd, Eric Garner, Elijah McClain, Derrick Scott, and too many others: I. Can't. Breathe. She closes with the point that, "[w]hile the Plague of the 14th century may not have been a Black Death in a literal sense, we must face the horrendous truth that COVID-19 most certainly is one."[18]

Statistics more than support her analysis. As of July 21, 2020:

- 1 in 1,350 Black Americans has died (or 73.7 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 1,650 Indigenous Americans has died (or 60.5 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 2,100 Pacific Islander Ameri-

16. See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010).

17. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 7.

18. Mary Rambaran-Olm, "'Black Death' Matters: A Modern Take on a Medieval Pandemic," June 5, 2020 https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/black-death-matters-a-modern-take-on-a-medieval-pandemic-8b1cf4062d9e .

cans has died (or 48.0 deaths per 100,000)

- 1 in 2,700 Latino Americans has died (or 37.2 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 3,100 White Americans has died (or 32.4 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 3,250 Asian Americans has died (or 30.7 deaths per 100,000)

By November 10, the numbers were even worse:

- 1 in 875 Black Americans has died (or 114.3 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 925 Indigenous Americans has died (or 108.3 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 1,275 Latino Americans has died (or 78.5 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 1,325 Pacific Islander Americans has died (or 75.5 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 1,625 White Americans has died (or 61.7 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 2,100 Asian Americans has died (or 47.6 deaths per 100,000)

Black Americans continue to experience the highest actual COVID-19 mortality rates nationwide—about two or more times as high as the rate for Whites and Asians, who have the lowest actual rates. Indigenous Americans' death rate is just slightly lower than Blacks.

If they had died of COVID-19 at the same actual rate as White Americans, about 21,200 Black, 10,000 Latino, 1,000 Indigenous and 70 Pacific Islander Americans would still be alive.

Adjusting the data for age differences in race groups widens the gap in the overall mortality rates between all other groups and Whites, who have the lowest rate. It also reveals that Indigenous people have suffered the greatest losses, accounting for age differences, followed closely by Blacks and Latinos. Compared to Whites, the latest U.S. age-adjusted COVID-19 mortality rate for:

- Indigenous people is 3.2 times as high
- Blacks is 3.0 times as high
- Latinos is 3.0 times as high
- Pacific Islanders is 2.3 times as high, and
- Asians is 1.1 times as high.[19]

Possibility

Even when the future looks bleakest, we can be at our best, as the fourteenth century illustrates. As about 50% of the population fell to a gruesome disease, clearly it was one of the worst centuries Europeans ever endured. But it was also a time of remarkable achievement. It was the time of Dante and Boccaccio, Chaucer and Wycliff, as well as two of Christianity's most inspiring theologians, Catherine of Siena and Julian of Norwich. Both women were mystics—people who have direct experiences of the divine that transform them and inspire them to share with others some of the wisdom they have gained from that experience. Catherine is believed to have been born in the year the plague first struck Italy. She was a Dominican tertiary, which means she was similar to a nun, but wasn't enclosed and could interact more freely with the outside world. People from all classes sought out her wisdom and guidance, and it was partly due to her that in 1377 the papacy returned to Rome from Avignon in France, where it had been since 1309 (and thus was when the plague first hit). Catherine's mystical experiences taught her a basic Christian truth that Christ himself is said to give in the Gospel of John (13:34)—to love one another as Christ loves us. But although many Christians know this teaching, few live its truth as Catherine did, ceaselessly serving the sick, the condemned, the oppressed, with freely-given love, regardless of how those she served might treat her or act towards others. Grace, after all, isn't about merit, but about love.

The word "charity" literally means love. When in First John (4:8 and 4:16) it says God is love, the Latin word is *caritas*, and God through Catherine as well as First John and the Gospel of John, as elsewhere, calls us to embody that love through caring for each other and creation. In her *Dialogue* with the divine, Catherine writes, "although [God] created us without our help, he will not save us without our help."[20] She also says to God, "You, deep well of charity, it seems you are so madly in love with your creatures that you could not live without us! Yet you are our God, and have no need of us."[21] God tells her, "This is why I have put you among your neighbors: so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me—that is, love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me."[22] So great is her love for God as well as humanity, Catherine declares, "If it were possible that, without losing love of you, I could be set upon the mouth of hell to close it, and so prevent any further souls from entering it, that is what I would like most of all."[23] In Catherine's understanding, God calls us to act as Christ for each other to the best of our ability, which of course pales incomparably beside Christ himself. Yet we are capable of greatness, because of our ability to love, which is divine power, especially when we heed Christ's example of how to live out that love.

Julian was an anchoress, or a woman (the male was anchorite) who after persuading her bishop that she had a genuine lifetime commitment and sufficient resources not to become a financial

19. This section quoted from APM Research Lab, "The Color of Coronavirus: COVID-19 Deaths by Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.," https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race . By December 10, Indigenous Americans had the highest fatality rate, with 1 in 750 killed by COVID, or 133.0 deaths per 100,000, and Black Americans at 1 in 800, or 123.7 deaths per 100,000.

20. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 59.

21. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 63.

22. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 121.

23. Raymond of Capua, *Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Conleath Kearns (Washington, D.C.: Michael Glazier, 1980), 14.

burden on the diocese, underwent a funerary rite in which she was declared "dead unto the world and alive unto God." She was then walled up in a small room or cell, called an anchorhold, adjacent to the church, and was never to leave that cell until her actual death; one window looked into the church, allowing her to witness and participate in the Mass, and another faced outside, where people like her younger contemporary Margery Kempe could come to her for inspiration and guidance. She thus existed in liminal space between heaven and earth, each day a sacrifice to her love and service of God, as well as a penance for her own and others' sins. Unlike Catherine, who played a prominent public role even as she dedicated herself to religion, Julian was literally a recluse, about whom most of our information derives from her *Revelations of Divine Love*. On May 8, 1373, when she was thirty years old (which would have made her about five when the plague first hit England), she received a series of sixteen visions as she lay on what was assumed to be her deathbed. This occurred in response to her desperate prayers to better understand Christ's suffering, which, according to Christian theology, he endured for his love of us, enabling our salvation. She became so grievously ill she received last rites; as the priest held up the crucifix and told her to take comfort from her savior, she saw Christ come to life as he died for us on the cross. Her revelations juxtapose gruesome details of his torment with their glorious meaning of the inexhaustible depths of his love for us, of how precious we are and how great the cost paid for us.

Julian envisions the divine as an all-loving figure who allows us to fall so that we will learn from our mistakes and become better people, offering the metaphor of God as Mother:

> The mother's service is nearest, readiest and surest: nearest because it is most natural, readiest because it is most loving, and surest because it is truest. No one ever might or could perform this office fully, except only [God]. … To the property of motherhood belongs nature, love, wisdom and knowledge, and this is God. … The kind, loving mother who knows and sees the need of her child guards it very tenderly, as the nature and condition of motherhood will have. And always as the child grows in age and in nature, she acts differently, but she does not change her love. And when it is even older, she allows it to be chastised to destroy its faults, so as to make the child receive virtues and graces. This work, with everything which is lovely and good, our Lord performs in those by whom it is done.[24]

She lived in a turbulent, often devastating period: the Black Death likely killed roughly half of Norwich's population, the Hundred Years War started in 1337, the Great Schism in which at least two broadly supported "popes" claimed the papacy began in 1378 and lasted for four decades, in addition to events like the Peasant Revolt of 1381, the rise of the Lollard heresy and their resulting executions, et cetera. Amid this political, socio-economic, and spiritual unrest, Julian offers a message of hope. She proclaims that God treasures each and every one of us and longs for our salvation, our re-union, even more than we do. Her optimism didn't blind her to the dire problems facing her contemporaries: she delves into the human condition of her time and interprets even our worst pain as an occasion for joy, although it doesn't seem that way to us. She assures her fellow Christians that Christ suffers as we suffer and thus we are never alone in our pain. In those dark and uncertain times, she wanted all to know God's message: God is love, powerful beyond measure; he paid the most precious and painful price for our salvation, so all will be well in the end, although we will suffer along the way. As she says in her final revelation, God "did not say: You will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted; he said: You will not be overcome."[25] She didn't mean this in a facile sense. She reminds her audience that we have to actively work towards our own and the world's salvation, but with the confidence that since God is with us, as she firmly believes God to be, we will ultimately triumph over the horrors that fourteenth-century Europe—or our twenty-first-century world—might throw our way.

Julian and Catherine's message parallels the wisdom of the late and much lamented Congressman John Lewis. In his autobiography, *Walking with the Wind*, Lewis describes the nonviolence training he received, which rested on Redemptive Suffering:

> there is something in the very essence of anguish that is liberating, cleansing, redemptive. I always understood the idea of the ultimate redeemer, Christ on the cross. But now I was beginning to see that this is something that is carried out in every one of us, that the purity of unearned suffering is a holy and *affective* thing. It affects not only ourselves, but it touches and changes those around us as well. It opens us and those around us to a force beyond ourselves, a force that is right and moral, the force of righteous truth that is at the basis of human conscience… We are talking about *love* here… a broader, deeper, more all-encompassing love. It is a love that accepts and embraces the hateful and the hurtful… It is the ability to see through those layers of ugliness, to see further into a person than perhaps that person can see into himself, that is essential to the practice of nonviolence… [This provides the foundation for building the Beloved Community, the kingdom of God on earth, which] is as inexorable, as irresistible, as the flow of the river toward the sea. Wherever it is interrupted or delayed by forces that would resist it—by evil or hatred, by greed, by the lust for power, by the need for revenge—believers in the Beloved Community insist that it is the moral responsibility of men and women with soul force, people of goodwill, to respond and to struggle

24. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 297-99.

25. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, 315.

> nonviolently against the forces that stand between a society and the harmony it naturally seeks.[26]

As Rep. Lewis recognized, history isn't just progressive growth, as those who claim that plague eradicated all oppressive aspects of medieval culture to pave the way for modernity, the Enlightenment, and Protestantism would have us believe, but he too shared the conviction that, eventually, we shall overcome.

The standard claim that the Plague ended feudalism dangerously oversimplifies history, as Dr. Rambaran-Olm argues, yet it was a contributing factor. In certain places, the scope of death and upheaval enabled serfs, peasant field laborers who were tied to manorial estates, to leave their lords' lands and go work for other lords who would pay higher wages, increasing financial and social mobility as well as urbanization. Relatedly, the current pandemic helped more people realize how invaluable "essential" workers like cashiers and store clerks were, prompting an increase in some of their wages. History is especially hard to analyze when you're living it, however, and it's hard to say where this will lead—especially when, as Niall McCarthy noted in Forbes in June, "Since the start of the pandemic, collective U.S. billionaire wealth has surged by more than $584 billion, while $6.5 trillion in household wealth has disappeared… the U.S. billionaire class saw its wealth climb 20% between March 18 and June 17 with 29 new billionaires added to the total… the total net worth of the 643 U.S. billionaires climbed from $2.9 trillion to $3.5 trillion. During the same period, 45.5 million Americans filed for unemployment." By February 19, 2021, American billionaires were collectively worth 4.3 trillion, a 44% increase since March 18, 2020, whereas American workers saw a 10.3% decline in their earnings. Possibility isn't inherently good or bad—it depends on what humans make of it.

It bears repeating that people didn't wake up on November 1, 1517, take a look around and say, "oooohhh, we're in early modernity now." These ages are imposed centuries later by those far removed, who look back at trends and place a marker. But we're clearly in a time of transition now. Humanity will decide what kind of age it will be—some factors are beyond our control, but many are not. Will this age reject racism and do the work of rooting it out from our institutions, systems, and our own minds? Will it create a more economically just society, so people get paid a living wage and aren't required to literally put their lives on the line for other people's profit, convenience, and comfort? Will it provide healthcare workers with the resources they need to fight this pandemic and heeds scientific advice to lessen the likelihood of the spread of this disease? I'll leave you to read the news and draw your own conclusions, but I'll end with the oft-quoted wisdom of Jane Goodall and Maya Angelou, reminding us that every day we make a difference and inspiring us to combat our own ignorance that causes us to be part of the problem more than the solution, so that we can learn better and "do better."

We have more power than we often realize. The question is, how will we use it?[27]

26. John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A memoir of the movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 76-78 .

27. Repeated on Goodall's website and Angelou's official Twitter. Final image from a June 8, 2020 tweet by Jarlath Ragan.

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Art and Race in the Time of Covid-19: Focus on Asian Americans

Lenore Metrick-Chen

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ABSTRACT

Trump and his administration brought with them an inflammatory rhetoric that reduced complex issues into the simplified polarity of "us" and "them." With this as the dominant paradigm, racism was encouraged and spread like a virus throughout the nation, appearing in heightened jingoism against other nations, anger towards fellow citizens and violence towards neighbors. When the pandemic Covid-19 spread throughout the nation and the world, it became politicized, used by Trump as a novel corona vehicle help inflame intolerance. He repeatedly associated China and Chinese people with the virus to forward his political agenda regarding US trade with China and he used the resulting demonization of China as a foil for his complicity with Russian crimes. In response to increased and well-publicized acts of violence against Black Americans, systemic racism against Black people is finally being noticed. However, anti-Asian violence has largely been disregarded. This paper discusses both the increased violence against Asian Americans and the lack of attention to it. Dividing the paper into three sections, I correlate an artwork to the main issue in each section: the state-of-affairs provide a context in which to understand the artworks. Reciprocally, because artworks evoke an embodied understanding, involving our senses as well cognition, artworks change our relationship with issues from topical to personal. The artworks recontextualize what we thought we already knew and present possibilities for constructing the world differently.

Keywords:
Covid-19;
artworks;
Asian American;
racism;
Trump;
Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom;
Phillip Chen;
Việt Lê

Art and Race in the Time of Covid-19: Focus on Asian Americans

What is so deceptive about the state of mind of the members of a society is the "consensual validation" of their concepts. It is naively assumed that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings. Nothing is further from the truth. … The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make these people sane. –

Philosopher and Psychologist Erich Fromm in *The Sane Society* (1955)

2020 was a year in which many Americans became aware of the bitter systemic violence against Black Americans. The Trump presidency not only made racism apparent but put its violence on steroids. On May 25, 2020, the murder of a Black man, George Floyd, by a White police officer was recorded by witness videos and went viral: we all became witnesses to the undeniable evidence of police brutality, racial injustice, and the need to take action. But no event catalyzed awareness in the general American public of the racial violence against Asian Americans,.[1] Throughout the pandemic, while hate crimes arose at an alarming 150% in in 16 major cities, the media was conspicuously silent. Until recently.

On March 16, 2021, the media and the nation became painfully aware of anti-Asian racism when a gunman entered three different spas in Georgia and murdered 8 people, 6 of them Asian-Americans. Professor and poet Claudia Rankine is prescient by discussing, in 2015, how in the US, racism only becomes a subject of discourse when it becomes scandal, when we think of it as exceptional rather than the everyday fabric of life. Instead of attending to the racism in small things—how people look at you, or don't look at you—we only acknowledge it when it ramps up and we only pay attention when someone dies.[2]

World events and art are all generally presented as separate stories. But this paper is an enactment of intersectionality, addressing relationships between art and race in America and the Covid-19 pandemic. The subject of race is too broad and diverse to address the conditions, incidents, forms of racism and responses to it for all races. Therefore, this paper will focus on racism against Asian Americans and art created during the pandemic of Covid-19. The paper is divided into three sections: 1) Rhetoric, 2) Vaccines and 3) Violence. In each section, I correlate an artwork to an issue relating to racism or to Covid-19: an in-depth discussion of the topic becomes the context for understanding the creation of particular works of art. The artworks, in turn, shed light upon the area investigated, transforming it from facts and social history to the personal.

Art is not window dressing or a decoration, art is a means of communication to the viewer. The artworks discussed in this paper were not chosen as *illustrations* for the issues of Covid-19 and race.[3] Art can be thought of as a way to recontextualize specific aspects of our material world and symbolic spaces--"a new form of dividing up the common world."[4] Jacques Rancière makes this clear when he speaks of "'politics' of art which consists in suspending the normal coordinates of

1. Masood Farivar, "Hate Crimes Targeting Asian Americans Spiked by 150% in Major US Cities," Voice of America, March 2, 2021 https://www.voanews.com/usa/race-america/hate-crimes-targeting-asian-americans-spiked-150-major-us-cities

2. Paraphrase of Claudia Rankine, in an interview with Lynell George, "Writer Claudia Rankine On White Blindness, The Black Body, and the Freedom to Live," KCET, September 3, 2015
https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/writer-claudia-rankine-on-white-blindness-the-black-body-and-the-freedom-to-live
In an interview, Claudia Rankine said, "The most surprising thing has been the number of Asian women who have come up to me at book signings with tears in their eyes to say: this is my life you're writing." Quoted in Kate Kellaway, "Claudia Rankine: 'Blackness in the White Imagination has Nothing to do with Black People," *The Guardian,* August 30, 2015
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/27/claudia-rankine-poet-citizen-american-lyric-feature

3. Herbert Brün, *When Music Resists Meaning,* p. 128

4. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, p. 22

sensory experience."[5] In other words, art recontextualizes what we thought we already knew. Through focusing our gaze, art presents new possibilities for how we can structure symbolic and material space. By visualizing alternative systems, it allows us to glimpse the system which is usually hidden.

At the time that I write, Covid-19 has taken the lives of 2,730,000 people throughout the world, 543,000 of them Americans. Many people have taken precautions of masking and social distancing. But disease is political; social distancing is a privilege. I do not see relationships between three spheres—pandemic, race, art—as causal, nor do I try to triangulate them: Covid-19 did not lead to racism, nor did racial events change the process of art-making.[6] Rather I see the pandemic as the context in which the other two develop; Covid-19 set up conditions for them to change and accelerate: Trump and Covid-19 created a climate in which we could no longer ignore the fact of daily racism and where we could no longer accept the consequences. Covid-19 's imperative of sequestering provided time to witness and process the words spoken about race by Trump, time in which we were able to realize that his words and descriptions did not parse with the reality before our eyes. Art provides the vehicle that visualizes what is invisible, disseminating images for critical thought. The topic of art and race is approached by the three sections of this essay in the manner of the term coined by Wittenstein, "family resemblances": there is no one definitive meaning or element shared by all.[7] However, they create an overlapping network, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

In 'Section1: Rhetoric,' I begin with two images by Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, posted on the internet, that vividly relates race to Covid-19, which become the point of departure for a close look at the brutality of verbal racism. In the second section: Vaccines, a set of etchings incorporating photography and drawing, created by Phillip Chen, raise the unknown consequences, positive and negative, of current work in sciences, opening a discussion on vaccines and limits to human knowledge. Section 3: Violence, focuses on the brutal mass-murder of eight people on March 17 in Atlanta, GA, contextualizing it through the lens of the history of violence against Asian women in this country. This, then, makes visible the links between verbal and physical violence and malfeasance in the Trump administration. I end the paper with exploration of the performative-based works of art by Việt Lê, designed toward community and healing. In different manners, the artists are cognizant of their Asian heritage in their works.

To comprehend the systemic nature of racial animosity requires establishing the context in which it is found. Context, however, is not always immediately present but often requires a more nuanced and more historical understanding. Here I borrow from WEB Du Bois a metaphor of lifting the veil, realizing that the veil still persists in America, dividing the nation into (at least) two overlapping realities. In this paper I follow his lead in looking behind the veil, for a deeper look into the relationships in the present and past to better witness and comprehend the continuing racism against Asian Americans during the time of Covid-19. The insights conveyed by artworks assist in lifting the veil.

Section 1: Rhetoric

Sanitizing Racism: Construe it as "Covid"

In July 2020, then-president Trump asserted that the Chinese government was "fully responsible for concealing the virus and unleashing it upon the world."[8]

In an Instagram post, artist Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom cautions: "Be careful what you wish for ... I've been complaining for decades about the lack of representation of East Asians in the West. I've been feeling neglected and overlooked. Well, not anymore. I've never felt more visible and monitored than now, and everywhere I look I see pictures of Asian people: Asians portrayed as sick, as infectious, as harbingers of death. Even people who label themselves "anti-racist" are happily sharing this type of imagery now with the excuse that they've no intention of harming anyone - the very same excuse they usually disqualify when calling out other people for sharing racist content. I've spent most of my life wishing I was white, something I've been glad to say I've moved on from. Now, however, I wish I was invisible instead."[9]

Sjöblom's art and writing on race and adoption appear on twitter and Instagram as well as more formally in her graphic novels. Korean by birth, Sjöblom was adopted and grew up in Sweden, and now resides in New Zealand. Originally, she posted in Swedish but her growing attention internationally convinced her to add English captions to her work.

Her drawing "I am not a virus" was motivated by seeing the words in a hashtag used by a French Asian group. The style is reminiscent of illustrations in a child's book of poetry, supple line drawings of a figure or a small group, items of clothing occasionally filled in with muted colors. She characteristically allows the tan ground of the paper, similar to the color of a paper bag, to stand in for the background of the scene. In her most stripped-down and candid images, a female Asian figure, a young girl, really, wears a mask over her mouth and nose,

5. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, p. 25

6. Although racist events did not change the process of art, racial events such as the creation of Black Lives Matter and the growing awareness of systemic inequities to Black Americans including iniquities in the art world, lead to changes in the art market, which I discuss in an upcoming paper.

7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1953, p. 32

8. Nina Strochlic, "America's Long History of Scapegoating its Asian Citizens," National Geographic, September 2, 2020. https://www.google.com/search?q=america%27s+long+history+of+scapegoating+its&oq=america%27s+long+history+of+scapegoating+its+&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i271l3j69i61l2j69i60j69i65.8164j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

9. Instagram

the Covid-19 kind of mask, looking out of the picture plane squarely at the viewer. The caption speaks her words, declaring, "I am not a virus."[10] The figure engages the viewer with quiet defiance while also conveying a sense of something wistful. We understand the deep sense of isolation arising from the solitary and masked figure, the only Asian person in an empty space, addressing an audience not present within the picture plane, an audience which has apparently been hostile. An audience in which we are included. Sjöblom said that the artwork represents herself and spoke about the palpable isolation, explaining: "A lot of my Asian friends and myself, we feel very lonely even within the anti-racist movement, because we always have to wait for our turn to speak about our experiences. When the attacks on Asians started to increase—because we've always been attacked in the West—when hate crimes started rising and people started defending them, I thought I had to comment on it in my drawings. I started drawing consciously about Asians and other people of color and felt my job is not just to portray people but also what we are going through, and draw people who are not white."

The image's strength lies in its candor. Her drawing strips away all but the most necessary detail, and the five-word caption at once asserts and refutes the racism of correlating Chinese people with the virus. Sjöblom's posts on Instagram have 7693 followers. Her postings on race receive requests for reposting, and comments saying how much works spoke to them. But saying something directly also makes you vulnerable. From her first racial posting, she was targeted. "I write about how I've been quiet for quite a few weeks where I felt that I couldn't express what I felt. When I started writing about Covid-19 on my Instagram I got a lot of hatred, so much so that I deleted a lot of comments because I didn't want other readers to feel unsafe by them. I was told that I was doing Chinese propaganda, that I was in the service of the Chinese communist party."[11]

How has it become necessary to challenge the equation of a whole people, all Asians, with a virus? Why has the virus allowed being Asian to become a justification for hate speech and hate crimes, and even cause un-ease and moral ambivalence in people who imagine themselves non-racist?

The short answer to all these questions is found in one source: the lies told by former President Trump who, with pretend amusement, insidiously and repeatedly spoke of Covid-19 as "the China virus" and the "Chinese flu," and found enjoyment in referring to it as "Kung flu." He added his voice and authority to those that erroneously perpetrated the theory that Covid-19 was created in a lab in China. The lies took effect – within a few months into the pandemic, an IPSOS poll found that three in ten Americans blamed China or Chinese people for the virus.[12] And Trump's Administration followed his lead: in their 57-page memo, the National Republican Senatorial Committee presented politicians with rationalizations to use in defending the conflation of Covid-19 and "the Chinese virus" as non-racist."[13] Nevertheless, Trump played innocent in response to questions about the effect of his words; for instance, when a reporter asked: "Do you think using the term "Chinese virus" puts Asian Americans at risk?" Trump answered, "No, not at all. I think people would agree with it 100 percent."[14] And to no one's surprise, news footage verifies that his base did indeed agree: time and again when he says "Chinese virus," and "Kung Flu," each time it is greeted as a much-awaited punchline, generating shouts and laughter and thunderous applause. The racism in referring to the deadly virus by its nation of origin becomes more apparent when we remember that the pandemic of 1918 -- which killed between 20-40 million people world-wide--is often referred to as the Spanish flu due to the number of deaths it caused there, but never as the "US Virus" or "Kansas Flu" or the "Haskell County Virus," although that pandemic most likely originated in Haskell County, Kansas.[15]

Sjöblom addressed the derisive appellation, saying: "It's implied that there are certain people that are spreading the virus more. Trump wants to make it look like it's a problem with certain groups of people rather than a structural problem. In the West, for hundreds of years there is the idea that there is a threat and it has an Asian face. That is why Trump can so easily talk about how everything is the Chinese's fault – these are not new images of Chinese people; they have been with us for hundreds of years." [16]

The artist touched on the history of

10. March 18 MSNBC Chris Hayes Representative Ted Lieu dem California echoed her, stating "stop using racist terms… I am not a virus – and when you say things like that, it hurts the Asian community."

11. Zoom conversation between author and Sjöblom, September 16, 2020

12. IPSOS is a multinational market research and consulting firm with headquarters in Paris, France. Nina Strochlic, op cit.

13. Ibid.

14. On March 18th in response to a reporter's question whether he regrated using terms like Chinese coronavirus, Republican House Minority Leader McCarthy began by echoing Trump's old Chinese chestnuts and when he went into new territory became incoherent: "I would wait to see why the shooter did what he did, but the virus came from china and I think the knowledge we had at the time said exactly that. I don't think that people from the standpoint to go after any Asian from any shape or form and I condemn every action to that"

15. The virus arose from a combination of the hogs and migratory birds, both found in abundance in that county: "when a bird virus and a human virus infect the same pig cell, their different genes can be shuffled and exchanged like playing cards, resulting in a new, perhaps especially lethal, virus." John M. Barry, "How the Horrific 1918 Flu Spread Across America, Smithsonian magazine, November 2017. See also the Journal of Translational Medicine, January 2004, "the Site of Origin of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and its public health implications," an NIH publication. the CDC website page on the 1918 pandemic sidesteps its probable origin in Kansas, stating only that "there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated." See CDC website article "1918 Pandemic (H_1N_1 Virus)" https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html

16. Zoom conversation between author and Sjöblom, September 16, 2020

Asians in America, a history that is never too far from the surface in the present, whether or not it is acknowledged. Trump's equation of the flu with Chinese was bolstered by traces of thought that remained active in the American consciousness. Tapping into our national memory banks, Trump resurrected defamatory ideas of Chinese as diseased and contagious, statements that arose in California in the 1870s due to the fear of competition from the newly arrived Chinese by White labor leaders. These comments were disseminated across the nation in the media. In 1873, sensationalized allegations, mainly from groups in California leading a vitriolic crusade against Chinese immigration, associated Chinese with small pox and leprosy. The New York Times initially rejected these unfounded assertions, describing them accurately as a form of slander by those opposing Chinese entry into the country. But continued contentions by California papers were reprinted in the Times, at times contextualized as "totally groundless and mischievous" but after a while, referred to as "moderate," or receiving no comment at all. And the East Coast was not without its own venomous version of Chinese contamination venom: as early as 1873 a Pennsylvanian legislator wrote a letter to the House of Representatives declaring Chinese habits to be so debased that they would degrade "all Christian communities brought into contact with them" (my emphasis). The Times represented the letter without commentary. [17]

Racism is also embedded in White Americans inability to distinguish between different Asian nations and groups; they simply lump the entire continent of Asia into one people, feared and disdained as a 'horde,' and placed under the umbrella category of "Chinese." A word--"sinologism"—was coined for such thinking, defined as an assumption that informs the "hidden logic," the invisible misunderstanding in Western ideas of China and Chinese peoples.[18]

The threat of contamination is underscored in Sjöblom's image of two women seated side-by-side in public transportation, in which the White woman says to her Asian counterpart "I don't want to come across as racist, but shouldn't you perhaps get off this tram?" While the racist sentiment it expresses is understood worldwide, Sjöblom based her drawing on an actual incident that occurred in Sweden. In Sjöblom's drawing, the Asian girl wears headphones, preparing to be in her own self-contained world and obviously not anticipating an interaction with a stranger. It is the White woman who approaches. And, as in the image previously discussed, with a mere caption the artist creates a double view. We see how the White woman imagines that by prefacing her remarks, she can erase the racism. She is literally shown talking out of one side of her mouth, pretending that her racist remark is benign, without malice, based on some hidden logic that makes it a fact. Sjöblom captures the racism, the perpetrator's awareness of her racism, and her indifference to it.

Rhetorical violence anticipates physical violence, and Trump's rhetoric cultivated a culture in which anti-Asian violence increased and was tolerated. Professor Russell Jeung emphasized this connection: "I think the Republican strategy is to deflect blame and scapegoat and rile up their base… A clear consequence of using terms like 'Chinese virus,' of making China the central campaign strategy, is putting Asian American lives at risk." Indeed, after the website Stop AAPI Hate was launched on March 19, 2020, within its first two weeks it received 673 reports of hate crimes. By February 2021, the site had received reports of 3,795 incidents.[19] The crimes described ranged from being yelled at, receiving racial slurs, being spat upon—all while simply involved in the normal public acts of walking, jogging, waiting in lines. [20]

Throughout 2020, anti-Asian violence received relatively little media attention. A major reason given for this lack of attention to the violence was that anti-Asian American crimes are often reported as a mugging and not a hate crime motivated by racism. Anchorman Richard Lui attributed some of the misidentification of the crime to the fact that "more that 2/3rds of Asian American/ Pacific Islander adults were not born in the US and roughly the same [number] speak English as a second language—reporting not in [your own] language about hate incidents? That's kind of tough." [21]

Sjöblom, however, indicted the media for ignoring anti-Asian violence, wryly observing "There is a general idea that we can only talk about one thing at a time." Indeed, media attention is capricious and sporadic, it comes and goes. Throughout 2020 attention on race focused on the multiple murders of Black Americans. Many Asian Americans supporting Black Lives Matter did not want to distract from the rare national attention and media spotlight that Black lives were finally receiving. However, Asian Americans were not passive: throughout the year, activists and their allies, democratic lawmakers, repeatedly petitioned the Justice Department for legislation and for a hearing on anti-Asian hate crimes. Although well aware of the violence, William Barr's Justice Department paid no attention. The news media took little notice.[22] Asian Americans were blamed for a disease they had nothing to do with and assaulted simply for sharing public space.

Section 2: Vaccines

Statistics and Race; Confidence and

17. Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects/ Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and the American Art Discourse, 1830-1900,* SUNY Press, pp. 136-138.

18. Ming Dong Gu, *Sinologism: An Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonialism,* Routledge, 2013, pp. xvi; 5

19. Stop AAPI Hate website, accessed March 15, 2021. https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf

20. Nina Strochlic, op cit. A3PCON asked the California attorney general's office to collect data. It declined, so the organization built its own reporting pipeline

21. Richard Liu, MSNBC American Voices with Alicia Menendez, March 20, 2021

22. Claire Wang, "Asian Americans have often needed to 'prove' racism," *NBC News*, March 5, 2021. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-have-often-needed-prove-racism-then-social-media-n1258896

Apprehensions

A major issue throughout the year was the question of when a Covid-19 vaccine would become available. We all know that prior to the availability of the vaccines in the US, other cures were suggested, most infamously, then-President Trump touted the use of hydroxy-chloroquine, and his science advisor appointee at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Paul Alexander, pushed for herd immunity.[23] Hydroxy-chloroquine was known to have no effect on Covid-19 and contrary to Alexander's of voluntary exposure, young people were at great risk if they got infected. The WHO warned that intentionally exposing oneself to the virus could lead to more infections and an increased risk of death. Because many did not use safety precautions, more young people died in 2020 then at any other time in our history.[24] The nation eagerly awaited a vaccine.

Many vaccines take more than a decade to develop. After nearly 20 years, a vaccine for HIV remains elusive. The Covid-19 vaccine is the most rapidly developed vaccine in history, taking under one year to be ready for roll-out. Prior to this vaccine, the previous record was held by the mumps vaccine which required four years for its development.[25]

By March 5, 2021, most states have vaccinated between 6-9% of their population. By March 26th, 14% of all Americans have been fully vaccinated and 27% have received at least one dose.[26] 69% of Americans anticipate receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, a significant increase from November when only 60% said they planned on getting a vaccination. Differences remain across demographic groups in the intent to be vaccinated, but the differences between racial groups – classified as Black, White, Hispanic or Asian—have generally decreased since December 2020. [27] But polls show disparities remain: African Americans are the least likely (26%) to say they will definitely get the vaccine, followed by 38% of Latinos, 47% of Asian Americans, and 51% of whites.[28]

But trust in science in general has diminished. In 2019, 78% of White people said science has a positive effect on society; this year's polling showed that number has decreased to 69%, a decrease of 9 percentage points mainly among White Republicans or White people who lean towards the right wing. Polling that adjusted for race found 69% of White people felt that science had mainly positive effects on society compared to 63% of Hispanic people and 58% of Black people. Asians had the highest percentage in judging the effects of science on society as positive; 79%.[29]

That sample, however, was comprised of English-speaking Asian Americans only, which is a skewed demographic. In fact, the skewed sample taken of Asian Americans shows more about the lack of understanding of that community by government and administrative agencies than it does about the preferences of Asian Americans. Looking at data from New York as a case study, Nadia Islam, associate professor in the Department of Population Health at NYU's School of Medicine, found enormous discrepancies between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding Asian populations and those from community level reports. Stella Yi, an assistant professor at NYU's Grossman School of Medicine agrees with this finding. CDC data found higher rates of infection in New York's Black and Latinx populations, but reported Asian rate of infection and death only slightly higher than that of White Americans.[30] However, an analysis of 85,000 patients in a New York City public hospital system revealed South Asians to have the second-highest infection and hospitalization rates for COVID-19. The mortality rate for Chinese Americans from Covid-19 was higher than for any other racial and ethnic groups.

Another reason for erroneous data is that the term "Asian American" includes 30 different subgroups sharing little if any ethnic background, language or income bracket. But the aggregation of all this data as "Asian Americans" essentially makes it meaningless. Compounding that problem is the flip side: members of the Asian American communities are "misclassified or counted as 'other' more often than other groups." There is also a discrepancy in terminology in how people classify themselves and how they are classified by others. "East Asians describe themselves as being Asian American. South Asians describe themselves as Asian American. But White and Black [people] and East Asians do not ascribe South Asians as being Asian American."[31] Darker-skinned Asians who cannot speak English can be misclassified as Black. Professor Islam called out preconceptions about Asian Americans as a contributing factor in erroneous classification of that

23. A vaccine for Covid-19 became available to the general American public on 14 December 2020.

24. Jeremy Samuel Faust, Harlan M. Krumholz and Rochelle P. Walensky, "People Thought Covid-19 Was Relatively Harmless for Younger Adults. They Were Wrong," *The New York Times,* Dec. 16, 2020
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/16/opinion/covid-deaths-young-adults.html

25. Jocelyn Solis-Moreira, "How did we develop a COVID-19 vaccine so quickly?," December 15, 2020
https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/how-did-we-develop-a-Covid-19-vaccine-so-quickly

26. "Guide to the Pandemic," *Washington Post,* March 26, 2021

27. Cary Funk and Alec Tyson, "Growing Share of Americans Say They Plan To Get a COVID-19 Vaccine – or Already Have," MARCH 5, 2021, PEW Research Center
https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/03/05/growing-share-of-americans-say-they-plan-to-get-a-Covid-19-vaccine-or-already-have/

28. Dean Bonner, Racial Disparities in Concerns about Getting COVID—and a Vaccine," Public Policy Institute of California, February 9, 2021
https://www.ppic.org/blog/racial-disparities-in-concerns-about-getting-covid-and-a-vaccine/

29. Ibid

30. Sojourner Ahébée "Without data, there's no equity': Deficient Asian American COVID-19 data masked community-wide disparities, PBS, March 14, 2021
https://whyy.org/articles/without-data-theres-no-equity-deficient-asian-american-Covid-19-data-masked-community-wide-disparities/

31. Ibid

data.[32]

As eager as the nation was for a vaccine, the rapidity of the vaccines' development has raised concerns about its safety, not only among people who are skeptical about science, but also in groups who tend to trust science. Their question about the quickness in finding vaccines have been reassuringly answered by the scientific community, who attribute the rapid timeframe to:

Numbers of researchers: The large number of researchers in labs around the world working on the vaccine led to more research.

Collaboration: Researchers shared their coronavirus data with each other

Previous knowledge: SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19 is a member of the coronavirus family, has been researched for 50 years. [33]

Multiple funding sources: Research for vaccines is always costly, typically between 31–$68 million. Funding came from both the government and organizations in the private sector.

Working on more than one vaccine: this made it more likely that a vaccine would be developed

Advances in genomic sequencing: researchers uncovered the viral sequence of SARS-CoV-2 in January 2020

Rapid completion of clinical trials: this was in large part due to the high number of volunteers for the vaccine studies

Large numbers of testing sites: more sites accommodated the higher number of volunteers, providing greater collection of data.

The development of mRNA vaccines: described as similar to the "landing on the moon moment," this was a major breakthrough in vaccine development.[34]

Other fears surrounding the vaccine have also been allayed. Two main concerns were about getting infected with the virus from the vaccine itself and the possibility of the vaccine altering DNA. But neither can happen. Explaining the science reassures most people: that the injection is not a small sample of the virus but instead a sample of messenger RNA and not the entire virus. Further, the mRNA never enters the nucleus of the cell, and so never contacts our DNA. Even more reassuring, the medical experts explain that the vaccines utilizing COVID-19 mRNA vaccines or with viral vectors "work with the body's natural defenses" in creating immunities.[35]

The idea of using natural defenses provides a comforting image, the thought of nature being dominant in the modality of the inoculation and the realization that this highly technical procedure is a more sophisticated version of familiar interactions with nature, just at a microscopic level. Democrats are now 27 percentage points more likely than Republicans to say they plan to get, or have already received, a coronavirus vaccine (83% to 56%). This gap is wider than those seen at multiple points in 2020.[36]

In an artwork commissioned by Peter Kwong, chief structural biologist for the NIH's AIDS Vaccine Research Center, Phillip Chen's work captures the vitality and optimism in scientific achievement. His work creates an analogy to the scientific methodology involved. While the AIDS vaccine research was the foundation for creating the print, the artwork seems prescient now with all of the "vaccine" talk around Covid-19.[37] How many people are now familiar with the idea of an antigen/antibodies that had not been in the previous year? The NIH's AIDS Vaccine Research Center has been working for over fifteen years to develop a vaccine and had cause to celebrate when it developed a broadly neutralizing antibody which has moved to the stage of being tested in animals. With this reason to celebrate, Kwong reached out to Chen to commission a print to hang in his new office when he transfers to Columbia University (he's taking over David Ho's lab). This will bookend an earlier print Chen created that was installed at the NIH in 2009 when Kwong started his hunt for an AIDS vaccine. Chen's print uses photo techniques and hand drawing that engage in a visual dialogue on paper. In the earlier print, Data and Theory, ancient pottery shards, photographically reproduced, are the point of departure for a fantasia of lines spiraling out into all forms and directions, including an anachronistic spigot. The work is both an analogy to any voyage of discovery: you have to have theories of what might be possible, even preposterous ideas; and a cautionary image: hypotheses ultimately have to be reconciled with facts, not fancy.

Working on a commission creates a challenge due to the need to adhere to the criteria imposed by the commissioner. Chen explained how he gradually elaborated the ideas contained in the newer print: "I tried to make an image independent of the scientific illustrations Peter provided me, one free from technicalities such as epitope and adjuvant--something more relatable to people without specialized knowledge." He also wanted to create a visual reference that removed the research from typical images of diagrams of molecules and linked the science to the natural world. "For Drift: Iteration, 2020, in order to become more emotionally involved with the project, I made a "bouquet" of corkscrew hazel branches that I collected from our front yard several years ago, anticipating that

32. Ibid

33. Jocelyn Solis-Moreira, op cit.

34. Dr. Yager, quoted in Jocelyn Solis-Moreira, op cit.

35. "Myths and Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines, "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mar 11, 2021 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html#:~:text=No.%20COVID%2D19,DNA%20in%20any%20way.
See also COVID-19 vaccine myths debunked, Mayo Clinic Health System, DECEMBER 8, 2020
https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/featured-topic/Covid-19-vaccine-myths-debunked

36. Sojourner Ahébée, op cit.

37. Conversation with Heather Skeens, Cultural Programs Supervisor, City of Cedar Falls, Hearst Center for the Arts

they might someday serve an artistic purpose."[38] The twists and turns of the branches create an energy and force that seems to eventually becoming channeled, first into a single common branch and then the turn of that branch echoes the curve of a an elegantly rounded-back wooden chair, implying their fusion. A section of the branch shows the mechanism created, entirely of the wooden pieces, to lock the branch and chair. The connection from wooden branches to wooden chair create an analogy to the recombination of elements in creating a vaccine. Chen described his choice of this other element: "I think the Chinese horseshoe chair is one of the most beautiful creations ever, and it wasn't much of a leap to visualize one of its specific joineries as a configuration that could "key" into a receptacle. In Peter's world, this half lap joint would be the structurally designed "epitope" of the antibody that conforms to the "N terminus region of the Fusion Peptide" of the antigen. The antibody is "boosted" by additions called adjuvants; my adjuvant can be seen at the bottom right, attached to the sinuous vertical element." The chair also references Kwong's and Chen's cultural heritage: both their fathers were born and raised in Toishan, a rural district outside of Canton.

While the branches are photographic reproductions, the chair is drawn schematically, diagramming its parts that have not yet fully come together to form one whole. The energy of the branches is echoed in a quieter way by the tension created by the spaces between the part-to-part elements. Our eyes anticipate their connection, but it has not yet happened. Chen's prints are on a golden tan paper, almost completely covered in the blackest ink. This surface is only interrupted by the objects that arise through the ink surface: the thin lines of the drawing, the tonal surface of the photographed objects. In other words, the positive elements are not the ink but the paper itself, and the ground surrounding them is the ink.

But Chen is well aware that scientific advances such as vaccines, no matter how needed, are received with uneasiness. While specific questions can be answered, a vague suspicion hovers over the enterprise as a whole, and the greater implications of what the science can lead to. Rearranging nature can bring dire consequences, either deliberately by some malevolent power, or inadvertently by those seeking to be beneficial. This is implied in the twisting, almost atomic energy, lyrically presented. And Chen's title, Drift: Iteration, conjures an image of a natural movement, a force of nature that continues despite human intervention. This becomes explicit as the subject of the companion work, Drift: Antidote, 2020.

The second in this series continues the use of the black surface of the previous prints. But instead of a lyrical image emanating as a single narrative onto this surface, this work is more fragmented, divided into three discrete sections. Each section consists of three distinct layers of imagery: a a photograph of a rock, a violent re-interpretation of the rock, and a curative antidote. The re-interpretations of the rocks are not photographic but are line drawings depicting an instrument of power: a stiletto, a spearpoint, a handgun. These are overlapped with another line drawing in red—but not in red ink, but in mercurochrome. They show an implement of culture: a paintbrush, a pinwheel toy, a spoon. Chen creates a visual analogy among the three elements of each set: the rock has a shape roughly reminiscent of the weapon, which then is reconfigured by the corrective, the constructive device. But the direction of the objects, the sequence of which was first, second, third, is left up to the viewer. The rock is fully visualized, and therefor appears most solid, the basis for the other two. And the utensil or toy are drawn with the thinnest of lines. The weapons are thicker, bolder. I'd like to think they come second and eventually become replaced by the tools for use, for play, for culture. But the red mercurochrome is both alarming and curative.

As in our own experience, the world in Chen's art leaves us with a choice. We hear the reassurances. But how can we ensure the outcomes? As viewers, we are confronted by the knowledge that, while processes are begun by others, the direction for the outcomes resides with us.

Section 3: Violence

A Sudden Shift, A Mass Murder: Acknowledging Anti-Asian Violence

As we saw above in Sjöblom's artworks, all during the first year of the pandemic, very little attention was given to the daily violence against Asian Americans. But with a mass shooting this has finally changed. The murder of 8 people, six of them Asian American women, has been creating a wave of awareness, nationally, of racism against the Asian community, placing the mercurial rise of hate crimes against Asian Americans during Covid-19 into the spotlight.

Or, as the Washington Post described it:

> The violent end to their lives has opened a window into the experiences of low-wage immigrant Asian and Asian American women in a stigmatized profession, and has ignited a difficult national conversation about race, class and gender in the United States. [39]

In brief, the incident transpired on March 16th 2021, when a white male, Robert Aaron Long, 21, purchased a gun and that same day went on a shooting spree at three different spas: he killed four people at the first salon: two Asian women, a white woman and a white man at the first salon; three Asian women at the second; and one Asian woman at the third. He shot his victims in the head and the chest, but insisted that "he did not specifically target Asian American

38. All quotes by Phillip Chen are from an email correspondence with the author.

39. Ariana Eunjung Cha, Derek Hawkins, Tim Craig and Meryl Kornfield, "Atlanta spa shooting victims highlight struggles for Asian and Asian American immigrant women in low-wage jobs," The Washington Post, March 20, 2021 https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/20/atlanta-spa-shooting-victims-highlight-struggles-asian-asian-american-immigrant-women-low-wage-jobs/

women." [40] The victims were Hyun Jung Grant, 51; Suncha Kim, 69; Soon Chung Park, 74; Yong Ae Yu, 63. (Daoyou Feng, 44; Xiaojie Tan, 49; Paul Andre Michels, 54; and Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33. Authorities say that in his confession to the crimes, the gunman claimed that he struggled with "sexual addiction" and that the spas were "a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate."[41] Long was charged with eight murders in Atlanta, Georgia, arrested while driving to Florida where, he told police, he planned on killing more people.[42]

News about the murders immediately went viral, not only because of the violence of the incident but also because of the anger that ensued when officials delayed (and still delay) in recognizing the crime as a racial hate crime.[43] This is in a climate in which, to reiterate the statistic, hate crimes against Asian Americans increased 150% in 16 American cities.[44]

Seeming to follow the shooter's lead, many resist viewing these crimes as race-based. J. Tom Morgan, a White male former district attorney in Georgia, found race incidental, stating: "This, to me, is a sex crime hate crime where the victims happen to be Asian."[45] Georgia state Senator, Michelle Au, who is Chinese American, expressed the opposite viewpoint, that "people feel like they're getting gaslighted… frustrated by that lack of visibility and that aspect being ignored."[46] Her opinion was reinforced by that of Georgia State University law professor Tanya Washington While police have said it's too soon to tell whether the spa shootings qualify as a hate crime, she said it seems obvious the violence was motivated by bias given the people and businesses targeted. And Carol Leonnig, MSNBC contributor, stated this opinion concisely: Why did he show up at something titled 'Yung's Asian Massage'?[47]

Frank Figliuzzi, former assistant director for counterintelligence at the FBI, attempted to split the difference: "If he says "I was addicted to sex" and acted out against that – he was targeting women. A gender-based crime [is legally a hate crime]. He's already confessed to a hate crime." But as Figloosie continued his thought, he strongly asserting: "We are still taking about a subject with an intense, violent, fetishizing, objectifying view of Asian women…" [48]

Can hate crimes against a particular gender be disassociated from race hatred? As early as 1991, philosopher Etienne Balibar wrote about sexism and racism as systems that are "mutually interconnected." He clarified: "racism and sexism function together and in particular, racism always presupposes sexism."[49] The artist Phillip Chen speaks for many when he stated bluntly: "Obviously race is inseparable."

By taking a step back to view our world more intersectionally, we can better comprehend the antecedents of violence directed against Asian women. This was not an isolated incident but arises from a long history—the violence is not just in this moment but has a much longer historical moment.

Almost from the beginning of Chinese immigration to America, White Americans chose to read Asian women's bodies in an overtly sexualized manner, using it as a method to curtail Chinese residency in the United States. In the early 1870s, California politicians recognized that defamation of Chinese women could provide an effective weapon against immigration: if Chinese men did come to America, they would not want to settle here without the possibility of family, they would merely sojourn here temporally. But how to ban Chinese women? Speaking before the House Committee on Foreign Relations in 1874, California State Representative Horace F. Page impressed the committee members with the evils of "importation" of Chinese women, playing on an image of Asian women as prostitutes that captured the imagination and has not disappeared in

40. Ibid; Amanda Arnold, "6 Asian Women Killed in Horrific Shooting Rampage," The Cut, March 19, 2021 https://www.thecut.com/2021/03/8-people-killed-in-atlanta-rampage-6-of-them-asian-women.html

41. Teo Armus, "The Atlanta suspect isn't the first to blame 'sex addiction' for heinous crimes. But scientists are dubious," *The Washington Post,* March 18, 2021 https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/18/sex-addiction-atlanta-shooting-long/

42. Paulina Firozi, et al, "Suspect charged with eight counts of murder in killings at Atlanta-area spas, authorities say," *The Washington Post,* March 17, 2021 https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/17/atlanta-spa-shootings-live-updates/

43. A hate crime is not a stand-alone sentence but is added to an indictment some time before going to trial: If jurors find it is a hate crime, the sentence received a mandatory enhancement of at least two years in prison and a fine of up to $5,000 for a felony.
Spurred in part by the murder of Ahmad Arberry, Georgia got is hate crime statute back on the books – it covers race and gender

44. Outrage was exacerbated when, while breaking the news of the rampage, the police spokesman, Cherokee County Sheriff's Office Capt. Jay Baker said nothing about the victims but said of the killer "He was pretty much fed up and kind of at the end of his rope. Yesterday was a really bad day for him and this is what he did." His comment prompted people to check out his social media where they found his Facebook page had posts promoting shirts with the slogan: "Covid-19 IMPORTED VIRUS FROM CHY-NA. "Meryl Kornfield, Hannah Knowles, "Captain who said spa shootings suspect had 'bad day' no longer a spokesman on case, official says" *Washington Post,* March 18, 2021
https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/17/jay-baker-bad-day/

45. Julie Bosman, Kate Taylor, Tim Arango, "A Common Trait Among Mass Killers: Hatred Toward Women," *The New York Times,* Aug. 10, 2019
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/us/mass-shootings-misogyny-dayton.html

46. Kate Brumback, "Spa shootings could be first test of Georgia hate crimes law," *Star Tribune,* March 20, 2021
https://www.startribune.com/spa-shootings-could-be-first-test-of-georgia-hate-crimes-law/600036559/

47. Carol Leonnig, guest, *The 11th Hour,* MSNBC, March 18, 2021

48. Frank Figloosie, MSNBC, 18 March 2021; Kate Brumback, "First Test Of Georgia Hate Crimes Law," Atlanta (AP), March 20, 2021. https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-shootings-georgia-ahmaud-arbery-coronavirus-pandemic-cd68207150500f76e248fdc899717cd5
In 2009, President Obama expanded the federal hate crimes law to include crimes based on gender as federal hate crimes, CNN Politics, "Obama Signs Hate Crimes Bill into Law," October 28, 2009
https://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/28/hate.crimes/

49. Etienne Balibar, "Racism and nationalism," in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*, 1991, Verso, p. 49.

over a century. With that image in mind, Congress moved quickly and a year later enacted the Page Law prohibiting entry to "Oriental" women entering for "lewd and immoral purposes." The burden of proof of morality was placed on Chinese women, and judged by White men. This was the nation's first federal law to restrict immigration, prior to restrictions for mentally deficient and criminals, forever ending US open borders .[50]

The equation between Chinese women and prostitutes became naturalized in the American imagination. The early 20th century saw Asian women in the US depicted as "Dragon Ladies": sexy, exotic, attractive, who would seduce white men and corrupt their Christian morals. [51] The wars in Korea and Vietnam led to familiar forms of conquest and power that encouraged soldiers to think of Asian women as "as playful sex toys." [52] In her book Sex Among Allies, Professor Katharine Moon investigated the relationships of American men with Asian women: "The main military newspaper, Stars and Stripes, encouraged soldiers to explore Korea's 'nighttime action,' especially the kisaeng party, the 'ultimate experience': 'Picture having three or four of the loveliest creatures God ever created hovering around you, singing, dancing, feeding you, washing what they feed you down with rice wine or beer, all saying at once, 'You are the greatest.' This is the Orient you heard about and came to find.'" Moon quotes a U.S. Army chaplain who told her that American men arriving in Asian countries had expectations of the women as "beautiful, subservient…. property, things, slaves… Racism, sexism, it's all there."[53]

The US government allowed American soldiers to bring Asian wives back to US, popularizing a new stereotype of Asian women. Known as "Lotus blossoms," the women were conventionalized as "excellent wives, cute, docile, knowing how to please their husband and great homemaker." [54] Both tropes emphasized the woman's availability for sexual activities.

These stereotypes have migrated to the web where 40 million Americans visit pornographic sites regularly.[55] During coronavirus, the rate of visits to porn sites on the web has markedly increased in nations with high rates of coronavirus.[56] One of the most frequented pornography websites is titled "Asian Women," ranked 9 in the category of most sexually explicit videos.[57]

At the same time, violence against women has been on the rise since the pandemic began. Researchers have documented direct correlation between the male objectification of women's bodies and violence against them. [58] Yet as a nation, we have turned a blind eye to this violence. Speaking about the recent mass killing at the spas in Atlanta, Frank Figliuzzi said "Defining it as a gender-based hate crime begs attention to the frequency with which mass killers express hatred towards women and target them. a common trait among mass killers with hatred towards women – this is a reality of violence in America every day.."."[59]

(Asian males have not fared much better in the white gaze of dominant power. Chinese men arrived in America in a society with strongly polarized gender roles, in the Western states which had were more greatly populated with men. While many had been recruited to do the hard labor of laying tracks for railroads, creating paths through and around mountains, and working in mines, they also looked for other employment. Rather than vie for the already competitive male-tagged jobs, many Chinese accepted work that White males identified as 'women's work': cooking, cleaning, laundering. Their beverage preference of tea over hard liquor also posed a threat to calcified ideas of gender. They further threatened the dominant male culture by their proximity to White women in their work in the house. Today we would understand how their sexuality disrupted the system of binary gender roles insisted upon in American culture, but at that time they received abuse by White society's inability to fit them neatly into preset ideas

50. Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects,* op cit., p. 141; "Page Law (1875), *Immigration History,* website, https://immigrationhistory.org/item/page-act/

51. Yanyan Zhou, Bryant Paul, "Lotus Blossom or Dragon Lady: A Content Analysis of "Asian Women" Online Pornography." Sexuality & Culture (2016) 20:1083–1100 DOI 10.1007/s12119-016-9375-9, p. 1088.

52. Ibid

53. Katharine Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in American-Korean Relations*, Columbia University Press, 1997, Pp. 32-33

54. Yanyan Zhou, Bryant Paul, op cit.

55. Internet Pornography by the Numbers; A Significant Threat to Society, Webroot: An Opentext Community https://www.webroot.com/us/en/resources/tips-articles/internet-pornography-by-the-numbers

56. The authors suggested that a reason for increased porn consumption "could be that some people are using sex as a surviving mechanism for coping with their loneliness, depressive symptoms, and even fear of death. Fabio Zattoni, Murat Gü, Matteo Soligo et al, "The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on pornography habits: a global analysis of Google Trends," IJIR: Your Sexual Medicine Journal, 11 November 2020 https://doi.org/10.1038/s41443-020-00380-w

57. Yanyan Zhou, Bryant Paul, op cit.

58. Paul J. Wright, Robert S. Tokunaga, "Men's Objectifying Media Consumption, Objectification of Women, and Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women," Arch Sex Behav (2016) 45:955–964 DOI 10.1007/s10508-015-0644-8 , p. 955

59. Julie Bosman, Kate Taylor, Tim Arango, op cit.

of male-ness.)[60]

Unlike the swastika against Jews or the burning cross against Black Americans, no iconic symbol signifies anti-Asian hatred. Many of the crimes are not physical assaults, 70% are verbal harassment. [61] The myth is that Asian Americans are not experiencing real violence, that the 3,795 incidents received by the Stop AAPI Hate reporting center from March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021, are not valid."[62]

We previously examined the relationship between Trump and his follower's racial slurs and the rise in hate crimes. But now we ask: who benefits from this? What does Trump –and now others in the government--gain by maintaining this rhetoric?

Intelligence and foreign policy analyst Malcolm Nance connected the dots. He showed the triangulation between anti-Chinese rhetoric, hiding Russian disinformation campaigns, and the mass killings of in Atlanta.

The first pair in the triangle that Nance exposed was the hidden relationship between Trump's anti-Chinese rhetoric and his desire to obscure Russian involvement in his administration. By constantly mocking China and by exaggerating China's interference in our elections, Trump effectively obscured the role played by Russia in election interference, shifting attention from Russia to China.

As evidence for this assertion, Nance referenced a report released March 10 2021 from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, assessing the foreign threats to the 2020 US federal elections. The report, researched during the Trump administration, stated: "We assess that China did not deploy interference efforts and considered but did not deploy influence efforts intended to change the outcome of the US presidential election. We have high confidence in this judgment." (my emphasis). The report also determined that Russia engaged in numerous efforts aimed at "denigrating President Biden's candidacy and the Democratic Party, supporting former President Trump, undermining public confidence in the electoral process, and exacerbating sociopolitical divisions in the US." [63]

Trump and his administration were all aware of the Russian disinformation campaign, as seen in the government report. Using rhetoric that cast China as the enemy accomplished two purposes: it created a diversion from Trump's mishandling of the pandemic, deflecting his personal and presidential failure in dealing with Covid-19 to China; and his substitution of China as the source of disinformation allowed Russia latitude to continue its covert operations.

The extent of the disinformation network is staggering: Rachel Maddow enumerated all those under the Trump administration who were complicit in propagating his lies, from Attorney General William Barr, to the Director of National Intelligence, John Ratcliffe. The intelligence community under Trump had definitively concluded that Putin authorized influence operations targeting the 2020 election and that China was not involved, but officials with key positions in Trump's administration deliberately deceived the public, reiterating Trump's lies placing blame for a massive influence campaign on China, and exonerating Russia. [64]

In a brilliant insight, Nance brought the relationship above into dialogue, triangulating it with the recent murders in Atlanta, saying "We may actually be able to see a direct arc from this report to the shooting that happened in Atlanta today." He spelled out how many right-wing people "adore" Russia and Putin's strategic goal of "dismantling liberal democracy and … foster[ing] autocracy around the world…. the Russians have been amplifying the message from the Trump administration that all liberals are members of the Communist Chinese Party, and that the Chinese attacked us. And then we saw this multifold attack on Asian citizens in the United States. It is incestuous and it is all connected."

To paraphrase Rachel Maddow, the consequences of this complicity with Putin has consequences not just in foreign policy, the consequences resonate here in our daily lives. [65] Everything connected to the anti-Asian stereotyping is part of this violence.[66] Until it is not politically beneficial to certain members of the

60. And certainly, one size does not fit all: As R.P. Wong observes, "Asian American men are an extremely diverse group. The term "Asian American" alone is applied to over 43 different ethnic groups-groups which are also diverse in terms of residential preferences, country of origin, immigration, history, acculturation rates, language proficiencies, etc." But stereotypes are stronger than direct observation in many cases and the diversity has been eclipsed by typecasting all Asian American men as "model minority", "perpetual foreigners," and as "socially inept," and while also often seen as "patriarchal," often labeled as "emasculate and effeminate." Even traditions such as greater verbal restraint than most White counterparts are cast as "feminine." Rather than understand the cultural motives for such habits, judgements are based on standards formed in and by dominant cultural. In his influential book, Orientalism, Edward Said correlated "feminization" of Asian culture with the domination of Western power, stating that "The Orient is characterized by the West as feminine because it is "depraved", "lacking control," "degenerate," "weak," "silent," "passive," "submissive," and "an object" to watch and examine. Such stereotypes leach into American culture, even affecting Americans who work towards being allies.

61. Claire Wang, op cit. Russell Jeung, Aggie Yellow Horse, Tara Popovic, and Richard Lim, "Stop AAPI Hate National Report," *Stop AAPI Hate,* 3/19/20 – 2/28/21, https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf

62. Jennifer Liu, How to take action against anti-Asian racism at work and in your personal life, CNBC. Mar 18 2021 https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/18/how-to-take-action-against-anti-asian-racism.html

63. National Intelligence Council Intelligence Community Assessment Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections, IO March 2021, p.7 https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/16/politics/read-odni-foreign-threats-2020/index.html

64. Maddow also mentioned deputy attorney general Jeffrey Rosen, acting attorney general trump administration Matthew George Whitaker and national security advisor Robert O'Brien. Rachel Maddow Show, MSNBC, 18 March 18, 2021

65. Rachel Maddow Show, MSNBC, 18 March 18, 2021

66. Thanks to Cora Metrick-Chen for this observation.

Republican party, the racist rhetoric will not stop, and aggressions will continue.[67]

Healing Art/ Việt Lê

We again turn to art. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, race and art are seen against the backdrop of the pandemic. The content of Việt Lê's work is concerned with recent events but not as illustrations. Instead, the work emerges from the consciousness of the hierarchies of power, of the needs of the community. Throughout this last year of the pandemic, Lê has created performative paintings. "Around the time of the protests I was incredibly sad and empathetic about the protesters, but also about the historical violence and so I have been trying to think about ways of healing. I've been doing these cycles." Each work in his series Cycle performance | paintings | object 2019-21, begins with performance, a ritual of movement in time using incense, smoke, and minerals. The ritual is his response, both personal and political, toward loss and grief within his self and in the community: a healing process. The impetus to the work is the acknowledgment of what our society so often shies away from: an acknowledgment of grief and vulnerability. Rather than avoid these topics, try to "get over" them, Lê understands their importance in linking self and group, their ability to become "sites for political potential and solidarity."[68] To begin with vulnerability rather than power, and to acknowledge shared grief, creates an art that realigns the body politic.

Each of Lê's performances is a healing process through both destruction and purification involving ancestor offerings and cleansing, both of which require burning. They incorporate salt, which is a cleansing substance, and oil, which is incendiary, and layers and layers of other things found scattered around his house. In his work we find hair, resin, rock. Moss is used as a medium. The ritual performance results in an object that is both an abstract artwork and a ritual object, both a painting and a burnt residue. These dimensional paintings speak of their own process of creation, and at the same time they signify in the present: their layered meanings are found in their simultaneous existence as traces and as things in themselves, synchronic and diachronic. The canvas itself is burnt through, resulting in holes through its surface that transform it from a solid ground to an active component, part of the matrix of the art work. Lê creates mandalas which when back-lit look like giant orbs, like the moon. Some works, such as untitled (May 2020) seem to bring us down towards the very substance of the earth, to an encounter with its varied textures, pebbled white and black and golden on a burnt black ground. Small areas of the burned surface are ripped, unfolding to reveal its ashy thinness, and we see the wall, the matrix underlying it. untitled (altar/alter), 2021 fuses found household objects such as circular cans and rectangular containers and suspends them in a coating of gold leaf. Intermittently, through the gaps in the matrix, we see the red of torn rose petals. The vertical work has a feeling reminiscent of the luxurious abundance of gold found in Gustav Klimt's portrait of Block-Baur, the repetition of swirls and patterns. But in Lê's work is not a celebration of luxury but a reminder of how objects themselves are always transforming, the pedestrian and the transcendent encompassed in one object.

Viewing Lê's art, we start to comprehend how the works have both private and public meaning. Still, it might at first seem a stretch to imagine that an individual action in creating art can have political consequences. This becomes clearer when we look to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who wrote about how our identity is not singular. An "I" becomes a "we": all individual quests for meaning interlace with memories of others. [69] Through sharing memory, an individual becomes anchored to a group, to several groups, and the self extends beyond its physical body. The ritual is part of the enaction of memory, linking individual to ancestors and present time to past and future.[70]

Lê elaborates on this: "I think the individual is reflective {reflexive} of the social/ political. I learned through my current illness: for me it is a sort of metaphor for larger spiritual concerns. We are individual bodies tuned into the body politic, so if there is something off-balance then I think we feel it." And conversely, while culture is collective, nevertheless we perpetuate it and link to one another only through our individual acts..[71]

Lê ultimately rejects the Freudian therapy for melancholia which describes how the sufferer continually revisits the site of trauma and through this can eventually be reconciled. "For some of us" Lê says, "there is no reconciliation." He asked "What do you do when you return [to the trauma] again and again? I argue that something shifts, a definite shift for a deeper understanding." He refers to Judith Butler's writing in which she discusses the movement beyond trauma: "Only once we have suffered that violence we are compelled, ethically, to ask how we will respond to violent injury. What role will we assume in the historical relay of violence…?" She answers that our rage and grief bind ourselves to each other. "In a certain way, and paradoxically, having suffered violence from others heightens our responsibility" and that responsibility is toward communal, even global justice.[72]

67. A paraphrase of an observation by ICCI community activist for racial justice Laural Clinton

68. Việt Lê, email to author, 15 March 2021

69. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* (1941), University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 171-173. A similar idea is expressed concisely by Aleida Assmann in "Memory, Individual and Collective:" "We must not forget that human beings do not only live in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first-person plural." in Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 223

70. Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Elusive Monuments For Contested Memory: Statues, Architecture And Other Ephemera,* in consideration at SUNY Press

71. In *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis,* Op cit.

72. Judith Butler, pp. 15-17, 25

Jewish thought, too, has a long history of regarding broken things, and discusses the importance of recognizing our own trauma as a prerequisite to working towards community and peace. The metaphor used in the Kabala is that we are all pieces of a broken vessel that had been sent crashing to earth. The origin of human life is through this shattering. The metaphor illustrates our unity through our brokenness, which is an intrinsic part of human experience; we are individually shattered and it is this vulnerability that links us collectively as a unity.

Lê's art is an answer to the question: "What do we do beyond trauma? How you choose to continue after the trauma?" This endeavor is not something Lê takes lightly. His art is not the "instant fix" of new age – which wants the end result of healing but replicates only the outer appearance of ritual without any of the work in understanding the deep significance attached to each gesture or word. The endeavor to rebuild our commons to be more compassionate, healing and sustaining requires knowledge of ourselves, our own histories, and communal history. Aleida Assmann is instructive here: "Institutions and larger social groups… do not 'have' a memory; they 'make' one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments."[73] Lê's art begins from a new paradigm, from his comprehension of wholeness as including trauma, and responsibility stemming from embracing that instead of suppressing it.

Ritual work does not begin with the ritual itself. It rests on a deeper knowledge. And this is where Lê begins. His groundwork is embedded not just in his art but in his life: "I think it's very important to be cognizant of specific histories and lineages and do deep research and engagements. My family is part of a Vietnamese indigenous religion: one of my great grandfathers and my grandfather were founders of Cao Dai - the third largest religion in Vietnam– we have visions and seances. It a syncretic religion combining Christianity, Vietnamese nationalism, French anti-imperialist sentiment, Buddhism, all connecting to the larger history of spiritual ritual." His knowledge of history, however, leaves him open to using ideas and practices from other lineages and entirely different shamanistic groups. After all, as he points out, any idea of "purity" or "authenticity," is problematic. "Countries such as mine have always been hybrid, we have been colonized for a thousand years. It's a rich culture that is indebted to Chinese culture, there's a lot of overlap, there's a lot of the same words, and same traditions. We are also indebted to French imperialism, American imperialism. So on the one hand you can't just pick or choose without deep embedded historical understanding. And at the same time, how do we enable other solidarities? Who can speak for whom: how can I as an Asian queer activist be in solidarity with other communities? We need to speak about these structural violences, see through our pillars and our silos to really connect. In this way we see these things that are flowing through: the oppression and violences that are literally killing us, but also our healing." Our very sense of self emerges from the way we incarnate the past.

In Lê's work, nothing is seen as "merely residue" but each component retains its own importance. The ash left over from the burning is as elemental to his art, as essential, as the process. His interest in "positive and negative" reflect Eastern art and philosophies which recognize the void as equal importance as the subject. The strength of the void, the empty spaces, allow the work to have what he refers to as a 'shadow response,' an analogy to a Jungian term that refers to the dark or unknown side of the personality. His work sheds light on the unknown. As Lê clarifies "You embrace the shadow aspects of yourself, the dark, difficult aspects." They contain a different kind of energy than that emanating from burning. They have a strength in their stillness. And that stillness is not passive but is in itself a form of action, a different strategy of action. The shadow aspects Lê discusses resembles in part to what the Chinese refer to as wei wu wei,為無為: the action of non-action, an alert, deliberate waiting.

Lê's work takes us from the binaries of "either/or" and from their calcifying consequences which we see playing out today in US politics. Through his performance, we see how the shamanistic ways of addressing violence and trauma opens up different ways of thinking about how to repair the violence systemic in our culture; in his paintings we find palimpsests of political historical traces, recuperative representation, a type of solace and source for healing.

The art opens us to think of other possibilities in configuring our relationships with one another. "I mean for them to get at the idea that we don't need to continue to exist as it now seems [we must]: so separate, so isolated." Instead, they lead us to understand that our grief is shared, a first tentative individual movement toward a more generative society centered on understanding "the individual is the communal."

Coda

Although racism, art and the pandemic could not be triangulated, nevertheless, connections among three separate sections—rhetoric, vaccines, and violence—became more transparent when seen against their shared backdrop of Covid-19. Each section of this paper did not speak equally about three components. Rather, they worked in concert with each other, each providing another view of the relationship. Linked by what Wittgenstein referred to as 'family resemblances,' the three elements formed constantly shifting pairs: race and art, art and Covid-19, race and Covid.[74]

We become aware of the underlying structure girding our society more through its effects than through a direct view. Through the overlaps in each section, as through a moiré pattern, we see a structure that has been hidden by looking at them singly. In this way, the paper in its entirety makes visible the ideology underlying and connecting the verbal and

73. Aleida Assmann, "Transformations Between History and Memory" *Social Research,* Vol. 75, Issue 1, Spring 2008, p. 55

74. Ludwig Wittgenstein, op cit.

Fig. 1: Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, image posted on Instagram

Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Untitled (I am not a Virus), 2020, ink and brush and digital coloring on paper

physical violence and the malfeasance of the Trump administration in the time of Covid-19. And the artworks enable us to see and feel the world differently: while they present aspects of the world we currently inhabit, they lead to a next step;

Fig. 2: Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom

image posted on Instagram

Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Untitled (I don't want to come across as a racist, but...), 2020, ink and brush and digital coloring on paper

they take us to the heart of possibilities.

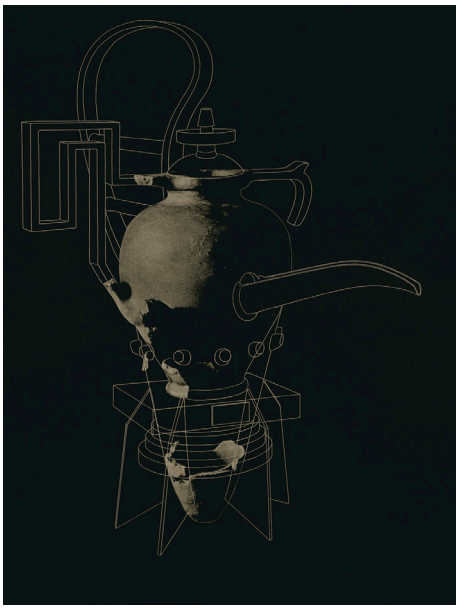

Fig. 3: Phillip Chen

Drift: Iteration

Etching with photographic and drawn elements,

Black ink on paper 23" x 31"

2020

Fig. 6: Việt Lê, untitled (May 2020)
Trace of a Performance
mixed media (oil, smoke, salt, dye, ash)
35″ X 35″ X 2″

Fig. 7: Việt Lê, untitled (May 2020), detail
Trace of a Performance
mixed media (oil, smoke, salt, dye, ash)

Fig. 8: Việt Lê, untitled (altar/alter), 2021, detail
Trace of a Performance
Mixed media (resin, roses, found household items [cans, containers], gold leaf)

Fig. 9: Việt Lê, untitled (altar/alter), 2021
Trace of a Performance
Mixed media (resin, roses, found household items [cans, containers], gold leaf) 78″ X 32″ X 1 3/8″

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Weightier Matters: Examining CEO Activism Issues in Ghana's non-Western Context

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ABSTRACT

Trendwatchers have spotted some seismic shifts in relations between business and politics. Particularly, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) are increasingly weighing in on greater good issues. Although a global phenomenon, current CEO activism scholarship reflects a Western focus; an ideological bias for modernist perspectives; a preponderance of White male CEO voices, and the relative elision of female activist CEOs. While, generally, no empirically-based typology of the sociopolitical issues that matter to activist CEOs exists, the specific range of causes of particular concern to non-Western CEO activists is neatly absent. This paper addresses all of these concerns, offering an inquiry into the emerging CEO activism phenomenon in the Ghanaian non-Western sociocultural milieu. Data collection entailed three separate rounds of fieldwork that saw long interviews with a corps of 24 self-identified informants, featuring an even split of men and women activist CEOs. The hermeneutic phenomenological theme-based approach guided data analysis. Following extant brand activism models, a typology of six clusters of CEO activism issues is offered that highlights the weightier matters of sociocultural activism, environmental activism, business/workplace activism, political activism, legal activism, and economic activism. Sociocultural issues include Ghana's fight against COVID-19, where activist CEOs pooled resources to construct and equip a new multimillion dollar 100-bed infectious diseases hospital facility, embarked on risk communication campaigns, donated critical health supplies, funded the screening and testing of employees, provided food and essential supplies to vulnerable groups, and called out the government for lapses in the management of this health crisis. Besides internationalizing CEO activism studies for the strategic communications, leadership, business ethics and responsible management fields, the results suggest the need to consider the perspectives of CEO activists in non-Western societies. This paper contributes mainly to current discussions in CEO activism (aka corporate social advocacy) and brand activism. It contributes to other theoretical and conceptual streams, including covenantal notions of public relations, Caritas, Ubuntu Philosophy, Africapitalism, and postmodern values in strategic communication. This paper contributes to the upper echelon perspective; insider activism; sustainability transitions; and current discussions concerning how to address issues of diversity, equity, inclusivity, and social justice in the public relations literature. Policy implications are laid out, and areas for future research are indicated.

Keywords:
CEO Activism;
COVID-19;
Responsible Management;
Business Ethics;
DEI;
Ghana

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Conventional business wisdom holds that the realms of business and politics ought not to mix.[1] However, we are seeing significant shifts in this dictum, as the terrains of business and politics continue to coalesce much strongly than previously thought.[2] Thus, although corporations have not always been concerned about wider social, political, and environmental issues that are not directly related to their financial bottom line, some scholars have observed seismic shifts.[3]

Some business leaders recently signaled a reimagination of corporations' role in society when the *Business Roundtable* issued a statement that suggests that forward-leaning and future-ready businesses now focus on seeking long-term shared value for multiple stakeholders, rather than only for investors.[4] This is a major departure from the traditional profit-maximizing and investor-interest-seeking focus advocated by Milton Friedman.[5] The new position urges companies to be accountable to, at least, some five strategic constituencies, namely, customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and shareholders.

Corporations, brands, and business executives are taking public stances on diverse sociopolitical and environmental issues through various activist and advocacy campaigns.[6] Notably, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) now speak publicly on controversial issues that were once the preserve of politicians, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other advocacy groups.[7]

CEO activism describes instances where CEOs– heads of profit-seeking corporations– speak publicly on social, political, and environmental issues that may not be directly connected to the operations of their companies or the ability of their businesses to make financial profits.[8] Sometimes, such public stances may run counter to the very business or profit-maximizing logic of companies.[9]

The widening gyre of corporate chieftains' public stances have included such issues as same-sex marriage, climate change, income fairness, immigration, racial discrimination and gender equality.[10] Oft-cited CEO activist exemplars tend to be White male Western (American) business bigwigs, including Tim Cook of Apple, Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs, Jim Rogers of Duke Energy, and Eric Schmidt of Google.[11] Others are Angie's List's CEO William Oesterle, Howard Schultz of Starbucks, and Dan T. Cathy of

1. D. C. Hambrick and A. Wowak. "CEO Sociopolitical Activism: A Stakeholder Alignment Model." Academy of Management Research, no. 46 (2021): 33–59. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0084.

2. Global Strategy Group. Business and Politics: Do they Mix? (2016, January).http://www.globalstrategygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GSG-2016-Business-and-Politics-Study_1-27-16-002.pdf

3. Aaron K. Chatterji and M.W. Toffel. The New CEO Activists. Harvard Business Review, January – March (2018): pp. 78 – 89. https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-new-ceo-activists.

4. Business Roundtable. Business Roundtable redefines the purpose of a corporation to promote 'An economy that serves all Americans,' (2019, August 19). https://www.businessroundtable.org/business-roundtable-redefines-the-purpose-of-a-corporation-to-promote-an-economy-that-serves-all-americans

5. Milton Friedman. The social responsibility of business is to make a profit. *New York Times Magazine* (1970, September 13), pp. 32–33, 122, 126; Milton Friedman, The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits. Berlin, Germany: Springer (2007).

6. Weber Shandwick, CEO activism in 2017: High noon in the C-suite (2017). https://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/ceo-activism-in-2017-high-noon-in-the-c-suite.pdf

7. Chatterji and Toffel, Starbucks'"Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism, (2015, March 24). https://hbr.org/2015/03/starbucks-race-together-campaign-and-the-upside-of-ceo-activism

8. Hambrick and *Wowak, CEO Sociopolitical Activism: A Stakeholder Alignment Model*, 33–59.

9. Eric Kwame Adae, Beyond Corporate Profits: Reminiscing about the Future of CEO Activism in Ghana. Doctoral dissertation, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, (2020). https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/25924.

10. Weber Shandwick, The Dawn of CEO activism, (2016). https://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/the-dawn-of-ceo-activism.pdf; Chatterji and Toffel, The power of CEO activism, (2016). https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/opinion/sunday/the-power-of-ceo-activism.html?_r=0

11. Chatterji and Toffel, *Starbucks' "Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism*.

Chick-fil-A.[12] The only exception appears to be the mention of a woman CEO activist, Marilyn Carlson, CEO of the global travel and hospitality firm Carlson Companies, who spoke out in 2004 against human trafficking.[13]

Buoyed by notions of brand responsibility, the Triple Bottom Line, and sustainability, corporate social responsibility has tended to serve the dual objectives of creating economic and social value simultaneously.[14] However, CEO activism is conceptualized as a unique expression of corporate sociopolitical involvement, as some CEOs may even intentionally court some controversy by weighing in on polarizing issues without any obvious pretense of raising corporate profits.[15]

CEO activism is fast emerging as a theoretical concept in scholarly circles.[16] This is due in part to the significant media spotlight on the phenomenon.[17] However, currently, scholars appear divided on various facets of CEO activism.[18] A disagreement appears to be what label to adopt.[19] Scholars say CEO activism possibly signals a shift in corporate public relations, since until relatively recently, most large companies have been cautious about offending sections of their stakeholders by avoiding controversies.[20]

Concentrated in the United States of America, a global prevalence of CEO activism is prognosticated.[21] Men and women CEOs from other parts of the world engage in activism, yet the bulk of current literature on CEO activism has focused on activist CEOs in Western (largely American) contexts.[22] Research on CEO activism displays an ideological bias for modernist perspectives that privilege consensus and the corporate and investor interests.[23] The field suffers a gender-blind spot, with many studies highlighting the activism of white, men CEOs, while eliding the voices and actions of women activist CEOs.[24]

Typologies for discussing the clusters of issues around which CEO activists plan their activism campaigns are currently nonexistent. Since scholars have yet to focus on the activist campaigns of CEOs in non-Western societies, there are no clear examples of the range of issues that matter to such activist CEOs in the Global South. Based on extant brand activism typologies,[25] this study examines the social resistance actions of both men and women who self-identify as activist CEOs in Ghana, with the view to providing some empirical basis for the development of a typology of sociopolitical issues in CEO activism, even while providing glimpses of specific issues that concern activist CEOs in a non-Western context.

Literature Review

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) adopted a new definition of the field in describing it as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."[26] This new look highlights the ethical basis and the human-social dimensions of PR.[27] This is seen in the centrality of the community-preserving functions of PR for companies and institutions.[28]

Generally, the mission of present-day public relations remains building and sustaining mutually beneficial relations between organizations and their strategic constituencies. While socially responsible corporate behavior had traditionally been driven by strategic corporate self-interest, it has been stressed that it is imperative for companies to "upgrade the quality of life in a community" (26).[29]

Some scholars have argued that although corporate social responsibility has usually been somewhat motivated

12. Chatterji and Toffel, *The Power of CEO activism.*

13. Weber Shandwick, *The Dawn of CEO activism.*

14. Chatterji and Toffel, *Starbucks' "Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism.*

15. Ibid.

16. Nalick, et al., Corporate Socio-Political Involvement: A Reflection of Whose Preferences? *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 30(4), (2016), 384-403.

17. Melissa Dodd, Corporate Activism: The New Challenge for an Age-Old Question, (2016, April 18). https://instituteforpr.org/corporate-activism-new-challenge-age-old-question/.

18. Kirsten Livonen, Understanding CEO Activism: Actions and Implications. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Vol. 2018(1), (2018).

19. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits: Reminiscing about the Future of CEO Activism in Ghana.*

20. Chatterji and Toffel, *The Power of CEO activism.*

21. Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists.*

22. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits: Reminiscing about the Future of CEO Activism in Ghana.*

23. Erica Ciszek and Nneka Logan, Challenging the Dialogic Promise: How Ben & Jerry's Support for Black Lives Matter Fosters Dissensus on Social Media, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30:3, (2018), 115-127, DOI: 10.1080/1062726X.2018.1498342.

24. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits: Reminiscing about the Future of CEO Activism in Ghana.*

25. See: Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism!* (2017, January 9). http://www.marketingjournal.org/finally-brand-activism-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/; Kotler and Sarkar, The case for brand activism. A discussion with Kotler & Sarkar, (2018b, November 15). http://www.marketingjournal.org/the-case-for-brand-activism-a-discussion-with-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/

26. G. Corbett, Final Candidates for a Modern Definition of Public Relations, (2112a). http://prdefinition.prsa.org.; Corbett, G. (2112b). [Letter to membership]. New York: Public Relations Association of America.

27. D. Tilson, Current Research in Public Relations: A Critique and Questioning of Global Trends. *African Communication Research,* 2(3), (2009), 367-396.

28. Public Relations Association of America (PRSA), Accreditation Study Course. New York: Public Relations Association of America, (2003).

29. D. Tilson and D. Vance, Corporate Philanthropy Comes of Age. *Public Relations Review*, 11, (1985), 26-33.

by efforts to uphold the social contract,[30] serving the greater social good does not have to be prompted or encouraged by the expectation of satisfying a corporate goal since good corporate citizenship could be an adequate reward in and of itself.[31] Thus, such notions have created room for a covenantal model of strategic communications as a legitimate theoretical field of inquiry,[32] to serve authentic social ends deemed "desirable in its own right" such as "health, sanitation or justice" (197-199). [33]

Some Corporate Advocacy Conceptualizations

Activism entails efforts by social actors and institutions to promote, impede or direct sociopolitical, economic, and environmental reforms or stasis, to improve society.[34] Activism is a mechanism for applying political pressure geared towards altering policies in a given direction,[35] and pushing for social change. [36]

The roots of advocacy spring from the past participle of the Latin verb *advocare*, referring to a clarion call on others for help and contains "the Latin word for voice (vox)" (200).[37] Advocacy refers to promoting and voicing support for an individual, organization, or idea, and working to persuade and gain the support of others to embrace what is advocated.[38] Thus, by extension, corporate advocacy generally involves a corporation voicing and making explicit public support for an individual, organization, or idea, and persuading others to do the same.[39]

Scholars conceptualize corporations and various agents within the organizational set as having the capacity for engaging in activism.[40] Corporate sociopolitical involvement presents itself in various hues and flavors. In an agentic model of the field, it has been suggested that corporate advocacy may be spearheaded by several corporate actors, including corporations (corporate activism), shareholders (shareholder/investor activism), brands (brand activism), other corporate executives (insider activism), and CEOs (CEO activism).[41]

The field of corporate sociopolitical involvement is fast emerging as a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry, spawning several conceptualizations.[42] These conceptualizations include corporate political activity and corporate political advocacy;[43] corporate social responsibility and sustainability;[44] political corporate social responsibility; brand activism and brand responsibility;[45] insider activism; shareholder activism;[46] and corporate social advocacy,[47] sometimes referred to as CEO sociopolitical activism,[48] and CEO activism.[49]

30. D. Guth and C. Marsh, *Adventures in public relations: Case studies and critical thinking*. Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, (2005).

31. T. Mescon and D. Tilson, Corporate philanthropy: A strategic approach to the bottom line. *California Management Review*, 29(2), (1987), 49-61.

32. D. Tilson, An alternative view of social responsibility: The ancient and global footprint of caritas and public relations. In B. St. John, M. Lamme, and J. L'Ethang (Eds.), *Pathways to Public Relations: Histories of practice and profession* (pp. 56-73), London, England: Routledge (2014).

33. S. Baker, The theoretical ground for public relations practice and ethics: A Koehnian analysis, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 35(3), (2002) 191-205.

34. Kotler, and Sarkar, Finally, Brand Activism! (2017, January 9). http://www.marketingjournal.org/finally-brand-activism-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/

35. M. Smith, Activism. In: Heath RL (ed.) Encyclopedia of Public Relations. London: Sage, (2013) pp. 5-8.

36. Council of Europe, HRE and Activism, (2017). http://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/hre-and-activism.

37. Wettstein and Baur, Why should we care about marriage equality: Political advocacy as a part of corporate responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 138(2), (2016). 99-213. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2631-3.

38. Edgett, R. (2002). Toward an ethical framework for advocacy in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 14(1), 1-26

39. Wettstein and Baur, *Why should we care about marriage equality,* 99-213.

40. A.J. Hillman, G.D. Keim, and D. Schuler, Corporate Political Activity: A Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, 30(6), (2004), 837-857. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.003

41. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits.*

42. Nalick et al., *Corporate socio-political involvement,* 384-403.

43. Wettstein and Baur, *Why should we care about marriage equality,* 99-213.; D. Baur, and F. Wettstein, CSR's new challenge: Corporate political advocacy. In M.C. Coutinho de Arruda, & B. Rok (Eds.), Understanding Ethics and Responsibilities in a Globalizing World (2016), 171-187. Springer Publishing.

44. Donnalyn Pompper, *Corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and public relations: Negotiating multiple complex challenges*. New York: Routledge (2015).

45. N. Kim, What is brand responsibility? Interview with Kim Sheehan, (2018). https://we-are-next.com/collection/what-is-brand-responsibility

46. Pompper, *Corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and public relations.*

47. See e.g.: M.D. Dodd and D.W. Supa, Conceptualizing and measuring corporate social advocacy communication: Examining the impact of corporate financial performance. *Public Relations Journal,* 8(3), (2014), 2-22; M.D. Dodd, Corporate activism: The new challenge for an age-old question, (2016, April 18). https://instituteforpr.org/corporate-activism-new-challenge-age-old-question/; and M.D. Dodd and D.W. Supa, Testing the viability of corporate social advocacy as a predictor of purchase intention. *Communication Research Reports*, 32(4), (2015), 287-293.

48. Hambrick and *Wowak, CEO Sociopolitical Activism: A Stakeholder Alignment Model*, 33–59.

49. See e.g.: Chatterji, *Why Apple's Tim Cook and other CEOs are speaking out on police shootings;* Chatterji and Toffel, *Starbucks' "Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism;* Chatterji and Toffel, *The Power of CEO Activism;* Chatterji and Toffel, Do CEO activists make a difference? Evidence from a field experiment." Harvard Business School Working Paper, (2017). No. 16-100, March 2016. https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/26274858/16100.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y; Chatterji and Toffel, The new CEO Activists. Harvard Business Review (January – March), (2018), pp. 78 – 89. https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-new-ceo-activists; Chatterji and Toffel, The Right and Wrong Way to Do 'CEO Activism.' (2019, February 22). https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-right-and-wrong-way-to-do-ceo-activism-11550874530; and Livonen, Understanding CEO Activism: Actions and Implications. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Vol. 2018(1), (2018).

Wettstein and Baur distinguish between corporate political *activity* and corporate political *advocacy*, based on three criteria: (i) whether the issue involves corporate strategic self-interest or eleemosynary/altruism; (ii) the nature of the outcome or consequence of the issue championed by the corporation; and (iii) the nature of profiling by the corporation, relative to the issue.[50] The notion of corporate political activity emerged in the management literature in the 1980s, focusing on corporate strategies to shape and influence government and/state policies, solely to help advance the realization of corporate goals.[51]

Corporate political *activity* involves diverse strategies such as constituency building, targeted campaign contributions, advocacy ads, lobbying, and coalition building.[52] Thus, the goal in corporate political *activity* remains the creation, maintenance and extension of private corporate value, rather than achieving public value for society. Conversely, corporate political *advocacy* is held as a distinctive form of corporate sociopolitical involvement that is unique because it is a voluntary and proactive corporate behavior that is driven by corporate values and relies on overt public advocacy in which the corporation fights for the common good.[53]

Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) is conceptualized as organizational stances on sociopolitical issues and straddles two realms in public relations: Strategic Issues Management (SIM) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).[54] Strategic Issues Management (SIM) embraces a multitude of organizational functions that highlight corporate social responsibility.[55] SIM is driven by the notion of organizational legitimacy that entails standards for considering whether the actions of a corporate body are acceptable or in tune with social values and norms.[56]

Social responsibility describes strategies and tactics aimed at ensuring that an organization (i) recognizes that it has linkages with multiple stakeholders, (ii) becomes aware of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of its operations and activities on members of its strategic constituency, (iii) manages the wider impacts of organizations on society and the environment, with the view to serving the greater good in ways that transcend the limited interests of owners and investors.[57]

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concerns an organization "incurring responsibilities to society beyond profit maximization" (1).[58] Such care-based organizational duties include "the voluntary actions that a corporation implements as it pursues its mission and fulfills its perceived obligations to stakeholders, including employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole" (8).[59] Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) conceptualizes corporations as political actors while stressing the role and responsibility of organizations in alternative forms of governments within the para-constitutional domain, such as public-policy networks and multi-stakeholder initiatives.[60]

Sustainability extends the idea of social responsibility in demanding that organizations secure their long-term viability by balancing the need to maximize economic profit for investors with the need to positively impact employees, society, and the environment.[61] Sustainability thus seeks to align the competing interests of the plurality of members of an organization's strategic constituency. Sustainability focuses on ensuring prosperity for the organization, the environment, and the society at large. The assumption is that pursuing environmental and social prosperity can energize an organization's financial viability, hence the notion of the Triple Bottom Line.[62]

The concept of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is a triple helix sustainability framework envisioned by John Elkington, who argued that rather than pursuing a single financial bottom line that privileges investors, corporations should pursue three bottom lines for (i) people (societal/community responsibility), (ii) planet (environmental sustainability), and (iii) profits (firm financial performance).[63] Elkington recently expressed second thoughts about his framework because of his perception that CSR is often diluted

50. Wettstein and Baur, *Why should we care about marriage equality,* 99-213.

51. Hillman, Keim, and Schuler, *Corporate Political Activity,* 837-857.

52. G.D. Keim and C.P. Zeithaml, Corporate political strategy and legislative decision making: A review and contingency approach. The Academy of Management Review, 11(4), (1986), 828–843.

53. Wettstein and Baur, *Why should we care about marriage equality,* 99-213.

54. Dodd and Supa, *Conceptualizing and measuring corporate social advocacy communication*, 2-22.

55. R.L. Heath, M.J. Palenchar, and H.D. O'Hair, Community building through risk communication infrastructures. In R. L. Heath & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.), Handbook of risk and crisis communication. London: Routledge, (2009), (pp. 471–487).

56. M.C. Suchman, Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review,* 20(3), (1995), 571-610.

57. Pompper, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Public Relations.*

58. Pava and Krausz, *Corporate Responsibility and Financial Performance.*

59. W.T. Coombs and S.J. Holladay, Managing Corporate Social Responsibility: A Communication Approach. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell (2012).

60. D. Baur, NGOs as Legitimate Partners of Corporations. A Political Conceptualization. Dordrecht: Springer (2011).

61. A.W. Savitz, Talent, Transformation, and The Triple Bottom Line: How Companies Can Leverage Human Resources to Achieve Sustainable Growth. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Wiley (2013).

62. Ibid.

63. J.B. Elkington, Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of the 21st Century Business. Oxford: Capstone, (1999).

by wider corporate self-interests and private profit priorities, without due concern *for people* and *the planet*.[64]

Some scholars suggest that CSR has fallen below expectations in positively driving changes in the society and the environment since it has largely become a tool for veiled corporate hypocrisy.[65] Thus, CSR is sometimes lampooned as an inauthentic veneer for preserving private firm value.[66] Some scholars challenge the argument that rises in industrial productivity (even with sustainable methods) can reduce current and future ecological externalities and negative social impacts.[67] CSR has tended to serve as a tool for preempting and circumventing democratic pressures for the environmental regulation and public scrutiny of corporations while fostering environmental degradation.[68] CSR also faces several marketing-oriented strictures, linked to perceptions that CSR is merely a corporate veneer and strategy for deception and corporate hypocrisy, designed to mask organizational self-interest.[69] These corporate inauthenticity-based censures include *"greenwashing,"*[70] *"pinkwashing,"*[71] *"bluewashing,"*[72] and *"wokewashing."*[73]

Distinctiveness of CEO Activism

Despite the various cognate conceptualizations of corporate advocacy, one of the least studied forms of corporate sociopolitical involvement is *CEO activism*.[74] CEO activism involves CEOs publicly speaking up on sociopolitical and environmental issues that may not directly have anything to do with corporate profitability, such as climate change, same-sex marriage, social injustice and inequality, and gun control.[75] CEO activism shares with corporate political activity the idea of corporations seeking to influence politics. It is noteworthy that the concept of corporate political activity entails lobbying to advance corporate self-interest or firm value.[76] However, CEO activism involves issues not directly related to the core business, and thus not salient to corporate objectives.[77] Corporate political activity is private, taking place behind closed doors, while CEO activism is public advocacy.[78]

CEO activism is akin to Political CSR (PCSR) in assuming it is not limited to the self-interest of corporations but is also concerned with the greater social good. However, while PCSR activities are externally driven but internally focused on the corporation's CSR policies and practices, CEO activism has an external focus, with corporate leaders seeking to instigate social change outside their corporations.[79] CEO activism is also different from CSR by being involved in culture wars that are quite different from the non-controversial activities, usually programmed as CSR efforts.[80]

I find many of the current labels for expressions of corporate advocacy rather confusing and unsuitable, especially when it comes to conceptualizing the genre of corporate sociopolitical involvements that are spearheaded by CEOs. CEO activism is a relatively unique nonmarket strategy and a new form of corporate sociopolitical involvement.[81] While the extant concepts of corporate involvement focus on the corporation and/or the brand as the archetype, CEOs are, by definition, not necessarily incorporated. Again, although CEOs may spearhead other corporate and brand activism, this may not always be the case as CEOs may find themselves engaging in activism purely out of their personal conviction.

64. J.B. Elkington, 25 Years Ago I Coined the Phrase "Triple Bottom Line." Here's Why It's Time to Rethink It, (2018, June 25). https://hbr.org/2018/06/25-years-ago-i-coined-the-phrase-triple-bottom-line-heres-why-im-giving-up-on-it.

65. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits.*

66. C. Sarkar, "Beyond the Triple Bottom Line" – An Interview with John Elkington, (2018, October 25). http://www.marketingjournal.org/beyond-the-triple-bottom-line-interview-with-john-elkington/

67. J.B. Foster, Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature. New York, NY: New York University Press, (2000).

68. S. Enoch, A Greener Potemkin Village? Corporate Social Responsibility and the Limits of Growth. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 18(2), (2007), 79–90. doi:10.1080/10455750701366485.

69. Pompper, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Public Relations.*

70. Kim Sheehan and L. Atkinson, Special Issue on Green Advertising: Revisiting Green Advertising and the Reluctant Consumer. Journal of Advertising, 41(4), (2012), 5–7. doi:10.1080/00913367.2012.10672453.

71. K. McVeigh, Susan, G Komen's "Pinkwashing" Problem a Black Mark on Charity. *The Guardian*, (2012, February 15).

72. Pompper, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Public Relations*

73. Kim Sheehan, Companies Promoting Causes can be Accused of 'Wokewashing' – Allying. Themselves only for Good PR, (2019, August 9). https://theconversation.com/companies-promoting-causes-can-be-accused-of-wokewashing-allying-themselves-only-for-good-pr-120962; P. Adams, The Year of 'Woke-Washing': How Tone-Deaf Activism Risks Eroding Brands (2019, July 8). https://www.marketingdive.com/news/the-year-of-woke-washing-how-tone-deaf-activism-risks-eroding-brands/557606/

74. Livonen, *Understanding CEO Activism: Actions and Implications.*

75. Chatterji and Toffel, *The New C*

76. Hillman, Keim, and Schuler, *Corporate Political Activity,* 837-857.

77. Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists.*

78. Livonen, *Understanding CEO Activism: Actions and Implications.*

79. Ibid.

80. A.G. Scherer, D. Baumann-Pauly, and A. Schneider, Democratizing corporate governance: Compensating for the democratic deficit of corporate political activity and corporate citizenship. Business and Society, 52(3), (2013). 473–514.

81. Baur and Wettstein, *CSR's new challenge: Corporate political advocacy,* 171-1

Besides, as observed by Kotler and Sarkar,[82] corporate activism may find expression in various domains beyond the social and the political realms, such as championing environmental causes. Thus, a more specific and heuristic label is required for the phenomenon. Yet, the extant perspectives of corporate social responsibility, corporate social advocacy, and corporate political advocacy all assume the corporate imperative, while others continue to split hairs by labeling such involvements as "sociopolitical,"[83] "political,"[84] and "social,"[85] among others. I am persuaded to concur with Chatterji and Toffel and Livonen in referring to the phenomenon as "CEO activism."[86]

This labeling is not only pithy, direct and punchy but also more specific in describing this unique form of corporate sociopolitical engagement in the public sphere, exercised through the agentic role of CEOs. For instance, in its study of corporate reactions to the US travel ban on citizens of selected nations, Weber Shandwick found that for 84% of the companies that made public pronouncements on the matter, such corporate articulations were directly made by the CEOs, using their personal names rather than the corporate brand names.[87]

A unique label must be consistently applied to the unique phenomenon that subsists when CEOs weigh in on wider social, economic, political, legal, business/workplace, and environmental issues that may not be directly related to the profitability or operations of the corporations they lead. I argue that that phenomenon must be labeled "CEO Activism," to help distinguish it from other forms of corporate sociopolitical activism, such as those expressed by brands, investors/shareholders, other corporate executives and corporate bodies.

The Brand Activism Perspective

Brands that are managed by corporations sometimes display agency for activism.[88] Brand Responsibility is deemed to be a progressive or forward-leaning brand stance that demonstrates a brand's commitment to a crucial social mission or purpose, stemming from the very core of the brand DNA, and not as an add-on or a contrived veneer-like activity.[89] Brand responsibility is a brand's resolve to contribute meaningfully to the creation of a better world by helping to solve some of the biggest problems by taking leading roles in conscious conversations in the public sphere.[90] Brand activism runs counter to the profit-maximization philosophy of corporations and embraces a values-driven multi-stakeholder agenda for brands' concerns for society's future, the planet's sustainability, and justice for all, especially those issues that remain unresolved by CSR.[91]

Brand activism is an expression of brand responsibility and a corporation's response to the market's expectation of brands to stand for something, even if it means sacrificing some other market segments in order to resonate with core segments.[92] While brand responsibility is regarded as purpose-driven and stemming from the very heart of the brand's purpose, CSR is widely regarded as inauthentic, contrived, and a veneer-like add-on, aimed at corporate hypocrisy and realizing corporate private value.[93]

Nalick and colleagues conceptualize sociopolitical issues as "… salient unresolved matters on which societal and institutional opinion is split, thus potentially engendering acrimonious debate across groups" (386).[94] There is the lack of societal consensus because such issues border on "contentious unsettled social matters on which opinions are split" (386).[95] Such sociopolitical issues are among the most controversial and sensitive topics, threatening the social, religious, economic, ethnic, partisan, or some historical sociocultural or geopolitical order.[96] They are also characterized by low information rationality, as information asymmetry and low information

82. See: Kotler and Sarkar, "The Regressive Brand: The Dark Side of Brand Activism" (2018a, August 20). http://www.marketingjournal.org/the-regressive-brand-the-dark-side-of-brand-activism-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/, Kotler and Sarkar, The Case for Brand Activism. A Discussion With Kotler & Sarkar (2018b, November 15). http://www.marketingjournal.org/the-case-for-brand-activism-a-discussion-with-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/

83. See: Hambrick and Wowak, *CEO Sociopolitical Activism: A Stakeholder Alignment Model*, (2021), 33-59; Nalick et al., *Corporate socio-political involvement*, (2016), 384-403.

84. See: Wettstein and Baur, *Why Should We Care about Marriage Equality*, 99-213; Baur and Wettstein, *CSR's New challenge: Corporate Political Advocacy*, 171-187.

85. See: Dodd and Supa, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Corporate Social Advocacy,* 2-22; Dodd and Supa, *Testing the Viability of Corporate Social Advocacy,* 287-293.

86. See: Chatterji and Toffel, *Starbucks' "Race Together;"* Chatterji and Toffel, *The Power of CEO Activism;* Chatterji and Toffel, *Do CEO Activists Make a Difference;* Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists*; Chatterji and Toffel, *The Right and Wrong Way to Do CEO Activism;* Livonen, *Understanding CEO Activism: Actions and Implications.*

87. Weber Shandwick, *CEO Activism in 2017: High Noon in the C-suite.*

88. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits.*

89. Kim, *What is Brand Responsibility?*

90. Lirtsman, *Brand Activism Built on Purpose*, (2017). https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/interbrand- breakthrough-brands/2017/articles/brand-activism-built-on-purpose/

91. Kotler and Sarkar, *The Regressive Brand: The Dark Side of Brand Activism.*

92. Kotler and Sarkar, *The Case for Brand Activism.*

93. Kim, *What is Brand Responsibility?*

94. Nalick et al., *Corporate Socio-Political Involvement*, 384-403.

95. Ibid.

96. D. Haider-Markel and K. Meier, The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Rights: Expanding the Scope of the Conflict. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(2), (1996). 332-349. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2960229.

structures tend to curtail credible information and reasoning relative to the issue. Such issues are further marked by evolving viewpoints and issue salience.[97]

A sizeable section of Americans (47%) believe that CEOs have a duty and a responsibility to speak out on contentious issues, despite the mixed blessings of potential risks and rewards.[98] Nearly 60% of Millennials think that business leaders have a greater responsibility to speak now than in years past regarding issues of wider social significance.[99] Americans are overwhelmingly supportive of corporate advocacy, with 88% of respondents agreeing that corporations have the power and responsibility to influence social change, and 78% agreeing that companies should act to address important issues facing society.[100]

Kotler and Sarkar identified six broad categories of issues/causes in brand activism. These include (i) social brand activism (including brand concerns regarding equality, LGBTQ, race, age, gender, and education); (ii) political brand activism (including brand concerns for lobbying, and campaign financing); and (iii) legal brand activism (including brand concerns for taxation issues and employment laws, etc.). The rest comprise (iv) economic brand activism (including brand concerns for minimum wage and related tax policies); (v) workplace activism (including corporate governance and corporate organization, CEO pay, worker compensation, labor and union relations, supply chain management, governance, and gender diversity in the upper echelons of corporations); and (vi) environmental brand activism (including brand concerns for climate change, land use and land degradation, air quality, conservations, and excessive damming).[101]

Motivations for CEO Activism

Generally, the motivation for activist CEOs is the desire for social change in such areas as race relations and gender equality and other areas of social life that are unrelated to the core businesses of corporations.[102] Nalick and co-workers argue that there are three main classes of motivations for corporations to become involved in sociopolitical issues, including (i) betting on future stakeholder benefits, (ii) responding to current stakeholder pressures, and (iii) pursuing ideological inclinations.[103] Companies are finding it hard to remain apolitical in the bid to engage their stakeholders in an increasingly polarized political climate.[104] Besides, most corporate leaders have genuinely strong convictions about contemporary social issues, partly due to a new wave of business education that stresses inclusive capitalism, social responsibility and sustainability and the general need for corporate leaders to think beyond financial profits.[105]

While expecting corporations to deliver good products and services en-route to recording profits, consumers also now expect corporations to do much more than make consistent financial profits and returns for investors.[106] There is a greater realization among corporations, governments, states, the civil society, and market segments of the need for corporations to maintain a careful balance between the profit maximization maxim with optimization of returns for people and the planet.[107] Linked to these are concerns for sustainable business practices, and the need for corporations to achieve and maintain societal consent and legitimacy.[108]

Generally, there is a growing gap between the promises of governments and their ability to deliver much needed social services, and, modern consumers are displaying a higher expectation of corporations.[109] Customer segments such as Millennials are protesting online and through street marches about many social issues.[110] Most consumers expect corporations, their brands, and leaders to step up to the plate and fill this democratic gap/deficit, by taking up issue with some of the most important social, political and environmental issues of the day.[111]

For some CEO activists, speaking up is driven by their personal convictions such as religious beliefs, pandering to the

97. Nalick et al., *Corporate Socio-Political Involvement*, 384-403.

98. Weber Shandwick, *CEO Activism in 2017: High Noon in the C-suite.*

99. Ibid.

100. Global Strategy Group. (2016, January). Business and Politics: Do they Mix? http://www.globalstrategygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GSG-2016-Business-and-Politics- Study_1-27-16-002.pdf

101. See Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism;* Kotler and Sarkar, *The Case for Brand Activism.*

102. Chatterji, *Why Apple's Tim Cook and other CEOs are Speaking out on Police Shootings.*

103. Nalick, et al., *Corporate Socio-Political Involvement*, 384-403.

104. Chatterji, *Why Apple's Tim Cook and other CEOs are Speaking out on Police Shootings.*

105. Pompper, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Public Relations.*

106. Weber Shandwick, *CEO Activism in 2017: High Noon in the C-suite.*

107. Savitz, *Talent, Transformation, and The Triple Bottom Line.*

108. Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism.*

109. A.M. Cronin, Public Relations Capitalism: Promotional Culture, Publics, and Commercial Democracy. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan (2018).

110. Ricardo J. Valencia and Patrick Jones Jones, Networks of Radical Contention: The Co-Constitutive Relations Between Structural Conditions and Public Relations Strategies and Tactics in the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. *PR Inquiry*, 7(3), (2018), 199-223. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X18788704

111. Cronin, *Public relations capitalism: Promotional culture, publics, and commercial democracy.*

aspirations of Millennials, standing with and for the masses, and showing courage and sincerity.[112] Thus, there is a new breed of younger business leaders emerging who are favorably predisposed to social liberalism, as more business leaders are aligned to the left side of the political divide and tend to identify with social and cultural issues, as opposed to economic issues only.[113]

Some activist CEOs point to their corporate values to justify their advocacy,[114] while others suggest that they and their companies should have a higher purpose beyond maximizing shareholder value.[115] Others are motivated by Caritas, Ubuntu, Africapitalism, a postmodern orientation, personal background factors, and calculated business motives.[116]

Research Question

CEO activists develop a strong sense of social-mindedness when personal/psychological factors interact with social/situational factors.[117] Once motivated to undertake CEO activism, sections of the literature on CEO activism suggests that the next step would be for CEOs to select a range of sociopolitical issues that would serve as the fulcrum for their resistance actions. [118]

Kotler and Sarkar posit that there are six broad classes of such issues that a brand could advocate. In their brand activism typology, these scholars identified political issues, social issues, economic issues, legal issues, environmental issues, and business/workplace issues.[119] I posit that this typology on brand activism could be adapted and extended to the realm of CEO activism. Currently, no such typology exists for describing the clusters of issues that CEO activists generally concern themselves with. Especially the range of causes pursued by men and women activist CEOs in non-Western contexts is non-existent. How does the extant brand activism typology of Kotler and Sarkar extend to CEO activism?

The focus of the research question is to address this lacuna in CEO activism literature concerning the classes of issues for CEO activists, even while unearthing some of the specific weightier matters of concern to activist CEOs in a non-Western society.

Research Question: What clusters of sociopolitical issues do CEO activists in Ghana focus on?

Methods

A qualitative epistemological route was selected for this inquiry. My preference for the human science, rather than quantitative approaches, was motivated by the aim of gaining deep insights on CEO activism.[120] This epistemological approach focuses on contributing to theory-building and examining how human social actors interpret and make sense of society.[121]

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected and analyzed data from long interviews with activist CEOs in Ghana, who were purposively selected for this study. The snowball sampling technique was also employed to include more informants, in addition to those primarily included through purposive sampling. In all, 24 men and women self-identified CEO activists served as my informants.

The selection/inclusion criteria were that participants should be (i) men and women CEOs who are leading/have led companies that operate in Ghana (be they Ghanaian nationals or not), and (ii) who have embarked on some form of CEO activism in Ghana. Thus, a purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who meet the selection criteria. As stated, this technique was augmented by snowball sampling, where participants were asked to recommend other activist CEOs they knew in Ghana who could be contacted for inclusion in this study.

The University of Oregon Human Subjects Board approved all the research protocols and instruments for this study. There were three separate rounds of data collection, comprising a pilot study in 2018, a main data collection phase in 2019, and a follow-up effort between December 2020 and January 2021. The mode of data collection was long interviews, in the sense of semi-structured conversations with the selected participants.[122] The pilot study involved 7 participants and the main data-gathering saw 17 CEO collaborators. The follow-up effort involved interviews with 12 of the

112. Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists,* 78 – 89.

113. Chatterji, *Why Apple's Tim Cook and other CEOs are speaking out on police shootings.*

114. Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists,* 78 – 89.

115. See: L. Gaines-Ross, What CEO Activism Looks Like in the Trump Era, (2017, October 2). https://hbr.org/2017/10/what-ceo-activism-looks-like-in-the-trump-era; Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists,* 78 – 89.

116. Eric Kwame Adae, *Brewed in the African Pot: Examining the Influences of Caritas, Ubuntu, Africapitalism, and Postmodern Values on CEO Activism in Ghana*. In D. Pompper (Ed.) *Public Relations for Social Responsibility: Affirming DEI Commitment with Action*, (in press, 2021), pp: 83-100. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Publishing.

117. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits*

118. Ibid.

119. See Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism;* Kotler and Sarkar, *The case for brand activism.*

120. See: M. van Manen, Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (2nd. Edition). Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press (1997).; and M. van Manen, Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (2016), (2nd. Edition, eBook version). Albany, NY: Routledge.

121. N.K. Denzin, and Y.S. Lincoln, Introduction – The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In Denzin. N.S. & Lincoln, Y.S., eds. (2018). Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 5th ed. (pp. 1-26). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

122. S. Brinkman, *The Interview*. In N. S. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) (2018). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (2018). (pp. 576-599). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

previous pool of 24 participants who were available for this mop-up exercise.

The conversations with informants produced digitally recorded narratives that I transcribed and prepared for data analysis. Data analysis was informed by the hermeneutic phenomenological thematic method of van Manen.[123] Positionally, the participants were regarded as collaborators, co-investigators, informants, and co-creators of this inquiry, rather than subjects.[124] The mission of data analysis was to organize the voices of informants in ways that highlighted specific lines of inquiry, as a prelude to rhetorically examining and interrogating their perspectives to provide insights that addressed the research question.[125]

Findings

Based on the data collected the brand activism typology postulated by Kotler and Sarkar, was invoked to help organize the range of issues that informants in this study disclosed. While most of the study participants pursued a cocktail of causes at a time, some specific issues emerged that could be classified according to the six brand activism clusters postulated by Kotler and Sarkar.[126]

Socio-cultural Activism

It was found that a sticking issue for most participants in this study involved diverse forms of sociocultural issues, including risk communication concerning the fight against COVID-19 in Ghana. It also emerged that in a predominantly patriarchal Ghana, an overwhelming majority of participants in this study have been addressing many forms of gender-based injustices.

Taking Action Against COVID-19

It emerged that various CEOs and companies in Ghana had joined forces with various sections within the society, including the Government of Ghana, political parties, the media, civil society organizations, the expatriate and the diplomatic community, and the wider Ghanaian public, to wage a war against COVID-19.

Considering the rising COVID-19 case counts globally, Ghana's private sector was proactive to recognize the deleterious pressures of this virus on Ghana's social and medical system and the already strained fiscal policy and private sector productivity. Among the interventions of Ghana's private sector was an initiative that was conceptualized and co-managed by Informant #14, a man CEO of an association of firms in Ghana's downstream petroleum sector. This was an intervention to augment the nation's frail medical system by providing a new multimillion dollar 100-bed isolation and treatment facility specifically for addressing the rising COVID-19 case load:

> Ghana's healthcare delivery system is under pressure. The existing facilities are already inadequate and this virus will only make the situation worse. We set up the COVID-19 Private Sector Fund to mobilize resources for the construction of a 100-bed treatment and isolation facility for our people.

Many CEOs and their companies rallied to the call, making cash donations and in-kind giftings of building materials, equipment and other hardware. Within six weeks, this infectious disease facility was ready for use by the people of Ghana. Other CEOs and their businesses made significant donations to a fund established by the Government of Ghana to support the nation's fight against COVID-19.

Many players in Ghana's private sector led in efforts to screen and provide COVID-19 testing facilities for employees, while some CEOs in this study had mass media advocacy campaigns to educate the public. Many participants served as opinion-leading talking heads in public service announcements on COVID-19 in the official language of English and many local dialects.

Other participants got their companies to fund the rollout of billboards and other out-of-home media channels with key messages on COVID-19. Some participants led campaigns to stem the stigmatization of Ghanaians who are infected by COVID-19. Others, including Informant #15, woman CEO of a chamber of firms in the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors testified that they published various poems about the pandemic. Informant #13, a woman CEO of a film awards company, appeared on many radio and television programs to deepen public education on the pandemic and mainstream public discussions on the subject. Many participants disclosed that they donated cash and valuable resources, including Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) to selected hospitals and also sponsored the training of frontline health workers to combat COVID-19.

With the COVID-19 case count escalating, the Ghanaian government imposed a lockdown that negatively impacted the movement and livelihoods of sections of the population, notably *Kayayei*, commercial head porters (mainly females) who operate at many markets and lorry stations. Some participants in this study indicated that they were part of *Feed-A-Kayayo* Campaign launched in April 2020 as a public-private partnership with the Government of Ghana to feed some head porters in the most populous parts of Ghana. Informant #19, a woman CEO of a technology and software training firm provided further details:

> This project sought to alleviate the harsh challenges confronting head porters because of the recent imposition of the lockdown. We fed about 10,000 head porters each day. This is a private sector-led initiative, but we are seeking the support of everyone. We must stand together to beat COVID-19.

Despite a season of heated campaigns in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections on December 7, 2020, the CEOs who led this project

123.See: van Manen, *Researching Lived Experiences.*

124. W.F. May, Doing Ethics: The Bearing of Ethical Theories on Fieldwork. *Social Problems*, 27(3), (1980), 358-370.

125. van Manen, *Researching Lived Experiences.*

126. See Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism;* Kotler and Sarkar, *The Case for Brand Activism.*

testified that they were able to unite the two bitter political parties in Ghana, the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in efforts to feed some of the most vulnerable sections of Ghana's population, as some political party bigwigs took to the streets on this initiative.

Some participants candidly spoke truth to power and expressed concern about the sub-optimal efforts by the government to manage COVID-19 in the lead up to the December 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. Many participants said the government was guilty of negative role modeling in creating a false state of normalcy during the electioneering campaign. For instance, Informant #1, a woman CEO of a group of companies in media and news publishing disclosed that:

> We started well, but we are now seeing a loss of urgency because of inadequate government communications and a general dropping of our guards in the management of COVID-19. The government must be up to the task and lead public education, so that the people would realize the seriousness of this disease.

Other participants blamed the government of deceptive reporting and the suppression of COVID-19 prevalence statistics.

Other Sociocultural Issues

Several participants indicated that they had been taking steps to promote the empowerment of women. Informant #3, a woman CEO of a media production company testified to acting in resistance to a plethora of cultural and institutional barriers in Ghana that limited the empowerment and advancement of women and children. These include sexual harassment, unacceptably poor pay and employment conditions of working women, and the abysmal representation of women in Ghana's party-political spaces:

> I speak on issues that concern women and children. My purpose is to empower women holistically, while I speak truth to power. I advocate and make noise; I agitate, and I push for the right policies to be developed and implemented that would advance the rights and position of women and children. Yes, my target is always the woman – the Ghanaian woman and her emancipation, empowerment, and advancement.

Others disclosed that their activism had revolved around issues connected with the well-being of girls and women in Ghana, including economic empowerment through livelihood support and efforts to address teenage pregnancy by educating young girls. In this vein, Informant #23, a woman CEO of a major financial industry regulator had been working to promote women's empowerment with campaigns to better equip a critical mass of women to help build the nation:

> If you empower the woman, you are building a nation. I created the Akoma platform in 2014 to encourage like-minded women to aspire to greatness, provide useful information to each other and help them network and share ideas that would make them more impactful and successful in society.

Many participants' actions involved conditioning and empowering the Ghanaian youth to become more entrepreneurial. Informant #16, a man CEO of a human capital development firm, had been focusing on youth investment and personal development, entrepreneurship, and talent development:

> I've engaged with 18 to 35-year-olds over 12 years now, through nationwide roadshows … a weekly radio broadcast on diverse themes that will develop people who are ethical and very purpose-driven.

Others disclosed that they had been active in deepening financial literacy among huge sections of the Ghanaian population. For instance, Informant #20, a man CEO of a management accounting and business advisory firm, testified that they had been working on getting the Ghanaian to become more competent in personal finance matters:

> Since 2008, I have been promoting financial literacy in Ghana. I have a radio program that seeks to deepen financial literacy among the population.

Many participants disclosed that their activities included fighting the government to provide essential services for Ghanaians. Some indicated that the main impetus for the formation of Occupy Ghana (a pressure group promoted by some participants in the study) was the myriad of systemic failures in the country in the run-up to the 2016 presidential and parliamentary polls. What had become popularly known as *Dumsor*, a *Twi/Akan* term for *'power frequently coming on, but then going off,'* a reference to the erratic electric power situation in Ghana, was the chief trigger for the formation of Occupy Ghana and its various protest actions. These participants said they were dissatisfied with what they saw as the generally low standard of governance in Ghana.

A great majority of activist CEOs in this study revealed that they had been instrumental in the passage of Ghana's Right to Information Bill into law in the middle of 2019. Informant #24, a woman CEO of an agro-processing firm, talked about how this bill was kept on the back burner for well over a decade. However, through the mounting of consistently stronger resistance action, the hand of the NPP administration of President Addo-Dankwa and the 7th Parliament of the current 4th Republic in Ghana cowered under the pressure and finally passed this important law:

> We got the Right to Information Law passed in the middle of 2019. We had the Right to Information Bill for well over 10 years. We kept pressing and blowing the matter open. We now have the Right to Information passed into law partly because of our activism.

Environmental Activism

A handful of participants had made environmental causes the mainstay of their work as activist CEOs. It emerged that within the broad field of environmental concerns in Ghana, CEO activist causes include climate change, checking the use of plastic waste, san-

itation, and pollution. One of the chief environmental concerns is the issue of *Galamsey*, a *Ghanaianism* for illegal small-scale (typically gold mining) operations that occur in all manner of mineral-rich locations across the country (sadly, even within forest reserves). Such illegal mining activities have been responsible for environmental degradation in Ghana, including the pollution of rivers, streams, lakes and other water bodies.

Informant #6, a man CEO of a chamber of telecommunications firms, indicated that they had spearheaded fights against *Galamsey*. Such struggles held substantial significance for them, asserting that pursuing such a cause was more about being a responsible African community elder, and not merely a business leader:

> I took on environment and causes to transform society, including working against illegal mining activities and the adverse impact of such irresponsible operations on the environment. I consider myself an elder. I can't look on when things go wrong in society. That'd be irresponsible of me.

Other participants had been working with various civil society organizations to press against the continued operations of *Galamsey* activities in Ghana. Some participants reported working in the area of the environment and sanitation matters, including speaking out against poor waste management culture, poor sanitation, and bad plastic waste disposal practices in Ghana. Some testified they had been advocating for a cleaner environment and society, leading national discussions on plastic littering, advocating for the banning of single-use plastic products, and promoting a culture of recycling and sustainable manufacturing and consumption practices.

Business/Workplace Activism

Several business/workplace activism issues engaged the attention of some of the participants. Glass ceiling issues ran through the resistance activities of many of the women CEOs in Ghana. It was found that most women CEO activists in this study have been working for the promotion of gender diversity and pushing against the under-representation of women in management positions and on the boards of most Ghanaian companies.

Several of the women CEOs indicated that they had been exploring ways of providing effective avenues for more women to climb the corporate ladder in Ghana. Given that many systemic and institutional barriers worked against the progress of women across many fields in Ghana, Informant #1 indicated that helping more women to break the glass ceiling:

> Here, few women rise the corporate world … we're poorly represented in management and on the boards. I thought it was important that having gone through that process and risen to the top, it was essential to help others to also get them up there.

Some activist CEOs have been advocating for a more vibrant and robust service culture in Ghana. Several participants indicated that they had been advocating for higher standards of customer service, as a way gaining competitive advantage for Ghana.

Political Activism

Among the range of measures that some activist CEOs had been advocating for in their bid to fight endemic corruption in Ghana was the need to promote greater transparency by compelling politicians and public office holders in the country to declare their assets. Informant #10, a man CEO of a major law firm explained their work in this regard:

> I am working with others on compelling asset declaration in Ghana because currently, nobody is complying with the law that requires public officers to declare their assets. We will write to the Attorney-General of Ghana, drawing attention to this blatant contravention of the laws of the land … we are going to drag the Attorney-General to court.

Following their childhood experienced during the Liberian civil war, Informant #13 became concerned about the growing pattern of electoral violence in Ghana that was generally attributed to political vigilantes. This participant embarked on a solo protest march #WHYIWALKFORGHANA on February 26, 2019 and petitioned the leadership of the Parliament in Ghana, issuing an ultimatum for the absolute disbanding of such militia within one month:[127]

> I went on a march … I said we would keep protesting until things changed. I could not imagine living at peace within myself with that explosive situation that such political vigilantes and electoral violence could bring to Ghana. If I don't act and something horrible happens, can I live with myself? Can I look at my children in the face, knowing I could have taken steps to neutralize the situation?

Several other informants had been actively working for the promotion of democracy and transparency in Ghana's electoral processes. Informant #8, a man CEO who leads a law firm and a business consultancy had seen the need to take some actions to help reform Ghana's electoral system:

> I decided to rally around some lawyers for us to challenge this in the courts before any new election was held in Ghana. The Supreme Court was surprised, and it was surprising to me that they were surprised because they had not noticed the anomaly. The Supreme Court ruled in our favor, stating that the Electoral Commissioner should provide all political parties with the pink sheets – evidence of valid votes

127. Informant #13 employed the hashtag #WHYIWALKFORGHANA to protest against private militia groups that wreak mayhem during elections in Ghana. This hashtag underscores the informant's realization of what they describe as *"Power of One,"* which emboldens them to speak up and take actions in a manner that could not be ignored by the Ghanaian authorities. They indicated that they were energized to act because of their unpleasant experiences during the Liberian civil war that saw many lives and property lost and a once prosperous West African nation utterly destroyed. This informant thus described a personal responsibility to help protect Ghana's democracy and ensure a safe country for all.

cast from every polling station to the political parties. Looking at Ghana's electoral history, I think that was a significant development.

Legal Activism

Through legal activism, several participants reported resistance to the pattern of state capture that had taken hold in Ghana. These participants were disheartened to note that individuals who had a significant influence - including those in government and others in policymaking positions – used such connections and privileges to change the rules of engagement, for the benefit of private individuals, very much against the state interest.

Many participants indicated that they had formed the Occupy Ghana pressure group to help highlight some of the failures of the government. Most of these participants spoke about holding the government to account by speaking truth to power through diverse resistance activities. One of the chief activities of Occupy Ghana had become a test case in legal activism in Ghana, involving a case the group brought against the state to compel the Auditor-General to crack the whip to check endemic corruption in Ghana. Informant #8 offered some insights into the nature of Occupy Ghana's anti-corruption drive:

> We sued the Auditor-General in the Supreme Court, asking for an order to compel him to do his job well. His job was to surcharge and disallow it when people have corruptly or improperly used government funds. The Auditor-General is using that law and last week, he surcharged a government official for some expenditure that the Auditor-General disallowed. That was historic in Ghana and a big win that I feel proud to have been a part of.

Some participants have taken actions to probe and question the propriety of some procurement agreements. These include the 2018 deal between the Government of Ghana and Haitian ICT firm Kelni-GVG to implement and develop a common platform for the monitoring of mobile phone traffic and the revenues accruing to the state thereof. Several participants described this as a controversial multimillion-dollar agreement involving the award of a 10-year contract worth nearly US $180 million to Kelni GVG as a 'rape' of Ghana. For instance, it emerged that a participant in this study, acting as a public interest lawyer, commenced multiple lawsuits against the government of Ghana on the grounds of financial maladministration. Informant #8 had this to say:

> Take the Kelni-GVG scandal in 2018 that exposed the controversial multi-million-dollar deal, signed between the Government of Ghana and the Haitian firm, Kelni-GVG. We saw so many irregularities and decided to take the State to court, to compel them to account to the people of Ghana.

Economic Activism

Several CEOs in this study focus on issues concerning better economic management in Ghana. Some had pressed the government for more effective management of the Ghanaian currency, the Cedi, that had the unfortunate penchant for suffering huge depreciations against the major trading currencies. Informant #5, a man CEO of a leasing and wealth management firm, who has taken on the persona of an unofficial shadow finance minister of Ghana, disclosed that they had been questioning the soundness of some of the economic policies of the Government of Ghana:

> I've been speaking on economic issues since 2013. I have been talking about economic and financial management issues in Ghana, breaking them out and highlighting the failures in some of our national economic matters in ways that the ordinary Ghanaian would understand.

Informant #4, a man CEO of an association of upstream petroleum companies revealed that they had been deliberate in highlighting a range of economic and financial matters, including the weak competitiveness of Ghanaian companies, high unemployment rates and unsustainably huge import bills facing Ghana:

> I've spoken generally on economic issues in Ghana; things that have got to do with the economy and their impact; I've spoken about Ghanaian companies not being productive enough; why companies in Ghana are not competitive, and the reasons why that is the case. One of my pet peeves has been about the Ghanaian currency, the Cedi.

Many participants expressed concern about uncontrolled government expenses by Ghanaian and African governments. Some informants disclosed that they had recently objected to huge amounts incurred by African governments in attending various summits with their bilateral partners. It became evident that those economy-focused CEO activists had been interested in weighing in on some government of Ghana programs and policies, such as the One District One Factory (1D1F) program, and other begging issues including hunger and national food security matters.

Many activist CEOs said they had engaged in intellectual debates with the Government of Ghana on diverse public procurement deals and agreements with some international institutions. Such public debates have been based on the perception that these public procurements and agreements did not meet the value-for-money criterion and did not serve the best interest of the generality of Ghanaians. These included the STX Housing agreement, a failed project launched in 2009 to construct 200,000 houses in Ghana over five years, at an estimated project cost of $10 billion.

The Komenda Sugar Factory was flagged as another flawed government project that had engaged the attention of some participants. Informant #8 explained some of the worrying aspects of this project:

> I expressed the view that the Komenda Sugar Factory was going to produce more propaganda than sugar! We broke it down and explained it in very simple terms. The Government of Ghana did not listen to us, and at the end of the day, more than US $36 million of Ghana's money is down the drain, with totally nothing to show for all

that investment. Everything we had said had come true.

Discussion And Conclusion

This paper was energized by the mission of rethinking facets of the current scholarship on CEO activism by considering some alternative approaches. The overall goal was to address the perceived dearth of scholarly research on how the phenomenon of CEO activism is evolving in non-Western societies. Specifically, the purpose is to contribute to literature on CEO activism by establishing a typology of CEO activism issues, while introducing specific examples of non-Western CEO activism issues into the literature.

A deliberate decision was made to select a non-Western context, to adopt a non-quantitative method, and to have parity of the voices and lived experiences of both men and women activist CEOs. Data collection involved three entrées into the field for long interviews with 24 purposively selected self-identified CEO activists.

Extant brand activism typologies were invoked to highlight the issues involved in *CEO activism.*[128] While many of the participants typically took on a plethora of issues and causes, extant six clusters of brand activism proved robust and adequate in describing CEO activism issues in Ghana. Based on the findings, I make a case for a fresh typology of CEO activism issue clusters.

Although Kotler and Sarkar's typology of brand activism clusters - comprising environmental activism, social(cultural) activism, legal activism, economic activism, business/workplace activism, and political activism - was developed specifically for brand activism, the findings in this study suggest that they were applicable to CEO activism. Adopting these categories for the range of causes of activist CEOs in Ghana proved adequate. However, this typology had to be somewhat modified by extending the "social activism" category to include cultural issues. Thus, for this study, there was a need for the inclusion of "sociocultural issues" as a cluster of CEO activism issues.

Following extant brand activism models, a typology of six clusters of CEO activism issues is offered that highlights sociocultural activism, environmental activism, business/workplace activism, political activism, legal activism, and economic activism (see Figure 1 below). In this wise, this paper extends extant brand activism notions.[129]

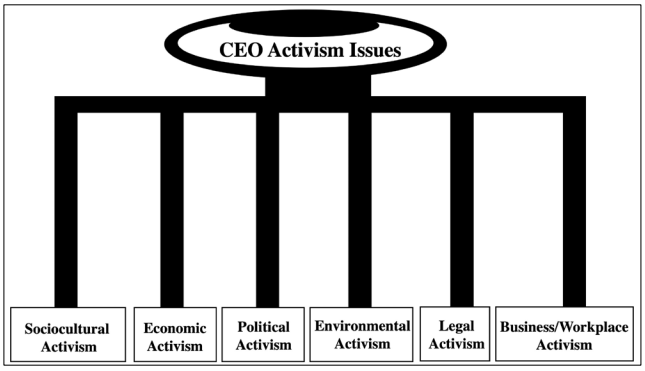

Figure 1: Taxonomy of CEO Activism Issues (Adapted from Kotler & Sarkar).[130]

(The motif is motivated by the ancient Ghanaian Adinkra symbol, The Duafe, which depicts a wooden comb. Duafe is an Adinkra symbol of femininity, love and care. It is emblematic of good hygiene and grooming.)

The findings effectively internationalize the literature on CEO activism and contribute to the literature on issues in CEO activism. Specifically, it enriches the literature on CEO activism[131] and the notion of *sustainability transitions.*[132]

These findings on the issues involved in CEO activism in Ghana, hitherto unarticulated in CEO activism literature, introduce specific context-specific weightier matters of interest to activist CEOs in a developing country. Sociocultural issues include Ghana's fight against COVID-19, where activist CEOs pooled resources to construct and equip a new multimillion dollar 100-bed infectious diseases hospital facility for Ghana, embarked on risk communication campaigns, donated critical health supplies, funded the screening and testing of employees, provided food and essential supplies to vulnerable groups, and called out the government for lapses in the management of the crisis.

Environmental issues include illegal (gold) mining activities in Ghana popularly called Galamsey. Business/workplace issues involve the low representation of women in corporate Ghana, particularly issues concerning breaking the glass ceiling. Political issues include political vigilantism and electoral violence, democracy and civil rights. Legal issues include enforcing asset declaration by public officers, corruption, and murky public procurement deals. Economic issues entail sub-optimal performance of Ghana's economy, perceived bad government policies and programs, unemployment, huge import bills, and unjustifiably large public expenditures.

These findings contribute to CEO activism literature by introducing specific examples of issues advocated by CEOs within an African society. So far, the literature on CEO activism only contained examples of issues from Western contexts. Thus, these findings would serve as a launchpad for more incisive studies

128. See Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism;* Kotler and Sarkar, *The case for brand activism*

129. See Kotler and Sarkar, *Finally, Brand Activism;* Kotler and Sarkar, *The case for brand activism.*

130. Ibid.

131. See: Dodd and Supa, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Corporate Social Advocacy,* 2-22; Dodd and Supa, *Testing the Viability of Corporate Social Advocacy*, 287-293; Chatterji, *Why Apple's Tim Cook and other CEOs are Speaking Out*; Chatterji and Toffel, *Starbucks' "Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism*; Chatterji and Toffel, *The Power of CEO activism*; Chatterji and Toffel, *Do CEO Activists Make a Difference*; Chatterji and Toffel, *The New CEO Activists*; and Chatterji and Toffel, *The Right and Wrong Way to Do 'CEO Activism.'*

132. M.A. Delmas, T.P. Lyon, and J.W. Maxwell, Understanding the Role of the Corporation in Sustainability Transitions. Organization & Environment, 32, (2019), 87-97.

on CEO activism from the Global South, as well as comparative studies between Western and non-Western societies.

The findings provide some indications for future research in the area of the pathways through which gender dynamics shape CEO cause selection, as well as differences in issues chosen by men CEO activists in Africa, relative to those selected by women CEO activists. These findings further contribute to contemporary discussions in the strategic communication literature, including notions about the confluence of Caritas and Public Relations.[133] I also contribute to similar commentary about the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a basis for the sustainability movement.[134]

Besides contributing to the literature on a covenantal and care-based definitions of modern-day and cutting-edge public relations,[135] these findings contribute to literature on the nascent concept of Africapitalism and illustrates the argument that place is not to be ignored or simply consumed.[136] Beyond the value of context in theory building, examining whether or not the issues addressed by African CEOs are different goes beyond context.

This paper contributes to the insider activist perspective.[137] It contributes to the literature on the postmodern values in public relations, which casts corporations and their executives as being concerned with greater good issues, even if doing so requires opposing dominant corporate power structures to which corporate executives belong.[138] It also straddles current discussions on giving force to issues of diversity, equity, inclusivity (DEI) and social justice issues in the public relations and responsible management literature.[139]

This paper has implications for corporate policies.[140] The literature points to a growing popularity of CEO activism. The findings reported herein could inspire companies seeking to engage in corporate activism to provide policy guidelines for the specific types of causes that their CEOs could pursue. This paper contributes to the business ethics and responsible management literature by deepening understanding of alternative routes for companies to become more socially and authentically responsible to multiple stakeholders.

Despite the useful insights provided, some limitations exist. As a qualitative study, the findings are only relevant to the participants of this study. Besides, the participants were purposively selected, making the findings scarcely generalizable. Still, the findings may not hold for CEO activists in a different socio-cultural context.

By considering the voices and experiences of women activist CEOs in Ghana, this paper only scratches the surface in contributing to feminist theory, especially the strands of feminist theory pertaining to intersectionality and African feminist thought. A stronger theory-based, gender-centric analysis systematically examining the behaviors and motives of men and women activists is advisable. Future work that seeks to develop a framework and elicit questions to better understand gendered views and initiatives is recommended.

By virtue of their status and other characteristics, CEOs are a unique activist archetype. The current tactics employed by social movements may not suitably serve activist CEOs. Yet, little is currently known about the tactical repertoire of activist CEOs. Scholars could seek to unearth the range of strategies and tactics employed by CEO activists.

It is unclear the range and depth of effects produced by the activist campaigns of CEOs. A fertile domain of research could be an examination of the varieties of consequences produced by CEO activists. Scholars are still grappling with the relationship between CEO activism and the specific ways in which it impacts companies. Future CEO effects studies could focus on the diverse pathways in which CEO activism is related to such organizational outcomes as employee morale, employee loyalty, customer brand preference, and brand equity.

133. Tilson and D. Vance, Corporate philanthropy comes of age. *Public Relations Review*, 11(1985), 26-33.

134. Adae, *Beyond Corporate Profits.*

135. See: Corbett, *Final Candidates for a Modern Definition of Public Relations*; Corbett, *Letter to Membership*; and Public Relations Association of America (PRSA), *Accreditation Study Course*.

136. See: Kenneth Amaeshi and U. Idemudia, Africapitalism: A Management Idea for Business in Africa? *Africa Journal of Management*, 1(2), (2015), 210-223, DOI: 10.1080/23322373.2015.1026229; and E. Adegbite, O. Daodu, and J. Wood, Will Africapitalism work? *Africa Journal of Management*, 6(4), (2020), 419-434, DOI: 10.1080/23322373.2020.1830697

137. See: Pompper, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Public Relations*; F. Briscoe, M. Chin, and D.C. Hambrick, CEO ideology as an Element of the Corporate Opportunity Structure for Social Activists. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57, (2014), 1786-1809; and D.R. Holtzhausen, and R. Voto, R, Resistance from the margins: The postmodern public relations practitioner as organizational activist. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(1), (2002), 57-84, DOI:10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1401_3.

138. See: D.R. Holtzhausen, Postmodern Values in Public Relations, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), (2000), 93-114. Doi: 10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1201_6; and Holtzhausen and Voto, Resistance from the margins: The postmodern public relations practitioner as organizational activist, (2002), 57-84.

139. Adae, *Brewed in the African Pot*, pp: 83-100.

140. Chatterji and Toffel, Starbucks' "Race Together" Campaign and the Upside of CEO Activism.

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Play and Interruption as a Mode of Action in Arendt, Dostoevsky, and Kharms

Simon Ravenscroft

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ABSTRACT

This essay uses Hannah Arendt's theory of action and her critique of modern politics to explore the themes of predictability and unpredictability in human affairs, and the political meaning of interruption and refusal. It draws on the life and literature of the Russian avant-gardist, Daniil Kharms (1905-1942), alongside Fyodor Dostoevsky and several contemporary theorists, to offer a reading of action as taking the form, specifically, of *playful* interruption and *generative* refusal. A marginal figure whose deeds and writings were disruptively strange, Kharms is taken as an exemplar of action in this ludic mode. This serves to elaborate upon Arendt's concepts of plurality and natality, while challenging some weaknesses in her theory of action as a whole.

Keywords:
Hannah Arendt;
Daniil Kharms;
Fyodor Dostoevsky;
action;
plurality;
natality;
interruption;
play;
surprise;
happiness

Play and Interruption as a Mode of Action in Arendt, Dostoevsky, and Kharms*

According to Hannah Arendt, "Action, though it may have a definite beginning, never…has a predictable end." [1] Action can never have a predictable end because of two related conditions of our shared human life: plurality––that we share the world with others who are different from us, and natality––the constant emergence of the new. This essay is an exploration of the implications of these concepts of plurality and natality for how we understand our social and political selves, which is to say, the perennial question of what it means to be human.

I wish to enter, however, through a side door, by quoting some paragraphs of the American poet, Anne Boyer, from an essay on the theme of refusal:

> Saying nothing is a preliminary method of saying *no*. To practice unspeaking is to practice being unbending, more so in a crowd. Cicero wrote… 'in silence they clamour'––and he was right: never mistake silence for agreement. Silence is as often conspiracy as it is consent…
>
> Sometimes our refusal is in our staying put. We perfect the loiter before we perfect the hustle. Like every toddler, each of us once let all adult commotion move around our small bodies as we inspected clover or floor tile. As teens we loitered, too, required Security to dislodge us, like how once in a country full of freely roaming dogs, I saw the primary occupation of the police was to try to keep the dogs out of the public fountains, and as the cops had moved the dogs from the fountains, a new group of dogs had moved in. …
>
> Some days my only certain *we* is this certain *we* that didn't, that wouldn't, whose bodies or spirits wouldn't go along. That we slowed, stood around, blocked the way, kept a stone face when the others were complicit and smiling. And still we ghost, and no-show, and in the enigma of refusal, we find that we endogenously produce our own incapacity to even try, grow sick and depressed and motionless under all the merciless and circulatory conditions of all the capitalist yes and just can't, even if we thought we really wanted to. This is as if a river, who saw the scale of the levees, decided that rather than try to exceed them, it would outwit them by drying up. [2]

This essay is about human action as something which in its consequences and effects is inherently unpredictable, but it will include as a central theme a reading of action as including generative acts of refusal. I am, moreover, particularly interested in action and refusal as relating to, and taking the form of, interruption. Indeed, a major reason I am leading with Arendt is because her account of action provides a framework within which to think of interruption – the intrusion of the unplanned and unexpected – generously and as something other than an enemy. Later in the essay from which I quoted above, Anne Boyer writes that "there is a lot of room for a meaning inside a 'no' spoken in the tremendous logic of a refused order of the world."[3] Incipient in that sentence is the idea of an affirmative mode of negation: of generative refusal, refusal that creates room for something new. Saying no can of course be an awfully poe-faced thing; refusals can be puritanical, they can be haughty, they can be pious and deadly serious. In order to escape that sort of mood, I will focus my attention on refusals and interruptions that take a ludic and ridiculous form, that is, that contain with them a spirit of playfulness (*ludere*) and laughter (*ridere*).

Arendt will, therefore, provide the conceptual foundations of the essay, and the first section comprises a reading of her categories of labour, work, and action, and of plurality and natality, as they relate to my major themes of

* Particular thanks to Boris Gunjević for introducing me to Daniil Kharms, Christian Coppa for many relevant conversations, and attendees at the D Society, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, where the first version of this essay was delivered and extensively discussed in March 2019.

1. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 175.

2. Boyer, 10-11.

3. Ibid. 16.

predictability and interruption.[4] This forms the ground to develop, in part two, Arendt's critique of modern politics as having become a sphere of fabrication rather than of action, investigating some of her comments on utopianism so as to apply them to the contemporary 'politics of happiness', as recently evaluated by William Davies. In the final two sections, I will turn to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, itself a satirical response to a fabricatory and utopian 'happiness politics' of his own day, and the work of the lesser-known Russian avant-gardist, Daniil Kharms, who lived, worked, and died under utopian Stalinism, for instances of the kinds of playful, interruptive, but generative refusal I have in mind. Indeed, Kharms will become for me a somewhat ridiculous but instructive exemplar of Arendtian action in such a mode. His example is instructive because, as an unquestionably marginal figure of minor historical importance, he challenges aspects of Arendt's analysis that, as numerous scholars have acknowledged, tend in an elitist direction. The essay will conclude with a discussion around this particular problem.

What follows is in some respects an exercise in 'serious play', but with the aim of illuminating dimensions of being-human that are of pressing theoretical and practical importance.

I. Action and the work of modern politics

Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* offers an original account of what it means to be human in the form of a phenomenological existentialism. That is, Arendt explores the human condition by describing the various modes of being-in-the-world that are available to humans in the different spheres of their existence. She makes two important critical moves at the outset. The first is to challenge the traditional hierarchy that sees the *vita activa* as subordinate to the higher ends of the *vita contemplativa*. She contends that for a long time the active life was defined from the viewpoint of contemplation, by people who were themselves engaged in contemplation; from this view, all activity appears similar, such that the various distinctions that can be found within the active life disappear.[5] Against this, she seeks to re-emphasise and explore fully the various dimensions of the active life, breaking these down into three categories, which form an ascending hierarchy: labour, work, and action. A second move Arendt makes is against modern political thought, which she admits has re-emphasised human activity, but she thinks in a wrong-headed way. Here she has in mind figures including Smith, Locke, and Marx, whom she accuses of having privileged labour and work, while forgetting about action. This critical move in relation to modern thought is central to the concerns of this essay, but in order to understand its significance we must better understand Arendt's three categories of labour, work, and action.

Labour covers the most basic forms of activity required to sustain life. "By labouring," Arendt says, "men produce the vital necessities that must be fed into the life process of the human body."[6] This can include forms of industrial mass production where what is being produced is for consumption, and so for the sustenance of biological life. Since the human life process is cyclical––eat, digest, expel, eat–– "labouring activity never comes to an end as long as life lasts; it is endlessly repetitive."[7] This cyclical pattern means that labouring activity is characterised by *futility*; it leaves nothing lasting behind but simply sustains mortal life until death.

The distinction Arendt then makes between labour and work is novel. While she acknowledges Marx as the great modern theorist of labour, she nevertheless considers him to have conflated these two categories. For Arendt, whereas labour concerns activity that devours in order to sustain biological life, work produces durable things that have an existence independent from that of their maker. Work, she writes, "does not prepare matter for incorporation but changes it into material in order to work upon it and use the finished product."[8] Work concerns acts of making and fabrication, and she has in mind mundane objects like tables, or buildings, or bridges, as well as more abstract objects like a poem or a piece of music, as long as those are recorded (written down). Together, these durable things comprise the objective world within which humans live. Whereas labour has a cyclical relation to time and is something that all animals engage in, work is distinctively human and has a linear relation to time, because it brings things into existence that can outlast their maker. Work in that sense (like action), opens to mortal human life the possibility of immortality.[9]

Work is also undertaken in order to achieve or produce something else rather than for its own sake: it is instrumental and utilitarian. It separates means from ends and tends to turn today's ends into tomorrow's means for something else. Arendt is not opposed to utilitarian reasoning and activity within its proper sphere, but she strongly criticises what she calls, "the generalization of the fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for the world as well as for the life of acting men moving in it."[10] According to Arendt, if there weren't action as well as work, then the totalisation of utilitarian logic would lead to the instrumentalisation of the entire world, something that would doom us to meaninglessness, since utilitarian thinking alone can never

4. I have carefully delimited my discussion to her writings that deal most directly with labour, work, and action, and the principles of plurality and natality, as I do not intend this essay to be an exercise in 'Arendt exegesis', but rather a creative development upon some of her most fertile concepts.

5. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 168.

6. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 170.

7. Ibid., 171.

8. Arendt, *Human Condition,* 100.

9. Cf. Voice, 40, 46.

10. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 157. Emphasis added.

provide an answer to the question, "what is the use of use?"[11]

Arendt charges modern political thought with having elevated labour and work, and neglected action. However, that is not quite all, because she also says, as a result, that our political life itself has come to be understood in terms of labour and work. This is a significant move. Where politics is conceived in terms of labour, she explains, human affairs become dominated by the cyclical satisfaction of material wants and needs – that is, by *consumption*. Arendt calls this political orientation, somewhat mysteriously, "the social," and describes it as "an interpretation that takes into account nothing but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become objects of consumption."[12] This is Arendt's critique of consumer society, and where she comes closest, critically speaking, to Marx and the familiar idea of universal commodification. More original is her notion of political life being understood as work, that is, as a kind of making or fabrication. Here, political activity comes to be seen in terms of constructing a desirable condition of society, as if a state of human affairs could be the end result of a production process. Arendt speaks here of the "delusion that we can 'make' something in the realm of human affairs – make institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men 'better' or 'worse'."[13] This can align with the kind of consumerist society just described, where the goal might be the 'production' of material wellbeing, or it could be oriented towards a higher end––the production of some eternal moral good. This is politics conceived technocratically: instrumental reason, acting upon the human world as if it were dead matter. It also allies politics with violence. As Margaret Canovan has summarised:

> Work is a matter of transforming material in order to make something: domination, violence and the sacrifice of the means to the end are inherent in the activity of fabrication. When this model is applied to politics, which is concerned with dealings between plural persons, it is other people who become the material to be dealt with violently and sacrificed to the end that is to be achieved.[14]

Marx understood politics this way, Arendt argues, but inherited his view from a longer tradition, running as far back as Plato and Aristotle.[15] Arendt also closely associates this way of thinking with utopianism, something we will return to in the next section. For Arendt, it constitutes a kind of category error because it confuses the human world with the material world.[16] It assumes that one can treat people, can shape them, as one would any other form of matter.[17] At the same time, it assumes that human affairs can have that same level of solidity and predictability as do processes of production.

Here we arrive at a central theme: for Arendt, work processes can be made predictable. Under normal conditions, one can establish stable causative relations between means and ends, and these can be managed and rationalised and optimised. This is not so with that form of activity that she regards as proper to the political realm: action." Though it may have a definite beginning," Arendt writes, "[Action] never…has a predictable end."[18] She speaks of the "inherent unpredictability" of action.[19] Its consequences and effects cannot be controlled, cannot be planned for, in anything like the sense that the consequences and effects of *fabricating* activity can be controlled and planned for. This absence of control is fundamental to what Arendt calls the "frailty of human affairs."[20]

Arendt's category of action is one of the most original and dynamic contributions to Western political and social thought in the last century. Defining the term concisely is difficult because of Arendt's descriptive, phenomenological method, and the fact that she does not give a litany of practical examples of what action looks like. Nor is she seeking to lay out a regulative, institutional framework for action in modern public life in the manner of other major political theorists.[21] Action, first, includes a revival of the antique notion of praxis––it is *political action*, but not in the bureaucratic sense in which we tend to think about political activity today. Action is, rather, a "mode of human togetherness"––it is participatory.[22] Second, Arendt distinguishes the sphere of action from the private, domestic sphere, but also the sphere of the 'social' that I mentioned above in relation to consumer society. The modern 'social' is, for Arendt, fundamentally homogenising––it has been described as a "blob"––

11. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 177.

12. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 89.

13. Ibid., 188.

14. Canovan, Hannah Arendt, 73.

15. Ibid., 72ff; cf. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 196, 225.

16. e.g. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 225-247.

17. Ibid.,188.

18. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 175.

19. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 191.

20. Ibid., 188ff.

21. For example, John Rawls. The closest she comes is to talk about an elaborate, tiered council system (cf. Voice, 51n3).

22. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 180. "The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (Ibid., 198).

whereas the sphere of action is one of plurality, of individual differentiation.[23] Third, action is undertaken by a person. This point may seem banal, but Arendt distinguishes between what humans are, as biological organisms and members of a species, and who they are as particular people. People, she says, are "unique, unexchangeable, unrepeatable,"[24] and, "in acting and speaking", people "show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world."[25] Thus for Arendt, individual persons are unique, and when they act their uniqueness is disclosed. However, and this is a fourth point, that disclosure is only intelligible as such within a context––that is, a shared context, which she calls the "space of appearance."[26] Action therefore happens under the gaze of others; it is performative. *There are no strictly private actions*: to act is always to act into an already-existing web of relationships.

Arendt's emphasis on uniqueness and disclosure is existentialist in flavour but this is not an existentialism for which the individual is, as it were, folded in on themselves. It is not the case, as with a common image of Sartrean existentialism, for example, that the individual for Arendt is able simply to choose and assert their identity, to unilaterally decide what to be. To think one can merely assert who one is would be nonsensical, for Arendt, for the simple reason that we are none of us alone, and therefore do not act in isolation. To act *freely* is nevertheless always also to act *into* that pre-existing web of relationships that she describes, which is made up of conflicting wills and intentions.[27] It is for that reason, among others, that action can never have a 'predictable end'. The ultimate meaning of any action––no matter how forcefully enacted––depends on the reciprocal actions of others through time. That is, it emerges diachronically and––Arendt does not use this term, but I consider it accurate––dialogically. Indeed, Arendt frequently relates speech and action, because the meaning and effects of something that is said in the hearing of others depends, in the same sort of way, on how it is heard, interpreted, responded to by those others––others who are different from the speaker, and over whom in a free society the speaker does not have control. This is what Arendt means by *plurality*. The fact of plurality means that we cannot dictate in advance the final meaning of what we do or say, and this is one of the ways action is distinguished from work, or acts of fabrication, for which the finished product lies within our control. These ideas come together in one lyrical passage:

> Since we always act into a web of relationships, the consequences of each deed are boundless, every action touches off not only a reaction but a chain reaction, every process is the cause of unpredictable new processes. This boundlessness is inescapable; it could not be cured by restricting one's acting to a limited graspable framework of circumstances or by feeding all pertinent material into giant computers. The smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness and unpredictability; one deed, one gesture, one word may suffice to change every constellation. In acting, in contradistinction to working, it is indeed true that we can really never know what we are doing.[28]

Arendt says that to do and to suffer the deeds of others are two sides of the same coin. The interaction of those elements through time is what will determine the meaning of what we do, and any final meaning can only be told, she says, at the end, in the form of a story.[29]

The counterpart to plurality in dictating the unpredictability and frailty of human affairs is Arendt's concept of natality, by which she simply means a capacity to give birth to the new.[30] For Arendt, what is special about action is that it is capable of bringing something unanticipated into the world. She writes, "Action, with all its uncertainties, is like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin something new." This has a very literal sense, in terms of the continual entry of new generations into human history, which causes no end of interruption and disruption. She writes,

> Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. The frailty of human institutions and laws and, generally, of all matters pertaining to men's living together, arises from the human condition of natality and is quite independent of the frailty of human nature.[31]

The same force of natality that births new generations is taken up and repeated in the actions of already-living people, which Arendt describes as "like a second birth," resulting in the perpetual introduction into the world of new, surprising beginnings.[32] She describes this in terms of an 'onslaught': it has something of the

23. Fenichel Pitkin.
24. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 97.
25. Ibid., 179.
26. e.g Ibid., 198-99.
27. Ibid., 190.
28. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 180; cf. Human Condition, 190.
29. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 192.
30. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 181.
31. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 191.
32. Ibid., 177.

irrepressible about it, a sense of life that teems. "It is in the nature of beginning," she writes, "that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before."[33] Action therefore always appears "in the guise of a miracle" (and we return to the theme of miracle in relation to Kharms, below).[34] But it is also here about rupture: life that erupts into history, and which *interrupts* and *disrupts* the best-laid plans and designs of people.[35] With these dual concepts of plurality and natality, Arendt rejects any political orientation that would treat human behaviour as reducible to a predictable, objective schema. The human capacity to act makes inevitable the *interruption* and *disruption* of any such programme.[36]

II. Fabrication and utopia

The conditions of plurality and natality contribute to what Arendt calls the "extraordinary frailty and unreliability of strictly human affairs."[37] This gives rise to a political temptation: to try to eliminate that frailty and unreliability by treating human affairs as a domain of fabrication rather than of action. Arendt writes in this regard of the:

> …depth of the authentic perplexities inherent in the human capacity for action and the strength of the temptation to eliminate its risks and dangers by introducing into the web of human relationships the much more reliable and solid categories inherent in activities with which we confront nature and build the world of the human artifice.[38]

She also writes of the "attempt to eliminate action because of its uncertainty and to save human affairs from their frailty by dealing with them as though they were or could become the planned products of human making…"[39] Arendt associates this tendency with utopian thought. I have already written that for Arendt, the elision of political action with work or fabrication springs from the delusion "that we can 'make' something in the realm of human affairs – make institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men 'better' or 'worse'." She continues in the same passage to link this to a, "conscious despair of all action…coupled with the utopian hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other material" (this despair of all action is because action cannot offer the same level of control over human material as that of which fabricatory programmes dream.)[40] Elsewhere she describes utopian schemes as "among the most efficient vehicles to conserve and develop a tradition of political thinking in which, consciously or unconsciously, the concept of action was interpreted in terms of making and fabrication."[41]

Utopianism is of course most commonly associated with revolutionary socialism and communism.[42] As such, it is commonly held that with the fall of the Soviet Union, utopianism definitively had its day, especially in the light of the fact that in the one remaining major communist regime - China - markets and private property are now well-established. In this sense, Fukuyama's famous 'end of history' pronouncement (now retracted) also marked the end of utopias.[43] History seemed to have reached an equilibrium in the global hegemony of democratic free market liberalism. This is the sense in which the late Mark Fisher spoke of capitalist realism, a term that reflected the "widespread sense that not only is capitalism [now] the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."[44] Insofar as utopianism concerns the imagining of alternative futures, this would indeed seem to mark its death knell.

However, the view that utopianism is dead ascribes that tradition too narrowly to a certain kind of Leftist thought. By contrast, as the institutionalist economist Geoffrey Hodgson has explained, "[while] utopian thinking is typically associated with socialism and communism…the contrasting politico-economic schemes of pro-market libertarians can equally be described as utopian."[45] Hodgson carefully elaborates why this is the case, to do with the imagining of a pure and perfectly efficient free market system. While many pro-market economists might well protest at this idea, it is not a wholly contentious point; Friedrich Hayek, of all people, readily admitted the role of a utopian or ideal picture of soci-

33. Ibid., 177-178.

34. Ibid., cf. 247.

35. This is not to say that miracle and rupture are simply one. Miracle can be conceived variously.

36. I will not develop this theme here, but the unpredictability attendant upon action gives great importance to what Arendt describes as the faculty of promise-making: "promises serves to set up in the ocean of future uncertainty islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would ever be possible in the relationships between men" (*Ibid*., 181). Promise-making, in relation to the future, is the counterpart to the faculty of forgiving, which in relation to the past serves to "undo its deeds" (*ibid*.). Both are examples of action.

37. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 180.

38. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 230.

39. Ibid., 231.

40. Ibid., 188.

41. Ibid., 227-228.

42. Partly for this reason Arendt herself somewhat minimises the historical role of utopian projects, something I am departing from here.

43. Fukuyama, *End of History.*

44. Fisher, 2.

45. Hodgson, 5.

ety in his own thinking.[46] David Steele, another advocate of free markets, argued in 1992 that, "The attempt to abstain from utopianism merely leads to unexamined utopias."[47] I am not claiming, *per se*, that this is a necessarily deleterious thing, either. As the late Zygmunt Bauman observed, the imagining of alternative political futures that do not yet exist can be a means of revitalising the present.[48] The danger comes, and here Arendt is again helpful, when that desirable political future becomes something to be fabricated in her specific sense. That is, when it is conceived as the predictable end result of a series of instrumental interventions on the human web of relationships, treating the latter "as one treats other material," or as typical inputs in a production process.

While there may be several contenders for contemporary utopias in various stages of development, of particular relevance here is the politics of happiness and wellbeing analysed in William Davies' *The Happiness Industry.* Reflecting on this phenomenon will serve both to clarify Arendt's critique of modern political programmes of fabrication for our contemporary context and, because of the historical and thematic parallels, to illuminate our subsequent discussions of Dostoevsky and Kharms.[49]

The attempt to measure and maximise happiness has a long history in utilitarian thought, but the recent clamour across this issue in industry and government seems to be related to the belated realisation that unhappy people are less productive as well as expensive to treat and medicate. Davies' text examines this history in light of contemporary attempts to develop an objective science of happiness as a "measurable, visible, improvable entity."[50] He describes how new neuroscience claims to have identified "how happiness and unhappiness are physically inscribed in the brain," and how happiness economists are using ever-growing accumulations of statistical data to ascertain, "which regions, lifestyles, forms of employment or types of consumption generate the greatest mental wellbeing."[51] "Our hopes," he writes, "are being strategically channelled into this quest for happiness, in an objective, measurable, administered sense."[52] Davies explicitly describes this project as utopian.[53] He means 'utopian' in the simple pejorative sense that it is a pipe dream, albeit a dangerous one, but we can also interpret it as utopian in Arendt's sense, as an attempt to fabricate a desirable political future. Davies argues, however, that to treat happiness in this way is to misunderstand that humans are social and relational beings who live, speak, and act *with others,* and not just biological entities. This too is of course consonant with Arendt. He focuses on our use of psychological language, including the word 'happiness', arguing after Wittgenstein that psychological attributes apply to the person *as a whole*.[54] An attribute like happiness does not lie *inside* someone, as a fact to be discovered, like their body temperature; rather,

> I know what happiness means, because I know how to describe it in others, and to notice it in my own life. But this is an unusual type of language. If one ever believes that 'happiness' refers to an objective thing, be it inside you, or inside me, I have misunderstood the word.[55]

The irony, Davies suggests, is that partly due to this error of spurious reduction, the happiness and wellbeing agenda may be generating the very conditions that it seeks to resolve, because it forms part of a wider socio-political culture that isolates and disempowers people.

> The fundamental question is what it means for society, for politics or for personal life stories, to operate according to certain forms of psychological and neurological explanation. A troubling possibility is that it is precisely the behaviourist and medical view of the mind – as some sort of internal bodily organ or instrument which suffers silently – that locks us into the forms of passivity associated with depression and anxiety in the first place. A society designed to measure and manage fluctuations in pleasure and pain, as Bentham envisaged, may be set up for more instances of 'mental breakdown' than one designed to help people speak and participate.[56]

He argues that treating the mind or an individual brain as a kind of "decontextualised, independent entity" that fails internally, without reference to the material and social conditions under which such breakdowns occur, "is a symptom of the very culture that produces a great deal of unhappiness today" (one of political and economic disempowerment).[57] When combined with a stifling culture of competitive success and optimism, this cannot but produce the reverse of what

46. Ibid., 8.

47. Steele, 375.

48. Bauman,13; cf. Hodgson, 7-9.

49. In addition to Hodgson's efficient market paradise (the realisation of which seems admittedly more distant than a few decades ago), one could mention the bureaucratic utopia explored in David Graeber's recent *Utopia of Rules.*

50. Davies, 3.

51. Ibid., 4-5.

52. Ibid., 4-5.

53. Ibid., 140ff.

54. Ibid., 263-264.

55. Ibid., 264.

56. Ibid., 249.

57. Ibid., 250.

is desired. He writes,

> It is only in a society that makes generalised, personalised growth the ultimate virtue that a disorder of generalised, personalised collapse will become inevitable. And so a culture which values only optimism will produce pathologies of pessimism; an economy built around competitiveness will turn defeatism into a disease.[58]

I regard this analysis as an important fleshing out of the lines of Anne Boyer quoted in the introduction, that we "grow sick and depressed and motionless under all the merciless and circulatory conditions of all the capitalist *yes*…" As such, it relates to my main theme of generative refusal: Davies identifies a contemporary political phenomenon that invites creative interruption. Moreover, he recognises that any solution must be political in the fullest sense, by which he means based on "whole new models of organisation, and not simply new techniques of management."[59]

III. "Two times two is four is…the beginning of death"

I mentioned that utopian attempts to measure and maximise happiness had a history. So does the critique and refusal of that endeavour. For a prescient example of the latter, we can turn first to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, a text that offers its own idiosyncratic critique of utopian formulas.[60] It can be read partly as a response to the ideas of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who saw a utopian future for humanity in the political enactment of the principles of 'rational egoism', an adaptation of the enlightened self-interest of the English utilitarians.[61] Chernyshevsky held, among other things, that universal happiness could be attained through a fully rationalised and scientifically administered social order. In 1863, he published a novel, *What is to be done?*, which was a vehicle for some of these utopian ideas (Lenin was an avid devotee of the book, and Joseph Frank once wrote that it, far more than Marx's Capital, "supplied the emotional dynamic that eventually went to make the Russian Revolution.")[62] A year later, Dostoevsky published *Notes from Underground*, with Chernyshevsky's novel squarely in his sights.

The *Notes* is an idiosyncratic memoir of an unnamed, unreliable narrator, divided into two parts, which are in reverse order chronologically. The second part relays certain events from the narrator's earlier life, which have various effects on him. This can be read as parodying the style and plot of *What is to be done?* The first part is a rambling diatribe against certain social and philosophical ideas given by the narrator who, in the interim between these parts, has become so disillusioned with the world that he has gone to live underground. This section incorporates a satirically exaggerated but nevertheless substantive critique of the utilitarian and utopian vision of Chernyshevsky and others like him, such as Charles Fourier.[63]

It is relevant to mention that London's Crystal Palace, which had been built a decade or so earlier to house the Great Exhibition, was an important symbol of utopianism in Chernyshevsky's *What is to be done?* Marshall Berman has explained that, for Chernyshevsky, the Palace represented:

> a highly developed, super-technological, self-contained exurban world, comprehensively planned and organised…more thoroughly controlled and administered and hence 'more pleasant and advantageous than any modern metropolis could ever be.[64]

Berman notes that this reflected Russian fantasies of Western modernisation much more than it did the reality of the Crystal Palace. But with Chernyshevsky's fantasies in mind, in the *Notes*, Dostoevsky has his bad-tempered narrator refer to the Crystal Palace as a "chicken coop."[65] He refers to it as such because of the reduced, deterministic image of humanity that underlies those fantasies. He describes the envisioned utopian future as follows:

> …all human actions will… be calculated according to…laws, mathematically, like a table of logarithms, up to 108,000, and entered into a calendar …it is then that new economic relations will come, quite ready-made, and calculated with mathematical precision, so that all possible questions will vanish in an instant, essentially because they will have been given all possible answers. Then the crystal palace will get built.[66]

Dostoevsky's narrator is indignant at the prospect of such a future. He is indignant because this wish to make over society for the sake of an objective, rationally secured happiness, presupposes a dead and inert conception of what humans are. As Richard Pevear has put it, at issue here is "the question of the very nature of the human being who was to be so forcibly made happy."[67] "Who wants

58. Ibid., 177.

59. Ibid., 251.

60. As the quotation suggests, Dostoevsky associate utopianism with deathliness. See also his *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*.

61. Frank, Dostoevsky, xvi, 414ff.

62. Frank,"Chernyshevsky," 68. This line now appears on numerous editions of the book.

63. Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 423. As Frank explains, it is not that the Underground Man should be read as a simple hero, and certainly not as a mere mouthpiece for Dostoevsky. Rather, he represents the tortured end point of someone who has tried to accept Chernyshevsky's materialist determinism intellectually, while simultaneously rejecting it on the emotional-intuitive level of moral conscience (414-416, 421).

64. Berman, 244.

65. Dostoevsky, 35-36.

66. Ibid., 24-25.

67. Pevear, xiv.

to want according to a little table?" the narrator protests; "Isn't there something that not only has not been but even cannot be fitted into any classification?" If human life is reducible to these formulas, to "two times two is four," he avers, then there is "nothing left – not only to do, but even to learn. […] Two times two is four is no longer life, gentleman, but the beginning of death."[68]

In a fit of economic wordplay, he suggests that there exists a "profit" which escapes these calculations; a profit, indeed, "remarkable because it destroys all our classifications and constantly shatters all the systems elaborated by the lovers of mankind for the happiness of mankind." This "most profitable profit" is precisely the freedom to refuse to do what one is told is rational and in one's best interests by those who claim the authority to do so, and it is part and parcel of what it means to be human to make such refusals. To see this inclination as an irrational anomaly, a departure from the truly (scientifically, measurably) human, as something to be corrected or eradicated, is––as he puts it––to reduce humankind to the status of a "sprig in an organ barrel," a cog in a machine, or to make this more crudely contemporary, a data point in an algorithmic system of happiness maximisation.[69] Returning to Arendt, we might say that it is to edit out plurality and natality from human affairs by turning the human person into a predictable creature. The larger point, learned not only from Arendt but the example of history, is that human affairs cannot be made to fit these kinds of formulas without violence. Commenting on Dostoevsky's *Notes,* Rowan Williams has for this reason described the attempt to amputate or delete "unmanageable desires" for the sake of an abstract peace or happiness as the "quintessential form of 'modern' violence."[70]

Davies' book *The Happiness Industry* explains why it may be necessary today to resist attempts to 'maximise' our well-being.[71] In the *Notes*, there is a comically overblown passage describing this kind of impulse in a person:

> Shower him with all earthly blessings, drown him in happiness completely, over his head, so that only bubbles pop up on the surface of happiness, as on water; give him such economic satisfaction that he no longer has anything left to do at all except sleep, eat gingerbread, and worry about the noncessation of world history – and it is here, just here, that he, this man, out of sheer ingratitude, out of sheer lampoonery, will do something nasty. He will even risk his gingerbread, and wish on purpose for the most pernicious nonsense, the most non-economical meaninglessness, solely in order to mix into all this positive good sense his own pernicious, fantastical element.[72]

A person will do this, the narrator contends, in order to "confirm to himself" that "human beings are still human beings and not piano keys."[73] Somewhat mischievously, I wish to interpret this passage, with all its ridiculous bloody-mindedness and hopeless recalcitrance, as describing at least in some respects that moment of rupture - of interruption and disruption - that is inherent in Arendt's notion of action, as described in the first section above. The will to refuse ready-made blueprints for human happiness is one way in which plurality and natality burst into the open in human affairs.

IV. Ludic interruption, lived and written

This thought brings me, finally, to Daniil Kharms, a Russian writer of the early twentieth century, whose life for my purposes embodies Arendtian action in just this sense: action in a playfully interruptive and ridiculous but ultimately serious mode.[74] Arendt held that narrative has a "redemptive power."[75] This is because, as Maša Mrovlje has neatly remarked, "by endowing with significance particular, single events and gestures, stories are able to affirm human freedom as a source of worldly events."[76] As such, I have given the following paragraphs a loosely narrative form.

***

Daniil Kharms was born Daniil Yuvachev in St Petersburg in 1905. In 1924, the same year Petrograd––as St Petersburg had come to be known in the meantime––was renamed again, as Leningrad, Yuvachev decided to rename himself, Daniil Kharms, a moniker which he seems to have derived from the English word 'charm'.[77] He became involved in avant-garde Leningrad literary circles, and in 1928 founded an art collective called the OBERIU (a nonsense word).[78] This did not, however, prove a good career move. The 1920s and 30s were a period of intense centralisation of Soviet culture, one in which the official aesthetic ideology of Socialist Realism was enforced with increasing dogmatism. Kharms' artistic outlook was, moreover, at loggerheads with the new Soviet reality, which sought the enactment of a thoroughly materi-

68. Dostoevsky, 34.

69. Ibid., 34-35.

70. Williams, 19.

71. E.g. Davies, 270-276.

72. Dostoevsky, 30. Jean Baudrillard famously used the first part of this passage as an epigraph in his book *The Consumer Society.*

73. Dostoevsky, 30.

74. The account of Kharms' life given below relies heavily on Matvei Yankelevich's excellent introductory essay to *Today I Wrote Nothing*. See also, Roberts, 33-44.

75. Benhabib, "Redemptive Power."

76. Mrovlje, 74.

77. Yankelevich, 19.

78. Cf. Roberts.

alist, mechanistic, scientific-utilitarian vision for society, not too distant from that which Dostoevsky's Underground Man lampoons in the *Notes*. In contrast to this, Yankelevich has described the guiding principles of Kharms' literary work as follows:

> Logical connections are thrown out, chance seeks revenge on received order, violence begets violence with neither motive nor authorial reprimand, and magic and nonsense prevail over reason. Kharms uses the language of sequence and logic only to undermine it.[79]

For example, the following passage from a story called *Sinfonia #2* is instructive:

> *The incident was really quite typical, but still curious, for thanks to me Marina Petrovna went completely bald, like the palm of your hand. It happened like this: One day I came over to see Marina Petrovna and, bang!, she went bald. And that's all.*[80]

Kharms was disciplined by the Soviet authorities. The members of his group were referred to as "reactionary jugglers" and "literary hooligans," and their poetry was labeled "counter-revolutionary."[81] He made ends meet by publishing work written for children. In 1931, however, he and several of his friends, were arrested and charged with conducting "anti-Soviet activities in the field of children's literature." Kharms' writing for children was deemed anti-Soviet, "because of its absurd logic and its refusal to preach materialist Soviet values." During interrogation, Kharms essentially admitted that his work had the aim of "distancing his readers" from the present reality; he confessed that he "consciously renounced contemporary reality," admitting that his philosophy was "deeply hostile to the present." Yankelevich explains that, "The utilitarian ideology of Soviet Russia, and, arguably, the technologically oriented thrust of modernity were anathema to Kharms' worldview."[82]

It was not just through his work that Kharms' provoked suspicion, but also through his unpredictable and bizarre behaviour. The following passage of biography is instructive:

> Public displays of decadent and purposefully alogical behaviour earned Kharms a reputation in Leningrad cultural circles. It was hard not to notice this tall and striking man parading down the main boulevards, dressed as a tweedy English dandy complete with hunting cap and calabash pipe… Rumours, some of which were later elevated to the status of legend, circulated about his unusual behaviour. He brought his own silverware, stamped with noble insignias, to proletarian pubs. He was prone to interrupt the flow of foot traffic on Nevsky Prospect by suddenly taking a prostrate position on the pavement, then, after a crowd had gathered around to see what was the matter, getting up and walking away as though nothing had happened. He kept a large machine at home, which he made of found scrap. When asked what it did, Kharms would retort, 'Nothing. It's just a machine.'[83]

Kharms had a strong nose for the ridiculous, in life and in writing. Roberts notes that some of his contemporaries saw him as continuing in the long Russian tradition of the holy fool, whose self-mockery "could reveal the stupidity of the world."[84] And indeed, Kharms is also described as having had "a religious sense of responsibility for words… he seemed convinced that he would answer for them before a higher authority than Soviet censorship or the political police."[85] This is to say that his was undoubtedly a very serious form of play. The major tools of his prose works are digression and interruption, that is, an abrupt and unexpected change of course or cessation of travel, which disrupts the predictable, linear flow of time and the link between cause and effect, elevating the moment of surprise. With such tools, Yankelevich writes, "[Kharms] attempts to save literature from its enslavement to progress," and also make us aware of our own "mechanization […] our weakness for unthinkingly following predetermined patterns of action and perception that limit our confrontation with the world, blinding us to differences."[86]

Much of Kharms' work would now be called micro-fiction. The best way of describing his little stories is to say that they trip you up.[87] In some of them nothing of note happens, and it is their banality or the abruptness of their conclusion that befuddles. For example, a story called *The Meeting*:

> *Now, one day, a man went to work, and on the way he met another man, who, having bought a loaf of Polish bread, was heading back home where he came from.*
>
> *And that's it, more or less.*[88]

In others, the story doesn't get going at all, because the author cannot recall the name of the animal he wants to tell you about, or stops early because he has lost his inkwell, or falls off his chair. In *An*

79. Yankelevich, 16.
80. Kharms, 270.
81. Yankelevich, 24-25.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Roberts, 37.
85. Yankelevich, 15.
86. Ibid., 15; 30.
87. Yankelevich, 27.
88. Kharms, 69.

Unsuccessful Play, five characters come out on stage one after the other, but each are unable to get through more than a few words before vomiting and running off, at which point the audience is informed that the theatre will be closing early due to illness.[89] Yet in others, a frantic series of apparently unrelated events are listed in staccato fashion––such as in the story, *Events*––or the author describes strange happenings that mingle the banal with the dreamlike, frightening, and miraculous.[90] For example, a story called *How One Man Fell to Pieces:*

> *"They say all the good babes are wide-bottomed. Oh, I just love big-bosomed babes. I like the way they smell." Saying this he began to grow taller and, reaching the ceiling, he fell apart into a thousand little spheres.*
>
> *Panteley the janitor came by and swept up all these spheres into a dustpan, which he usually used to gather horse manure, and took the spheres away to some distant part of the yard.*
>
> *All the while the sun continued to shine as before, and puffy ladies continued, as before, to smell enchantingly.*[91]

As the 1930s progressed and the political atmosphere in Russia darkened, Kharms found it ever harder to publish his work, and became gradually more destitute.[92] He wrote, like many of his contemporaries, 'for the desk drawer', his audience limited to his wife and a small group of friends. Yet he is said to have met often "with artists and fellow writers, and also enjoyed the company of 'natural thinkers', men living on the margins or even on the streets, whose unusual ideas and manner of behaviour Kharms found exciting precisely because they were out of sync with the norm."[93] In 1939, in a diary entry that brings to mind a similar emphasis in Arendt, he wrote that, "Only miracle interests me."[94] Yankelevich writes that, for Kharms, "chance itself is a transcendent category; error and accident, the very glue of the universe, constitute manifestations in this world of the miraculous."[95]

Kharms continued to embrace idiosyncratic behaviour, developing––apparently on purpose––a tic; a gesture that acquaintances likened to a snort or a hiccup. Yankelevich again:

> Like the interruptions in his stories, Kharms self-inflicted tic brought the independent moment into the foreground and broke up the regular flow of time. It seems that this was just one more way that Kharms sought to avoid a 'mechanised' life: Surprise and unpredictability created, in the otherwise dull continuum, a 'slight error' – something critically important to Kharms's aesthetic theory, and which, by extension, he applied to the real world.[96]

The outbreak of the Second World War meant that anyone with a police record was picked up by the secret service. Under analysis, Kharms was deemed too psychiatrically unfit to be useful, and was eventually sent to a prison hospital. There he died of starvation on 2 February 1942, during the blockade of Leningrad.

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Kharms is not of course a 'great' historical figure. Of his work for adults, only two early poems were published during his lifetime, and even today he is far from well-known. I have nevertheless chosen this 'reactionary juggler' as my exemplar of Arendtian action because of his marginality, rather than in spite of it, as this poses a particular challenge in relation to Arendt's framework.

Among various criticisms made of the latter, two stand out here. The first is that in setting up her hierarchy of action, work, and labour, Arendt denigrates labour and work, presenting labour as sub-human and work as irredeemably violent, relegating both to a private, sub-political sphere.[97] One can manoeuvre Arendt at least some way out of this problem. She writes, and this is sometimes overlooked, that although labour, work, and action are conceptually distinct, they are nevertheless in practice more or less interwoven. She states, for example, that, "An element of labouring is present in all human activities, even the highest, insofar as they are undertaken as 'routine' jobs by which we make our living and keep ourselves alive."[98] She also says it will be impossible to be engaged in action all the time, so a good human life could never be composed purely of that.[99] In other words, the force of this charge rests on the extent to which one interprets it as a rigid edifice, as opposed to something more fluid or porous.

A second but related criticism is that Arendt's elevation of action encourages an 'elitist' view of history, attached to an antique notion of glory, with a narrative "populated by the deeds of great men",

89. Ibid., 70.

90. Ibid., 46.

91. Ibid., 231.

92. Yankelevich, 25. His commitment to his artistic cause never waned, however; in a diary entry in Autumn 1937, at the height of Stalin's purges, he wrote, "I am interested only in nonsense; only in that which has no practical meaning. Life interests me only in its most absurd manifestations" (11).

93. Ibid., 25.

94. Ibid., 25-26.

95. Ibid., 29.

96. Ibid., 26.

97. See e.g. Benhabib, Reluctant Modernism, 123-124, 125-126, 157 – on Arendt's "phenomenological essentialism"; Hughes, 226-227; Sayers, 117-118; discussions throughout Honig; for a good reflection on how some of these questions relate to Arendt's attitude to nature, see Bowring.

98. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 173.

99. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 198-199.

and the stories of the politically and socially marginalized rendered somewhat irrelevant.[100] This is linked to the first criticism, since it has to do with how porous her categories of activity and the spheres to which they relate can be said to be, and specifically here of whether her public sphere is too strictly bounded. Voice has clearly summarised the issue:

> Arendt's public sphere is, in principle, open to all citizens equally but the facts overwhelmingly demonstrate that the poor and the marginalized are denied access to the public sphere and so cannot speak as equals with their fellow citizens. If politics cannot be concerned with social issues and thus with matters of access to the public sphere, then Arendt's idea of unconstrained deliberation between equal citizens is seriously jeopardized. On the other hand, if politics does allow in social concerns, then Arendt's quarantine of the political and the social is breached.[101]

I have suggested Kharms as an unorthodox representative of action as one way of responding to this difficulty. He is someone who, as regards the course of Soviet history at least, had an unquestionably insignificant role, and whose freedom to speak and act publicly was gradually diminished, until it was snuffed out completely. One commentator has remarked that, "Kharms and Vvedensky," (Aleksandr, another member of OBERIU), "were stripped of their voices, becoming 'marginal figures'…isolated from their own culture and their own epoch; therefore they continue to hold an unstable position, are continuously on the edge."[102] This makes Kharms a challenging exemplar of action. He lived under a regime that sought, in increasingly totalitarian fashion, to fabricate a utopian society grounded in 'scientific', utilitarian ideals. That regime gradually took away his voice and ultimately his life. Yet his refusal to conform to that vision and those ideals, in both his life and his work, are, I would argue, a striking embodiment of the interruptive character of action in Arendt's sense. Refusing a political order that in its violent pursuit of utopian goals treated people as grist for the mill of history, and sought explicitly to fabricate a New (predictable) Soviet Man and to remove those citizens who would not be so engineered, Kharms made himself into a living interruption, and his strangely comic literary work is guided by the same interruptive logic. This had a profoundly serious purpose, which must be called political: publicly, for as long as possible, to resist assimilation to an order of the world that would, in the end, do away with human difference and creativity. In often playful and humorous ways, his actions and writings illuminate the relationship of plurality and natality with rupture that Arendt explores, within his own limited context and to his own cost.

I would hold that using Kharms in this way is broadly consistent with many aspects of Arendt's description of action. I am less interested, though, in remaining strictly faithful to her concept, than I am with extending her best insights in a way that clarifies the political significance of marginalised figures such as Kharms. To the extent that Kharms can be taken to embody action in her sense, so might many others historically and today who may not be great historical actors, and whose access to the public sphere may be precarious or threatened, but whose small acts of creative and generative resistance and refusal nonetheless have real political and ethical weight. This seems a worthwhile modification.

That Kharms life and work might now be understood in this manner was far from inevitable, however. His notebooks would have been lost during the Second World War were it not for the efforts of some loyal friends, who saved and kept them hidden until the 1960s, when they were smuggled out to the West. His marginality reveals in an extreme way, therefore, the contingencies that Arendt acknowledges are inherent in all human action: that we cannot know in advance or control the final meaning of what we do, because that will depend on others.[103] Indeed, we can only consider Kharms' story in the way we have because it is long over. None of the meaning that we might now find in his life would have been transparent to him, and to him none of it would have seemed destined. Far from it. He often struggled to write. One of his more melancholy notes from January 1937 reads, "Today I wrote nothing. Doesn't matter"––and if it might be tempting to read that flippantly it appears alongside prayers for divine inspiration that are far from flippant.[104] Arendt grasps the ambiguities here when she writes, "Although everybody starts his own story, at least his own life-story, nobody is the author or producer of it. And yet, it is precisely in these stories that the actual meaning of human life finally reveals itself."[105] If action in the sense that we have been discussing it is unlike other more reliable modes of human activity, such as fit under Arendt's categories of labour and work, it is for the simple reason that, since we live in a world with others, with conflicting wills and intentions, our actions may become more or less than we intend them to be. It is a continual temptation, individually and collectively, to devise schemes to minimise this unpredictability, to increase our level of control. Yet for our shared life to flourish we must resist this impulse, being vigilant to allow room for what cannot be assimilated or anticipated.

Conclusion: Roominess

100. Passerin d'Entreves, 96-97; cf. Voice, 50; Canovan, "Contradictions," 5ff; Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179-180, 198-199.

101. Voice, 51. In restricting her public sphere Arendt is arguably too heavily indebted to antique notions of the *polis* as a public space of deliberation, not of production or consumption. Cf. Passerin d'Entreves, 84-85, 95-97.

102. Rosanna Giaquinta, quoted in Yankelevich, 40 n41.

103. As Arendt puts it, the disclosure that accompanies action can "almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose" (*Human Condition,* 178).

104. Kharms, 120.

105. Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," 180.

I began this essay by quoting Anne Boyer, that "there is a lot of room for a meaning inside a 'no' spoken in the tremendous logic of a refused order of the world." We have returned to this theme of 'roominess', in a different sense, above at its end. A benefit of examining Arendt's theory of action through the lens of unpredictability and rupture is that it foregrounds the limits of human political power in a shared world of plurality and natality. It also foregrounds the political temptation, strongly felt throughout the modern age, to try to break beyond those limits, sometimes with good intentions, such as for the sake of stability or general happiness. Arendt's warning is that this risks an ethically and politically inhuman outcome, because of what it must suppress through violence of one kind or another. To allow room becomes, against this background, a distinct political task. In this, Arendt's account of action contains within it a paradoxical moment of restraint or renunciation––a moment of active passivity or passive activity––since to allow room means to relinquish control, or a claim to control, over some space into which others may then speak and act. What happens when this kind of space is threatened by schemes that would, giving in to the aforementioned temptation, make claim to a more totalising mastery over human affairs? Through a variety of sources we have explored how refusing to be conformed to such schemes, finding ways to interrupt them, can also be actions in Arendt's sense, allowing for a roominess of another kind. This is the mode of generative refusal Boyer describes, which in negating one order of the world simultaneously affirms other, more capacious meanings of being human––a 'no' that has room within it for a different and broader 'yes'. This is how I interpret the ludic interruptions and refusals made by Kharms and embodied, to a lesser extent, by passages in Dostoevsky's *Notes*. Kharms' small deeds of interruption and the interruptive strangeness of his enigmatic stories were ways of resisting the formulaic reduction of human affairs, and of allowing room for all within it that was unpredictable and could not be so reduced. His was a serious, luminous kind of play in a darkening time. Insofar as the present continues to be afflicted by programmes that seek to reduce the human to a predictable thing, such as the austere tech-led utopianism of Davies' 'happiness industry', one political task will be to find creative ways to refuse and interrupt those programmes in order similarly to allow room.

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The Rhetoric of Demonic Repetition: The Two Deaths of Osama Bin Laden and Other Stories

Tom Grimwood

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ABSTRACT

A number of writers have recently challenged the notion of the demonic as mere superstition, arguing for a need to understand the demonic in terms of the often-obscured ways in which it operates in relation to contemporary thought and critique. Building on this, this paper offers an analysis of the demonic as a rhetorical concept. Moving beyond the notion of the demonic as simply a trope at the disposal of a speaker or writer, the paper explores how the expression of the demonic performs a more foundational, repetitive, and indeed, deceptively banal role in shaping the discourses it inhabits. This precedes and frames the ethico-political discourses on evil commonly associated with demonology today.

Keywords:
Demonic;
Rhetoric;
Repetition;
Media;
Cliché;
Evil

The Rhetoric of Demonic Repetition: The Two Deaths of Osama Bin Laden and Other Stories

1. Rethinking the Demonic

Responding to Gershom Scholem's claim that her phrase the 'banality of evil' had become a mere slogan, losing any effective contribution to moral or political debate, Hannah Arendt wrote:

> It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. […] It is "thought-defying," as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality."[1]

This is, of course, a reiteration of Arendt's famous claims on the agency of evil. One can perform evil deeds, she argues, without being intrinsically evil; this is because contemporary evil can exist in the most ordinary and banal of activities. As such, she alludes to the demonic here only as a redundant trope – an aesthetic and mythical manifestation of the 'depths' of evil which does not, she argues, exist in contemporary culture. But if the demonic is redundant to the question of evil, there is a sense in which it is rendered banal as well, in the sense that any invocation of 'radical evil' itself becomes tired, lifeless and cartoonish. The problem is that this banality does not emerge within the acts of agents, as Arendt focuses on. Rather, the concept of the demonic has always been one to exhibit a fundamental complexity regarding the relationship between the appearance of evil and the medium through which it emerges. Perhaps, then, the banality of the demonic requires separate attention from the banality of evil.

Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that as the forms of medial communication grow and intensify throughout 21st century, a number of writers have engaged with the question of what 'function' the demonic has to play in the 21st century.[2] While working across a range of disciplines, these writings all challenge the idea of the demonic as mere superstition or a symbol of evil. Edwardo Cruz, for example, returns to Paul Tillich's theological argument that the demonic is a force of destructive creativity, existing dialectically between the 'ground' and the 'abyss.'[3] Eugene Thacker has considered the demonic in ontological terms: suggesting that, in place of a philosophy of horror, we consider the 'horror of philosophy' that links the themes of the demonology with investigations into object-oriented ontology.[4] Simona Forti's *The New Demons* argues for a 'post-Dostoevsky' model of demonology in the face of the de-legitimising of the assumptions that promote 'the good' in contemporary culture.[5] Ewan Fernie has applied a literary focus to the demonic as 'the paradox of life that is opposed to life,'[6] while Adam Kotsko re-inserts the devil as a constitutive form within the political theology of neoliberalism.[7] Of course, these cross-disciplinary reappraisals are not gathered together under any pretence of unified view or intent. However, in spite of their seemingly arbitrary collection, these writings nevertheless all press two distinct themes. First, they share an understanding that within the complexities of 21st century Western culture, simplistic representations of the demonic must be interrogated and critiqued; a task that necessarily invokes the *performance* of demonic tropes and figures within our discourses, rather than the agential and moral use of such tropes which Arendt invokes. Second, they present the demonic, not as an external or radical 'other' to their respective disciplines, but rather as a destabilising force at the *centre* of theology, ontology, and morality. Taken together, these themes suggest that the topic of the demonic challenges the modes of traditional etic analysis. After

1. Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, ed. Marie Luise Knott, trans. Anthony David (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) 209.

2. Eduardo Cruz, 'The Demonic for the Twenty-First Century.' *Currents in Theology and Mission* 3:4, 2001, 420-428, 428.

3. Ibid.

4. Eugene Thacker, *In The Dust Of This Planet* (London: Zero Books, 2011); *Starry Speculative Corpse* (London: Zero Books, 2015); *Tentacles Longer Than Night* (London: Zero Books, 2015).

5. Simona Forti, *New Demons: Rethinking Power and Evil Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

6. Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), 22.

7. Adam Kotsko. *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2018).

all, establishing the basis of a critical distance between the 'knowing' subject and the 'known' object is problematic when that object is characterised by deception and mutation of the very categories the subject uses to 'know.'[8] Consequently, the style and delivery of their critiques often respond to the demands of the concept itself.[9] In this sense, the fact that contemporary concerns for the demonic and its relation to evil emerge in somewhat arbitrary ways is constitutive of its rhetoric.

In this paper, I continue these themes by focussing on the rhetorical performance of demonic repetition. In keeping with the broad directions sketched above, my interest is less with how the demonic is *used* as a trope (for example, the framing of particular individuals or groups demonically in order to incite fear or hatred). Instead, I am interested in how the characteristics of this repetition interlink with the media which carries its emergence, and the resulting 'rhetorical transformation' which 'discourse experiences,'[10] outside of any individual agency or single speaking subject.[11] As such, in order to understand the contemporary demonic rhetorically, we need to look beyond mere trope, allegory or ornament at the disposal of a speaker. Instead, the expression of the demonic performs a more foundational – indeed, deceptively *banal* – role in shaping the discourses it inhabits, encouraging forms of nihilistic impasse at the expense of creative approaches to moral and political events. In doing so, the demonic expresses a relationship between the efficacy, trust and suspicion that the meaning of an event carries; a relationship characterised by what Boris Groys terms 'sub-medial suspicion.'[12] This relationship is embedded within the fleeting, theatrical *performances* by which the demonic appears in the rhetorical sense: performances which involve the interlinking of creativity, destruction, repetition and resemblance. This rhetorical aspect, I suggest, precedes and frames the ethico-political discourses on evil commonly associated with demonology today.

Recognising both the performative nature of the demonic and the wariness of its effects on knowledge that scholarship has raised, I want to explore this rhetoric through three demonic 'scenes,' which serve as fleeting illustrations of three significant aspects of demonic repetition for rhetoric: its misconception as a sign of difference; its paradoxical creation of sincerity; and its subsequent effect on the power of critique. In referencing these scenes –Lanz's argument linking the demonic to the triteness of gossip; the reporting of the death of Osama Bin Laden; and the *Black Mirror* episode 'White Bear' – my purpose is not to provide in-depth analysis of each performance, but to use them as waypoints for drawing together an involution of wider concepts supporting their *persuasiveness*; a persuasiveness which depends in part on the pace of their appearance and disappearance. While maintaining this pace, I will attempt to demonstrate how, within these small and erstwhile insignificant moments, the rhetoric of demonic repetition disrupts its own conventional framing as a form of radical evil.

2. Demonic Gossip

In a little-known paper written for the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1936, Henry Lanz begins with the striking claim: his paper was 'an attempt to prove the existence of the Devil.' He continues:

> The mingled absurdity and bigotry of such an undertaking in the twentieth century, in the very flush of the age of scientific enlightenment, will perhaps seem less striking if one considers the vagueness that prevails in our views with regard to the gentleman whose existence I desire to demonstrate. For just who is, what is, the Devil?[13]

Rather than dismiss the Devil as a collective noun for a whole range of past superstitions, Lanz instead identifies its 'vagueness' as a constitutive aspect of its activity, which places it firmly in the modern age. Thus, to prove the existence of the Devil, Lanz suggests we recognise that the Devil is a 'surface phenomenon'; 'one-sided, only skin deep, with no real background – aimless evil.' But – and here is the clever twist – 'aimless and idle talk is gossip.'[14] Hence, the point of his paper, entitled 'The Metaphysics of Gossip,' is to argue that the phenomenon of idle chatter should be seen as an ethical affair: not only because it often involves pointing out the rights and wrongs of other's actions, but more importantly because the language of gossip refuses to be drawn into narrative or teleology – it is carried by slowly mutating repetition – and thus remains, in Lanz's words, a 'malady' of our age.[15]

If Lanz's long-forgotten argument seems somewhat tenuous, it also provides a starting point for this inquiry for two reasons. The first reason is that, while insouciant in its approach, it nevertheless

8. As Michel De Certeau introduces his masterful reading of the 17th century *Possession at Loudun*, a 'diabolical crisis' 'is not merely an object of historical curiosity. It is the confrontation [...] of a society with the certainties it is losing and those it is attempting to acquire.' De Certeau, *The Possession at Louden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

9. For example, Thacker's work draws upon the styles of medieval *quæstio*, meditation, and short, partially connected interventions across historical periods; Vilém Flusser's work on *The History of the Devil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) does not present a linear argument but a 'spiral', structured, in Simone Osthoff's words, 'according to the way the devil exercises his influence upon men' via uncanny repetition (Osthoff, *Performing the Archive* (New York: Atropos Press, 2009), 66).

10. Laurie Gries, 'On Rhetorical Becoming.' In Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle (eds.) *Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things* (Alabama: Alabama University Press, 2016), 155-170, 158.

11. Jenna N. Hanchey, 'Toward a relational politics of representation.' *Review of Communication* 18:4, 2018, 265-283.

12. Boris Groys, *Under Suspicion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

13. Henry Lanz, 'The Metaphysics of Gossip.' *International Journal of Ethics* 46:4, 1936, 492-499, 492.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 496.

posits an important relationship between demonic repetition and the banality of representation, which anticipates a number of questions around how the rhetoric of the demonic embeds itself within contemporary media. The second reason is the way in which Lanz's attempt to remove the rhetorical dimension of gossip and replace it with the ethical *fails*, as it is this failure which highlights the specific problems posed by the rhetorical aspects of the demonic.

Lanz's alignment of the demonic with gossip recasts the traditional identifies a relationship between the demonic and the apparent banality of the 'surface phenomena' of modern culture. This relationship was articulated some 40 years later by Anton Zijderveld,[16] who's sociological study draws heavily on Walter Benjamin's concept of aura in order to link a particular type of repetition in social interaction – banal idiom, and the cliché – to secular society's loss of a fixed sense of authenticity or legitimacy which religion once provided. Modern society, according to Zijderveld's blunt meta-narrative, becomes clichégenic: in the absence of religious ritual, icon or cosmological destiny, we have changeable, malleable and ultimately facile points that adapt perfectly to the consumerist demand of capitalism. Meaning is reduced to function; in this sense, Nietzsche's seismic claim that *God is dead, and we have killed him* is a foundation of modernity not because of its literal deicide, but rather because, as a quotable tagline, it circulates and disseminates more readily around all kinds of discourses. Such an association between cliché and tyranny has, of course, been (ironically) pressed to the point of over-familiarity; expressed across an entire spectrum of ideas and ideologies, from Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay on 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch,' to Jonah Goldberg's book-length assault on liberalism in 2011, and many more in between.

This collapsing of the motifs of evil into repetitive banality is intrinsically linked to changes to the conditions by which they have traditionally been persuasive. The Western demonic traditionally emerges in the victorious wake of a divinity, a god-king, a Cartesian rationalist, a romantic hero, and so on. Zijderveld's 'clichégenic society,' however, renders this ultimate good as no longer restricted to the triumph of a singular or absolute reason, or innocence, or 'hypermoralization.'[17] Instead, the appearance of such an ultimate good is predicated on its persuasive use of repetition. Analysing figurative language in Western culture, Sarah Spence argues that while the stylistic element of anaphora was once used by rhetoricians as a point of emphasis, it has now 'migrated from superficial ornamentation to deep structural principle. […] It provides a glimpse of what differentiates our era from all others.'[18] The rhetorical principle of repetition is, Spence argues, the 'embedded trope' of the late modern age: rolling news, hashtags and re-tweets compress, carry and shape the binding truths of our time *by virtue of* their repetition, not in spite of it. But rather than destroy the aura of sincere or authentic experience, as Benjamin described, such repetitions create and maintain authenticity in ways that are both negative and positive, destructive and creative. Spence points, as an example, to the 9/11 Commission Report, which documents how it was only the crashing of the second plane that authenticated the first; it was only the repetition of the unthinkable that confirmed the singularity of the event itself. In this way, 'the second event has come to validate and identify the first, not the other way around; without the second the first is often misconstrued.'[19] Far from the destruction of 'the event' that Zijderveld prophesised, the singularity of an 'event' is never quite enough when it is necessarily predicated on anaphora. The ultimate good, which supersedes the demonic, instead depends for its claim to be 'ultimate' on enthymemes of repetition and amplification.

Lanz's paper thus asks an important question as to how decisive moral tropes such as 'evil' or 'the Devil' can be carried and shaped by the repetitive power of gossip. This question prefigures what we see in the 21st century when, for example, the news of Osama Bin Laden's death was broken over Twitter, announced simultaneously by a White House security expert *and* a former World Wrestling Entertainment star turned film actor.[20] Repeated images are both formative and effective in their representation of evil. We need only consider the rolling news coverage of the terrorist attacks in Paris on the 13th November 2015, which repeatedly showed the same, otherwise harmless clip of a van turning into a closed street: here, repetition both carries the event necessarily ('breaking news' is premised on a recurrent headline) and affectively (the repetition of the scene itself, which was perfectly mundane, only heightened the suspense around what was not being shown, or allowed to be shown).

But the second point of interest about Lanz's paper is precisely why his argument fails. This failure is, indeed, one which dogs many discussions on demonology: that is, while his conceptual starting point is the Devil, such signs, symbols and figures of individual demons are not identical to the dialectical performance of the *demonic* as a concept. In *The Interpretation of History* (coincidentally, published in the same year as Lanz's paper) Paul Tillich argues that if the demonic 'has not yet become an empty slogan, its basic meaning must always be retained: the unity of form-creating and

16. Anton Zijderveld, *On Clichés: The Supersedure of Meaning by Function in Modernity* (Sydney: Law Book Co of Australasia, 1979).

17. Forti, 2015, 178.

18. Sarah Spence, *Figuratively Speaking: Rhetoric and Culture from Quintilian to the Twin Towers* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 2007), 19.

19. Spence, 2007, 33.

20. See, for example, Brian Stelter, 'How the Bin Laden Announcement Leaked Out.' Available at http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/how-the-osama-announcement-leaked-out/?_r=0 accessed 18 May 2018; Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson's tweet remains viewable at https://twitter.com/TheRock/status/64877987341938688

form-destroying strength.'[21] This unity distinguishes the demonic from the Satanic, the latter being a mere 'destructive principle, inimical to meaning,' which 'has no actual existence, unlike the demonic;' and while this destructive negation is at work in the demonic, it is situated 'in connection with the positive, creative meaningful principle' rooted in the form of the demonic.[22] To take a form is a creative act; this simple distinction between form-creation and form-destruction comprises the basis of the demonic as a creative power. But Tillich also notes how the creative act of the demonic is often passed over (in what he terms 'religious' ages), or over-emphasised (in 'secular' ages).[23]

In this way, Lanz's identification of a *sign* – the Devil – immediately diverts his attention from the question of the *surface itself*; and more specifically, the medial form which carries that surface and how such surfaces interact and interconnect to create the appearance of meaning. Instead, a focus on the demon (in the singular) leads Lanz down what remains a familiar route: an identification of the demon as Other, and subsequently an analysis focusing on *difference*. Consider, for example, how works as diverse in content and aim as Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Rogin's *Ronald Reagan: The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, or Owen Jones' *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*,[24] all nevertheless deploy the figure of the demon in a similar commonplace position: representing an Other which is threatening but ultimately servile, even ridiculous; the pantomime 'devil' character, who audiences take pleasure in booing from the stage. Clearly, this Othering is a core part of Western demonology. But, as a *koinos topos*, the emphasis of this figure on difference (chronological, topological or cultural) fundamentally diverges from Lanz's initial conception of gossip (that is, the phenomena of circulated same-ness and medial repetition). This becomes a problem because of its subsequent effect on critique; in particular, a secondary 'othering' which often accompanies the demon-as-other commonplace. The act of exposing the dichotomies of 'good' and 'evil' contained within the sign of the demon necessarily seems to invoke its own dichotomies of rationality and irrationality: in this case, between intellectual critique and the passive consumption of modern demons. Prefiguring our next demonic scene, consider as an example Douglas Kellner's comments on the aftermath of 9/11:

> The discourse of good and evil can be appropriated by disparate and opposing groups and generates a highly dichotomous opposition, undermining democratic communication and consensus and provoking violent militaristic responses. It is assumed by both sides that "we" are the good, and the "Other" is wicked, an assertion that Bush made in his incessant assurance that the "evil-doers" of the "evil deeds" will be punished, and that the "evil one" will be brought to justice, implicitly equating bin Laden with Satan himself.[25]

Here, Kellner critiques the reduction of post-9/11 discourse to simplistic dichotomies of 'us' and 'them,' using these to highlight how the resurgence of crusading terminology and Just War re-invokes the Oriental demons of old. But at the same time, the force of his criticism leads to another reduction in the name of criticism itself: that is, one dichotomy (the creation of a good 'we' versus evil 'Other') is replaced with another (the active critic of this dichotomy, and its passive consumer). This rhetorical move is also seen in Lanz's proof of the devil, whereby he concludes that 'good' and 'evil' are appearances, not ultimate realities. As *appearances*, it is 'the artist' who can magnify the slipping of one into the other once they are embedded within idle chatter. For when gossip 'becomes artistic, far from degrading art to the level of mere chatter, it raises it to Olympic heights.'[26] In other words: in the hands of the expert (the artist, the critic, etc.), good things may come. But the nature of these good things – that is, what is actually 'good' about them – already seems to go beyond the initial sense of good as a 'mere appearance'. There is a complex repetition at work which underlies this re-introduction of the 'good'; a repetition obscured by the focus on the *production* of demonic signs.

In this sense, perhaps the problem with the use of 'the devil' as a rhetorical motif is the excessive amount of *clarity* which this figure lends to what is, in reality, a muddily polysemic field, saturated with multiple visual and cultural references. As Forti rightly argues, we are no longer in what she terms 'the Dostoevsky paradigm' regarding the problem of evil: '*wicked demons* on the one side and *absolute victims* on the other,' based around the 'desire for and will to death.'[27] Instead, Forti argues that such a paradigm of absolutes must be replaced by an understanding of 'mediocre demons' (p.9) that, far from being 'ultimate' are far more replicable and, as such, banal. In this way, Lanz is entirely correct to situate the demonic within the circulation of gossip.

21. Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 81.

22. Ibid., 81.

23. While Tillich still insisted that the demonic only made sense in the context of the ultimate goodness of the divine, and that such dialectic 'breaks down only before divinity, the possessed state before the state of grace, the destructive before redeeming fate,' (Ibid., 122) this, he concluded, was an event for eternity. In our own time, the demonic finds a reality in the capitalist free market, and the 'last great demonry of the present', nationalism – and there is, he suggested, no adequate response to this.

24. Stan Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 2011); Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan: The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Irvine: University of California Press, 1988); Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2012).

25. Douglas Kellner, '9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation: A Critique of Jihadist and Bush Media Politics.' *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1:1, 2004, 41-64, 47.

26. Lanz, 1936, 499.

27. Forti, 2015, 6.

However, he also maintains an attempt to reduce the demonic to a motif of difference – 'irrationality,' 'other,' etc. – and thus frames gossip as straightforwardly antithetical to proper thinking (when outside of the hands of experts, at least). But the simplification of the demonic to one, destructive meaning overlooks the creative role of simulation and repetition that gives the demonic its specific, and persistent, effect, across its cultural history. Such a creativity is not reducible to the production and exchange of signs but is rather embedded within the *preservation* and *circulation* of signs: that is, to borrow Forti's terms, the mediocrity of communication.

3. Death and Sincerity

This mediocrity is perhaps exemplified with the death of Osama Bin Laden. The figure of Bin Laden in Western media shows how, despite scientific enlightenment and multiple secularisation theses, demons very much occupy the 21st century Western imaginary. As a devil, Bin Laden calls forth apparitions of the oriental/occidental divide; narratives of past crusades raised and re-raised from the dead of the past, metamorphoses from freedom fighter to terrorist, and images of the classical Termagant figure in curious juxtaposition with emerging medial technologies. Both aesthetically and rhetorically, Bin Laden was an exemplar devil and, as such, is immersed in unwieldy relations of myth and narrative surrounding the figuring of difference.

However, I want to pick up on a very small part of this narrative: not the fact that Bin Laden was killed, but that he was killed (at least) twice. The two deaths emerged from two official reports of the event; on the 2nd May 2011, the White House counter-terrorism advisor John Brennan gave a relatively detailed, and immediate, account of the death; the next day, White House press secretary Jay Carney presented a different narrative. In the first, Bin Laden's wife had been killed whilst being used as a human shield by the armed terrorist; and the Navy SEALs were instructed to take him alive if possible. In the second, the wife was only injured, having rushed at the SEALs, and it was not clear – and highly unlikely – that Bin Laden was himself armed.

The first, and perhaps most obvious reading of this, is that one death simply corrected the other. The initial report was inaccurate, so the second report corrected, explained or admitted ambiguities (certainly enough for some to question whether President Obama's claim that 'justice has been done' was wholly legally justified). And if we focus on the truth of the matter, or the clarification of facts, or the nature of justice – if we treat this as an epistemological or moral issue – then we remain in the domain of difference. There is no repetition, as such; just the bringing to light of all the known facts.

A second possible reading is that this double announcement simply re-asserts the conventional wisdom that the demonic only has meaning at all in terms of its ultimate overcoming by the powers of the divine; but with the added caveat that, since the death of God, the conspiracy theory is the only metaphysical certainty we have. The absence of a body would always fuel such a reading: but conspiratorial readings still insist on a linear narrative unity, whereby a threat is presented and overcome; the demonic scene becomes a signification of demons. In Tillich's terms, this still emphasises the destructive aspect of the demonic at the expense of the creative.

But the real interest of the absent corpse was the deliberate removal of a sign or symbol of the death, meaning that the death itself directly opened a question of what Boris Groys terms 'sub-medial suspicion'. Epistemology and morality concern the exchange and relation of signs on the medial surface. But, Groys notes, signs necessarily block the medial carrier, which also sustains them.[28] Submedial space thus remains a 'dark space of suspicion, speculations and apprehensions – but also that of sudden epiphanies and cogent insights.'[29] The submedial subject is not one of knowledge, but of fear and suspicion. The ontology of media, then, is not about the correspondence of signs to truth, but medial *sincerity*: that is, how much we *trust* in the carrier of signs. While suspicion, in this sense, 'is generally considered a threat to all traditional values,'[30] it is for Groys 'not a subjective attitude of the observer that can be changed by force or will; rather, it is constitutive of the very act of observation as such. We are unable to observe without becoming suspicious.'[31] As such, the more we believe that we have uncovered the medium of a message, the sincerer it seems. This is only ever fleeting; for, just as flipping over of a painting reveals the canvas behind, once the sub-medial becomes visible, it becomes a sign and consequently is supported by its own, hidden, sub-medial space. We cannot see the two at once: we are thus, Groys suggests, 'always already involved in the economy of suspicion, which is, so to say, the medium of all media.'[32]

In this sense, there is something within the repetition of Bin Laden's deaths which embeds the scene within the broader history of the demonic as a cultural form. This link is the sense in which the sincerity of the event *itself* was created in this act of repetition. With all else that surrounded the figure of Bin Laden – whose effective power of 'terrorism' went well beyond bounded *acts* of terror and was maintained through the *aesthetic* means of emergence within networked media (both of his own production, and of those who fought him) –

28. It is important to note that Groys' account of the sub-medial, whilst part of a phenomenology of media, should not be confused with the Husserlian distinction between part and whole: that is, I see a bowl, but only one side of it; in turning it around, I see the other side, but not the first. Groys' concern is distinctly medial, rather than epistemological.

29. Groys, 2012, 13.

30. Ibid., 173.

31. Ibid., 174.

32. Ibid., 175.

for his death to be 'authentic,' there *had* to be some kind of a cover-up, some kind of error, some form of unreliable report. One act could not be enough: for with the perpetual possibility of alternative accounts and iterations – images, documents, feeds, etc. – medial *sincerity* is only really achieved once a report has been first rendered suspect, and then repeated. The sincerity of the single event is premised on the metamorphosis of its own repetition; a repetition which assures both that the demon has been eliminated *and* that their initial suspicion was warranted. The audience has, in effect, seen the event for themselves, but *only* by seeing the undoing of that event in terms of its sub-medial conditions. At this moment, when these two deaths exist within the same medial space, the laying bare of a cover up assures a sincerity to the event that it would not otherwise exhibit. It gives the two deaths one life, rooted in the trust that *some* event had happened; establishing the trust needed to move forward and explore *what kind* of event it, in fact, was. It also provides a specific sincerity to the event, which *allows* the audience to move onwards into the arrangement of signs and figures, books, films, conspiracy theories, and so on. For, as Groys notes:

> suspicion supports all values medially, because submedial space (the submedial carrier) is nothing but the space of suspicion. […] However, in order to be truly compelling, values must repeatedly renew the *mana* of medial sincerity. That is, they must repeatedly confirm the suspicion that submedial space "essentially" looks different on its inside than it appears to be on the medial surface.[33]

In Groys' view, such '*mana*' – the 'aura of medial truth'[34] – is renewed by the act of critique: after all, the attempt to expose or reveal what is hidden within a sign is also a demonstration that something exists behind it. Critique is thus embedded within a cultural economy which involves not only the exchange of the surface of a sign for a hidden sub-medial 'reality,' but the generation of a value in the original object of critique: as Groys notes, 'the more a sign is deconstructed, exposed, stripped of its aura, and devalued, the more *mana* and medial power it absorbs.'[35] What is apparent, though, is that the two deaths of Bin Laden present something distinctive from this general economy. It is the doubling of the event – the anaphoric repetition, rather than the economic supplementing or substituting – which lends it sincerity. The manner in which this doubling confirms the suspicion of submedial space is precisely what makes it a 'demonic' event.

4. Repetition, Again

This point echoes, to an extent, the concerns of Rita Felski when she writes of how the notion of 'critique' has become synonymous with an attitude of suspicion,[36] which may not map on to a single methodological hermeneutics, but nevertheless constitutes a particular mood or mind-set that characterises critical thinking. But in this case, I am more interested in how the demonic frames the doubling of the demonised Bin Laden figure. For this, it is useful to sketch out in three brief points how this scene links to a particular *topic* of demonological rhetoric, which concerns precisely the relationship between the sincerity of the authentic, and the demonic as a form of repetition.

The first point to note is that demonic repetition does not necessarily *negate* the singularity of sincerity, so much as *undermine* it; precisely by performing an uncanny reproduction of sincerity's conditions. Klossowski demonstrates this with his reading of Tertullian's *On the Soul*: here, the demon is cast as a simulator, not of Christ (as with St. Paul's Anti-Christ), but of the dead: demons allow the dead to walk, which in turn discredit the significance of Christ's resurrection. Klossowski notes that, on the one hand, this correspondence of existence and simulation translates into the dichotomy of God as being, the demon as non-being.[37] On the other hand, the simulation is not simply inauthentic, but rather undermines the very facticity of the authentic. This is an ironic phenomenon, because, at least in the religious sense, the authenticity of the event in question – Christ's resurrection – is rooted in its utter singularity. The power of the demonic is not simply the opposite of the power of God; but the gnawing doubt, the risk of error that accompanies such a repetition. Indeed, as a 'perversion of the creative,' in Tillich's words,[38] the demonic troubles and subverts our very confidence in *both* our capacity to represent the *difference* which marks out the demon from ourselves *and* to critique it.

The second point to note is that while we can detect this demonic repetition, and its relation to sincerity and error, throughout the history of the demonic, it also undergoes a metamorphosis related to both the nature of 'the authentic' and the medium of repetition. As Leatherbarrow argues, the increasingly 'secular' conditions of 19th century culture led to representations of demons reflecting an internal human condition, rather than external spirit;[39] but rather than this internalising resting easy in figures of psychosis or mania, it also coincides with the communicative institutions of a growing media culture.[40] Thus, we find across literature endless examples of the

33. Ibid., 175-6 (emphasis original).

34. Ibid., 141.

35. Ibid., 165.

36. Rita Feltski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 6.

37. Pierre Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 18.

38. Tillich, 1936, 93.

39. William Leatherbarrow, *A Devil's Vaudeville: The Demonic in Dostoevsky's Major Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

40. See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

demonic which call into question the creative-destructive dialectic of repetition: Dostoevsky's *döppelganger* and Shelley's replicant are also not simply 'monsters,' but ambiguous reiterations of social bureaucracy and scientific ambition. In such examples, the threat is not simply to the clearly identifiable authentic human existence. The demonic is not simply a version of Benjamin's mechanical reproduction. Rather, the threat is to the sincerity with which we can trust the medial carriers of this existence, which in turn allow us to articulate this difference between 'life' and uncanny replica. The demonic remains a faulty replica, within a culture increasingly dependent upon hidden, sub-medial processes of technological replication. The logic of demonic repetition remains, but the shift in its medium of expression reveals a reflexive concern with medium itself. In Joanna Hodge's words:

> the figure of the demon shows that technology does not reveal a termination of history but the vanishing of the nineteenth-century dream that history might be thought of as some single structure, through which a discrete process, the emancipation of human beings, might be thought to take place.[41]

The third point to note is that this vanishing is not delivered via pure negation. Rather, the demonic emerges through uncanny and un-authored creations of such a historical narrative as it is performed and expressed: creations which, in turn, render the narrative suspect. We need only think of Nietzsche's reimagining of Descartes' demonic doubt: while Descartes' demon is summoned in the *Meditations* to challenge the certainty of our self-knowledge – which, as Christia Mercer has reminded us,[42] itself replicates a well-established tradition of early modern meditative practice – the demon of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* challenges, not certainty, but rather the exclusivity, individuality and significance of our self-knowledge. No longer simulating existence and being, the modern demon confronts humanity with fleeting images of its own inversion: images that undermine the human being as a singular and irreplaceable being. Perhaps the exemplar of such a performance is the work of Kierkegaard, which continuously wrestles with this problem in its efforts to describe the full problem of the demonic within the context of the growing print culture of 19th century Europe, and the distinctive interpretative audience this creates. The demon is, for Kierkegaard, the faulty replica of the believer, possessing all the strengths and creative potentiality of religious commitment, but turned inward towards nihilism. But even in describing this, Kierkegaard struggles to position the demonic amongst a typology of signs; the act of writing, printing and circulating his work *itself* continuously undoes the efforts to capture the demonic adequately.[43] This is encapsulated in Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death,* where demonic despair is described as if:

> an author were to make a slip of the pen, and that this clerical error became conscious of being such – perhaps it was no error but in a far higher sense was an essential constituent in the whole exposition – it is then as if this clerical error would revolt against the author, out of hatred for him were to forbid him to correct it, and were to say, "No, I will not be erased, I will stand as a witness against thee, that thou art a very poor writer."[44]

Such a slip of the pen invokes the modes of simulation and repetition: both in terms of the demonic as a kind of 'fake' religious existence; a relationship to infinity that is entirely bound up in oneself, rather than in God; as well as in the simulation of writing itself, as a technique of iteration.

This point leads us back to our starting point: for, in many ways, this is no different from Lanz's problem of gossip. It is not that gossip completely withdraws from any narrative economy of signs. Rather, it circulates an uncomfortable *excess* of signs; the mundanity of which are always slightly beyond the grasp of definitive concepts. For this very reason, they hold a certain demonic threat: we lose sight of being able to tell the sub-medial from the medial and invest in a sincerity based on an endless interplay of surfaces. In Tillich's words: the 'depth of the demonic is just this, that the meaningful and meaningless elements in it are inseparably combined. Thereupon rests its inevitability, its surpassing power, in the face of which all moralising is doomed to impotence.'[45]

Bin Laden's death continues this demonic motif in the sense that its double announcement creates an event explicitly through the circulation and repetition of information. Sincerity, in this case, is produced not simply by locating a source of 'truth' – such as a proper reference, or an absolute relation to the event that we observe – but rather through the awareness of where we, as interpreters, stand in relation to repetition, or, more specifically, it's inherent errors. As such, the repetition of an event identifies and validates its original on the one hand; and on the other hand, *by virtue* of this possibility of repetition, the very vulnerability of that truth is exposed. In this way, the demonic emerges in the technologies of repetition that threaten to create a 'life' which challenges our ability to mark a difference between authentic life on the one hand and replicated life beyond agency or control on the other (a blurring line which Derrida, in his reading of de

41. Joanna Hodge, 'Kierkegaard's writing machines: epistemology of the demon.' In Gary Banham and Charlie Blake (eds.) *Evil Spirits: Nihilism and the Fate of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 22-39, 37.

42. Christia Mercer, Descartes' debt to Teresa of Ávila, or Why we Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy. *Philosophical Studies*, 2016, 1-17.

43. See Tom Grimwood, Kierkegaard's Printing Errors: On a Curious Passage from Stages on Life's Way. *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 3:4, 2013, 913-927.

44. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 370.

45. Tillich, 1936, 120.

Man reading Rousseau, specifically cites as a 'monstrosity'[46]). This inherent medial aspect of the demonic carries its capacity to reproduce and perpetuate itself; in short, to impersonate the creative without an act of creation.

In turn, it is precisely the development of medial technologies which amplify Lanz's original concern with gossip into the contemporary configuration of 'good' and 'evil' we have today. It is our contemporary medial forms, after all, which enable repetition to become so central to our moral and political narratives. As such, the sincerity of Bin Laden's death is not achieved through the production of the event, but rather through the expectations of its circulation: specifically, expectations of error and counter-narrative which are nothing other than the heightened economy of suspicion which drives, in Groys words, the 'medium of media.' In this sense, the fleeting scene of Bin Laden's two deaths passes quickly precisely because it is embedded within particular techniques of iteration that are otherwise completely banal. But demonic creativity has always concealed itself with the banality of repetition: this is precisely how it undermines the sacred. And on this note, the scene of Bin Laden's death raises a further question about the meaning of the demonic in contemporary culture, removed from (though related to) the more traditional foci of the problem of evil or the fear of the Other. That question is how these technologies of repetition, embedded within the banal repetition of our everyday practices, might not only sustain a paradoxical 'life that is opposed to life,'[47] but also sustain an equally paradoxical death: or at least, blur the difference between authentic and replicated death for the sake of medial sincerity. This is precisely why we must heed Tillich's argument that demonic sincerity is fundamentally creative. While the appearance of the demonic has always, historically, been characterised by repetition and mutation, it remains too easy to lose the creative value of these paradoxes once the demonic is 'explained' as a mere devil, monster or obscene Other. At that point, the demonic is reduced to its destructive role, and the clichés return – not simply clichés of evil, but also un-reflexive clichés of criticism. And this, of course, affects the afterlife of a death: it directs the focus and flow of how such a death is preserved; and, of course, how our discussions of morality, politics and critique proceed around it.

5. Demonic Clichés

To illustrate this last point around the afterlife of demonic sincerity, consider a different scene, which, while very different in content to Bin Laden's death/s, also seems to capture the 'perversion of creativity' which Tillich identified in the demonic today. In 'White Bear,' an episode of Charlie Brooker's television drama series *Black Mirror*, a girl, Victoria, wakes up with complete amnesia in an empty house in an abandoned village. Exploring her surroundings, Victoria is soon pursued by a slow-moving, zombie-esque crowd who silently film her on their mobile phones. In fear, she is taken into some woods by a mysterious saviour, who then attempts to viciously torture her; as she calls for help, a mute audience gathers, continuous playing the scene on their mobile devices. But before long, the reveal is made: the set is pulled away, and we see that Victoria has unwittingly been caught in real-world play. The mobile phone carriers are a paying audience, and the characters she has met only actors. Strapped to a chair, the narrative is resolved: Victoria is not a victim, but in fact a perpetrator; years ago, she participated with her fiancé in the abduction and murder of a child, which she filmed on their mobile phone. Having pleaded guilty while claiming to be 'under the spell' of her fiancé, her punishment is confinement in a lurid theme park named the White Bear Justice Park, where each day members of the public can pay to enact a curious mob justice: she is forced to undergo the same experience of terror which the victim felt, and in this way is exposed to her crime (and punishment) in front of a baying studio audience. She is then drugged, awaking the next day with no memory. She is thus caught in a constant loop of re-discovering her crimes.

Characteristically for *Black Mirror*, 'White Bear' plays on the audience's expectations through the archetypal arrangement of hero and victim in zombie movies, switching one demon (zombie-turned-audience) with another (hero-turned-child-killing-voyeur), in order to open an implicit question over the morality of the distant, disinterested spectators who thirst for the visceral and imminent punishment of unthinkable crimes (audience-turned-zombie again, perhaps). In doing so, it reminds us that the recent cultural resurgence of zombies is only ever nostalgic. The zombie may be undead, but such a traversing of life and death is far from a *demonic* monstrosity: after all, in archetypal series such as *The Walking Dead*, the eponymous undead are still markedly *different* from those who are alive; the fear they elicit is blunt horror, rather than uncanny. In contrast, 'White Bear' reminds us that the creative aspect of the demonic, as a medial form, fundamentally problematizes such distinctions. Indeed, the central demonic aspect of the episode is the constant repetition of the action by the ever-present 'screening' of mobile devices.

The very moment at which this uncanny repetition is removed – the moment when the twist is explained by an announcer on a stage, at which point the ambiguous juxtaposition gives way to a moralising narrative – this demonic aspect subsides and is replaced with a folk devil (Victoria herself). It is not insignificant that the 'reveal' of the episode is purposefully weak – performed with the camera uncomfortably close-up to the announcer, straining to express the moral disdain at the protagonist's past actions. The single statement of sincerity – *this is what you have been watching, all along!* – is rendered feeble by its removal and obscuring of the different medial surfaces on which it rests. That is to say: on the one hand, we are being shown everything there is to see regarding the

46. Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 72-4; see also Grimwood 2013, 916-7.

47. Fernie, 2013, 22.

plot narrative; but on the other hand, the power of the narrative was our suspicion that there must *always be more*.

The use of repetition in 'White Bear' – of images, of names, and of genre tropes – is central to the sense it creates: to such an extent that, once a narrative resolution emerges, it can only ever be weak. We are once again reminded that the singularity of the event is not enough, if it is to be sincere. As in the case of Bin Laden's death, the repetition of the event reveals a sincerity which can only ever be paradoxical.

The problem of this narrative resolution returns us to an earlier point: that the demonic has always, historically, only made sense in the context of its overcoming by an ultimate good; but that – as 'White Bear' reminds us – the nature of such an ultimate good has become complex, often sustained by acts of clichéd repetition. In his detailed account of the 'narrative turn' in Western politics, Christian Salmon provides a powerful insight into how policy decisions are replicated – and then replaced – through the perpetual repetition of the 'enigmatic signs' of storytelling in order to project an authenticity to a disillusioned voting public. But this turn, Salmon argues, is prompted by a specific problem facing political speech-writers and spin doctors regarding the everyday, aimless circulation of something which Lanz might recognise as gossip: 'How can we control the explosion of discursive practices on the Internet? How can we communicate in this chaos of fragmented knowledge without the help of some shared legitimizing figure?' And, in turn, 'How are we to describe the conflicts of interest, the ideological or religious collisions, or the culture wars?'[48] This is why, Salmon argues, 'storytelling has become the "magic" formula that can inspire trust and even belief in voter-subjects.'[49] In this sense, the coherence of political storytelling – which would include the conspiracy theories which by now envelop Bin Laden's two deaths, in the way that they clumsily force the visual *mythos* of the Bin Laden trope into a scientistic causal logic – create trust *only* by building on a prior sense of sincerity which is already embedded within 'the flow'[50] of that which it attempts to control. Necessarily, this narrative resolution is weak, simplistic or overly-clear for the complexity of the depth of rhetorical signifiers it draws on.

But likewise, it is not enough to simply critique this narrative turn for what Salmon's book describes as the 'bewitching of the modern mind.' This only serves to obscure the question of how the critic themselves accesses such narratives yet remains *un-bewitched*, or what happens to the circulation of bewitchment once it is exposed. And in many ways, such an obscurity – an obscurity which is paradoxically produced from the very act of critical clarification – serves as a contemporary form of demonic temptation. After all, it is tempting to apply a heavy-handed coherence to the scene of Bin Laden's death – to insist on one death, not two – but in doing so, this effectively enacts the same rhetoric of control which Salmon criticises. It insists on one narrative over another, without probing the conditions by which we trust in either.[51] It is tempting, likewise, to figure the rhetoric of demonology as separate from its sub-medial structure – that is, to relegate it to a sign of 'evil' or 'ignorance' – when, in fact, the medium of communication is precisely where the creative terror of the demonic resides. It is tempting to place it, as Salmon does, within a 'fiction economy'[52] that is based on nothing more than the production of storytelling, rather than the circulation and preservation of such narratives which are embroiled within the cultural discernment of the medial from the sub-medial. And of course, it is true that in both 'White Bear,' as much as in Bin Laden's demise, there is a question of 'what *actually* happened?' which demands an answer beyond the ornaments of anaphora. Of course, there are ethical and political questions which follow from the 'facts' of the answer to that question. But underlying these are fundamental – albeit fleeting – questions of medial sincerity which the demonic has always played upon and subverted, creatively and destructively. Hence, it is more telling to attempt to situate the ways in which the demonic maintains, in uncanny ways, the same tropes of moral, critical and spiritual teleology which would seem otherwise opposed to it.

As such, to interrogate the demonic today is to not simply observe terrifying and monstrous repetition, but also to interrogate the cheerless banality of the clichés which prompts and creates the conditions for the kind of radical othering within contemporary demonization. These momentary, banal emergences of the demonic are precisely what signal a form of creativity which links its contemporary appearances to a long, well-embedded history within Western culture; a history which goes well beyond signs of demons alone.

48. Christian Salmon, *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind* (London: Verso, 2010), 94.

49. Ibid., 95.

50. Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016).

51. In this sense, the aftermath of Bin Laden's death stands as a key illustration of Bruno Latour's provocative charge that cultural critique and conspiracy theory are not so far apart: 'conspiracy theories are an absurd deformation of our own arguments, but, like weapons smuggled through a fuzzy border to the wrong party, these are our weapons nonetheless.' Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.' *Critical Inquiry* 30, 2004, 225-248, 230.

52. Salmon, 2010, 53.

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The Poetic Task of "Becoming Homely": Heidegger reading Hölderlin reading Sophocles

Norman Kenneth Swazo

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ABSTRACT

In view of intensified danger from multiple causes manifesting what Heidegger understood as the rule of planetary technology and the possibility of pitting meditative thinking (*besinnliches Denken*) against the dominant calculative thinking (*rechnendes Denken*), there is enhanced need to think further Heidegger's turn to the poetic word of Hölderlin. Here Heidegger's attentiveness to Hölderlin's "The Ister" is engaged with a view to clarifying the significance of "becoming homely" and "dwelling" as part of the task of thinking required of Western humanity if it is to appropriate a "second beginning" such as Heidegger intimates possible. Absent this thinking, the "first beginning" initiated in Greek antiquity promises a thoroughly techno-cratic world order.

Keywords:
Heidegger;
Hölderlin;
"The Ister";
Technology;
Meditative Thinking

The Poetic Task of "Becoming Homely": Heidegger reading Hölderlin reading Sophocles

…lange haben das Schikliche wir gesucht.
[…long have we sought what is fitting.]
Hier aber wollen wir bauen.
[Here, however, we wish to build.]
Im dichterisch Gesagten liegt daher ein eigener Beginn.
[A properly unique beginning thus lies in whatever is said poetically.]
--Hölderlin, "Der Ister"[1]

Im Eigenen zu wohnen ist dann aber jenes, was zuletzt kommt und selten glückt und stets am schrwersten bleibt.
[To dwell in what is one's own is what comes last and is seldom successful and always remains what is most difficult.]
--Heidegger, Hölderlin's "The Ister" (1996)

Introduction

As in the latter half of the twentieth century, it remains critically important today to be concerned about the future of humanity in view of ongoing technologically-induced ordering of the planet, technologically driven global interdependence of human settlements, and the challenges of political governance that augur an emerging *techno*-cratic world order. Nearly half a century ago, in 1971, world order scholar Richard A. Falk published an urgent assessment of our time in his *This Endangered Planet: Prospects and Proposals for Human Survival*. In that work, Falk highlighted the "underlying causes of planetary danger" and advanced the just cause of an "ecological imperative" that might guide our thinking in view of the long-term *human* interest, in contrast to the parochial geopolitical interests of nation-states that yet champion the not so benign logic of statecraft. Falk re-emphasized this view in 2009 in juxtaposing the concepts of "ecological urgency" and "environmental justice." Referring to James Gustave Speth and Peter Haas's *Global Environmental Governance*, Falk concurred that, "(1) the conditions relating to the global environment are worsening; (2) current responses to address these conditions are grossly insufficient; and (3) major new initiatives are needed that address the root causes."[2]

The fundamental question at issue here, however, is not merely what counts as efficacious responses to planetary danger. Rather, at issue is *the manner of thinking* that motivates and moves such responses. The twentieth century has been characterized, to use Falk's words, as "a time for retrenchment of powerful vested corporate and governmental interests, for Promethean reaffirmations of the capacity of technological innovations to overcome whatever harm could be attributed to the role of technology as the engine of human progress."[3] Yet, precisely these Promethean reaffirmations of the role of technology and the promise of "technological fixes" are in question; for, as the twentieth century German philosopher Martin Heidegger warned, "What threatens man in his very nature is the view that technological production puts the world in order…"[4] On the contrary, as he said elsewhere in interview in 1966—after his experience of the failure of the Weimar Republic; after the destructive rise of Nazism with its biologistic and

1. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*; for German text see Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"*.
2. Falk, "The Second Cycle"
3. Falk, "The Second Cycle"
4. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 14.

racist ideology and the consequent loss of the German "homeland;"[5] after the Second World War with the frenzied crime of genocide unconcealed in the technologically-driven Nazi "manufacture of corpses" in the gas chambers of death camps such as Auschwitz and Birkenau; after the unprecedented American indiscriminate use of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed by a bipolar nuclear arms race promising "mutually assured destruction" (M.A.D.) of the built world and devastation that would make the planet a wasteland: "[In] the last 30 years, it's certainly become clearer that the planetary movement of modern technology is a force whose magnitude can hardly be overestimated. For me the decisive question today is how this technological age can be subjected to a political system and to which system."[6] In short, the intensifying planetary rule of technology is, for Heidegger, a manifest cause for thinking differently and, thereby, "renovating" the political beyond the "great politics" (*grosse Politik*) of the twentieth century national powers that seek dominion over the whole of the planet Earth.[7] At the center of this for Heidegger in 1953-1954 is his concern for what he calls "the complete Europeanization of the earth and of man."[8]

In his *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger remarks: "The problem of man poses difficulties which are still hardly beginning to dawn on us."[9] The way we "think"—*or fail to think*—is indeed what is most problematic in our day, for, as Heidegger commented, "Thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today's world. […] [Man] today is in *flight from thinking*."[10] Indeed, says Heidegger with more profundity: "Most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking."[11] The keyword here is '*das Bedenklichste*', which is also to be understood as *that which is most questionable,* thus what is most to be put into question. But, of course, the question is whether we who live today are provoked to think in a way other than one that further entrenches Promethean reaffirmations of technology as if this were the only mode of thinking and action.

Heidegger reminds us: "Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks."[12] To use Heidegger's lexicon in his clarification of the meaning of 'thinking' (*Denken*), the manner of thinking that yet dominates our time is one of "calculative thinking" (*rechnendes Denken*),[13] a "calculative rationality" that has its roots in the Western metaphysical foundations of logic, the latter impelling the "logistics" at the core of all technological possibilities of planetary ordering.[14] Heidegger understands our time as one of distortion, as global human settlement is driven by a frenzied calculative rationality. This is not a merely human doing, however. Rather, for Heidegger, it is the disclosure of what was "ventured forth" long ago at the commencement of the Western philosophical tradition in Greek metaphysics, thus in the basic concepts and categories that have determined our view of "reality"

5. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 48, reflected with patent concern that many Germans "lost their homeland, have had to leave their villages and towns, have been driven from their native soil. Countless others whose homeland was saved, have yet wandered off and have resettled in the wastelands of industrial districts. They are strangers now to their former homeland. And those who remained in the homeland? In many ways they are still more homeless than those who have been driven from their homeland."

6. Heidegger, "*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*." Heidegger, of course, entangled himself in the Nazi movement, the fact of which has generated an immense amount of scholarly debate. For my own contributions to this debate, see Swazo, "*L'Affaire* Heidegger," Swazo, "*Gnothi sauton*: Heidegger's Problem Ours," and Swazo, *Heidegger's Entscheidung*.

7. Bernard P. Dauenhauer used the term 'renovating', in his "Renovating the Problem of Politics." Dauenhauer responds in part to some remarks of Robert Sokolowski, who argued that, "Heidegger's conception of the public is not adequate for political life; in terms of the kinds of human association distinguished by Aristotle in Politics I.2—family, village, city—Heidegger's thoughts are most appropriate for the village, not the city. A village is not based on any kind of constitution or 'social contract'." Dauenhauer considered these remarks "well-founded" but nonetheless argued that Heidegger (along with Merleau-Ponty) "show a way to retrieve and renovate what is sound in the political thought which developed under the sway of metaphysics." In relation to Heidegger's attraction to the village in contrast to the modern metropolis, see Charles Bambach, "Heidegger, Technology, and the Homeland." Bambach, taking note here of Heidegger's remarks delivered in October 1955, comments: "What preoccupied Heidegger as he began to situate his discussion of modernity within the rhetorical topos of the homeland were the sweeping effects of the technological revolution on the fate of modern Germany."

I concur with the above comments, while nonetheless taking note of a more recent explanatory approach to Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism, as presented by Martin Feldman, "Between Geist and Zeitgeist," who "explores the heuristic value of viewing Heidegger as a leading representative of modern intellectuals bent on reconciling 'eternal aspects of the human mind (*Geist*) with a 'spirit of the age' (*Zeitgeist*) here characterised by an acute sense of the breakdown of Western civilisation." Feldman thus allows for an explanatory approach that "[clarifies Heidegger's] short period of activism and subsequent shift away from the Third Reich toward apoliticism following his disillusionment with the 'spiritless' course of its revolution."

8. Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," 15.

9. Heidegger, *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, 143.

10. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 45.

11. Heidegger, "What calls for thinking?" *Basic Writings*, 371. The German text here: "*Das Bedenklichste in unserer bedenklichen Zeit ist, daß wir noch nicht denken,*" from Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (p. 3), italics in original.

12. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 239. The German text here is from Heidegger, "*Über den Humanismus*,": "*Das Denken wird nicht erst dadurch zur Aktion, daß von ihm eine Wirkung ausgehet oder daß es angewandet wird. Das Denken handelt, indem es denkt*."

13. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 46, clarifies: "Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is."

14. For a pertinent discussion, see Wanda Gregory, "Heidegger on Traditional Language And Technological Language." Gregory clarifies Heidegger's distinction of *überlieferte Sprache* and *technische Sprache* as made by Heidegger in a lecture he delivered on 18 July 1962, Martin Heidegger, *Überlieferte Sprache und Technische Sprache* (1962), Herausgegeben von Hermann Heidegger (St. Gallen, Erker, 1989). Gregory translated the lecture, published as Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language." Gregory comments in her WCP paper, "[…] Heidegger bemoans the lack of a poet or 'a house-friend who in equal manner and with equal force is inclined toward the technologically constructed world-edifice *and* the world as the house for a more original dwelling..." See further Heidegger, *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, especially noting §§29, 30, and 31.

(i.e., being) and the "knowledge" we seek thereby.[15] What matters for Heidegger and for us is a turn away from this calculative thinking. It is precisely this manner of thinking that is to be questioned and challenged if we are truly to advance beyond the present planetary danger. Heidegger's post-metaphysical thinking takes on this challenge, hence his import as a thinker in our "destitute" time.[16]

Heidegger turns to the poetry of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin for insight and guidance.[17] As Andreas Grossmann opines, "With Heidegger's first Hölderlin lecture in 1934-35, poetry became the thinker's key partner in the search for an 'other beginning' of thought"—i.e., a beginning other than that of metaphysics and all that has ensued from its commencement in Greek philosophy.[18] Grossmann adds, "In the metaphysical plight in which the West now finds itself, the poetic factor is for Heidegger the power from which a people's historical being originates and on the basis of which philosophical thought and politics are determined […]."[19] Thus, for Heidegger, "Our thinking should take the poetic word as its measure,"[20] in which case it is in Hölderlin's poetizing (*Dichtung*) that we are to find our measure ('our' here meaning what is proper to Western humanity); for, presumably Hölderlin's poetry is a "herald of the overcoming of all metaphysics" hitherto.[21] Overcoming (*Überwindung*) metaphysics implies an overcoming of the derivative Western tradition of political philosophy as well, thus an overcoming of the orientation of modernity's philosophical orientation in the politics of "the State." Hölderlin himself understood the import of this in writing, "What has always made the state a hell on earth has been precisely that man has tried to make it heaven."[22]

Heidegger tells us that Hölderlin's poetry provides "a hold for thoughtful reflection [*Nachdenken*]. Thoughtful reflection is meant to awaken our attentiveness."[23] 'Thoughtful reflection' does not mean an occasion for gaining knowledge (in the strict epistemological sense of that word). Rather, it is through such reflection that we may accomplish what is more imperative, viz., "a fundamental attunement [*Grundstimmung*] from out of which we always have a sense only for the essential [*das Wesentliche*] and have the sole vocation of marking out the essential from everything else so as to retain it in the future, to 'attend' to it."[24] A fundamental attunement is possible only through hearing what is essential. This hearing itself is performative and precursor to what may follow, viz., a "moment of vision" (*Augenblick*) that is essential to seeing our way forward.

In what follows, we shall follow Heidegger's thoughtful remembrance (*Andenken*) of Hölderlin's poem, "The Ister" (as given in lecture from summer 1942). It is important to bear in mind that Heidegger warns against reading Hölderlin metaphysically, in which case a thoughtful reflection has to proceed otherwise. In the case of "The Ister" poem, therefore, one must be cautious of finding in Hölderlin's imagery of "the river" an *allegory* in the sense used in metaphysics.[25] Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger insists, "must stand entirely outside metaphysics, and thus outside the essential realm of Western art."[26]

In short, to read Hölderlin's poetic word "authentically," one must not read through the lens of metaphysics and, thereby, not through the conceptual apparatus of Western "aesthetics" (as in the "science" of art). On the contrary, following Heidegger's guidance in his essay

15. In his "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indications of the Hermeneutical Situation," Heidegger (370) claims: "The philosophy of today's situation moves inauthentically within the *Greek* conceptuality […] The basic concepts have lost their primordial functions of expression […] But […] there remains a particular character of origin: these basic concepts still carry with them a part of the genuine tradition of their primordial meaning […]."

16. Following Hölderlin, Heidegger speaks of our time as "destitute"; see here Heidegger, "What are poets for?" (89).

17. One may take note here of Francesca Brencio's ("Foundation and Poetry: Heidegger as a Reader of Hölderlin," (195) somewhat critical observation that, "The meaning and limits of Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin have been thoroughly discussed by many scholars, according to a twofold evaluation of both the constrictive nature of Heidegger's exegesis, and the legitimate emphasis on its merits. […] [It] appears obvious that Heidegger has built around the poet a framework biased by the constraints imposed by the issue of the meaning of Being. […] Thus, the 'poetic thinking' of the philosopher shapes an image of Hölderlin that is missing some crucial features, such as German romanticism and idealism as privileged sources of his lyrical education." It is to be noted that Heidegger is guided by the Hellingrath translation of Hölderlin's poems, influenced thus by Hellingrath's estimate of Hölderlin as "*der erste Verkünder des deutschen Schicksalgeheimnisses*," i.e., "the first herald of Germany's hidden fate." See here Joseph Suglia, "On the Nationalist Reconstruction of Hölderlin in the George Circle," *German Life and Letters*.

18. Grossmann, "The Myth of Poetry," 29.

19. Grossman, "The Myth of Poetry," 30. There are those critical of Heidegger's appropriation of Hölderlin in a "nationalist" context at the time that National Socialism was emerging in Germany's politics. See here, e.g., Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*. For a critical discussion of this, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger Reexamined: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, especially p. 395.

20. Grossmann, "The Myth of Poetry," 33, citing here Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 53:197.

21. Grossmann, "The Myth of Poetry," 33, citing Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 52:143. Brencio, "Foundation and Poetry," 184, writes: "For him, Greece is not only land, people, culture and gods, but rather the achievement of the long awaited occurring future. From Greece he expects the fulfilment of the promise concerning the return of the gods and a new dawn."

22. The verse is from Hölderlin's "Hyperion." See here Loralea Michaelis, "The Deadly Goddess," 225-249.

23. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 13.

24. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 13-14.

25. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* (16) explains, "αλληγορια [allegory] is a proclamation of something else by way of something, namely, by way of something familiar that can be experienced sensuously." Thus, in the case of Hölderlin's attentiveness to the river, read as allegory one would read 'river' here allegorically as that which is experience sensuously, i.e., by way of our faculty of sensibility, but take this to be referring to something else not immediately evident.

26. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 18-19.

on the origin of the work of art, we are to recall that he tells us it is the nature of poetry to *found* truth. Heidegger says, "We understand founding here in a triple sense: founding as *bestowing*, founding as *grounding*, and founding as *beginning*."[27] This founding thereby initiates a ground of history (*Geschichte*) as a beginning (*Beginn*) that proceeds from its origin (*Ursprung*).

Hence, if on turning to the origin we read Sophocles as Heidegger reads Hölderlin, recognizing Sophocles for the "great poet" that both Hölderlin and Heidegger take him to be, then we must take Sophocles' poetic word to be founding for Western humanity in that triple sense. Inasmuch as he as poet "fore-tells," he bestows; insofar as he bespeaks a "decision" manifest in his poetic word, he grounds; and inasmuch as that decision is taken, the poet tells us of the import of a beginning that yet governs our "time." But it is Hölderlin, in his dialogue with Sophocles, that matters here; for, as Grossmann writes, "In the plight of history, he is the one who is necessary, the averter of danger, the one who makes 'poetic dwelling' possible […]."[28] Thus, in our time of planetary danger, it is the poetizing of Hölderlin that, for Heidegger, holds the promise of averting the perils of escalating Promethean affirmations of the technological; for, it is this poetizing that opens the way to an other beginning in thought.

To read *Heidegger* reading the German poet *Hölderlin* reading the Greek poet *Sophocles*, then, is to immerse oneself in a thoughtful reflection, in a *meditative* thinking (*besinnliche Denken*) that may disclose this moment of vision and thus "unconceal" what is historically essential to Hölderlin's word as he speaks of his own "encounter" (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the ancient Greek poets, as he continues the poetizing (*Dichtung*) that yet intimates what is essential to the future of Western humankind, essential to a "fitting" time yet to come.[29] Attentive to the poet's essential word, we respond to the call to hear, at the outset unprepared for what we are called to hear about what has vanished (*die Schwindenden*), viz., the origin (*Ursprung*), but a vanished origin that is nonetheless full of intimation (*die Ahnungsvollen*). In reading Heidegger reading Hölderlin for what is essential therein, one is not left merely with a "reproduction" of Heidegger's "interpretation," a word Heidegger declines to use and instead speaks of providing "remarks" (*Anmerkungen*) on Hölderlin's poetic word.[30] Rather, following Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics,[31] one has a *productive* engagement of Heidegger's text, and thereby of the poetic words of both Hölderlin and Sophocles, in which case one goes beyond what Heidegger himself says while we are nonetheless guided by his own manner of questioning. What follows here, therefore, cannot but be a productive encounter with the dialogue that ensues as Heidegger reads Hölderlin, as Hölderlin reads Sophocles, and as Heidegger reads Sophocles.

The Question of 'Origin' (*Ursprung*)

For Heidegger, "the timespace of that which is poetized" is not a function of its historiography but instead of its "spirit" (*Geist*). In this way, Hölderlin and Sophocles have their unity in what is essential to their poetic thinking. "For," Heidegger tells us, "all essential poetry also poetizes 'anew' the essence of poetizing itself."[32] Hölderlin performs his *Auseinandersetzung*, we may say following Heidegger here, "to hear something distinctly significant" in the poetic word of the ancients. While doing so, he "await[s] a concealed fullness of poetic time and of its truth," then awaits a moment of vision that is one of unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*). Heidegger's turn to Hölderlin itself intimates what is the task of thinking that the poetic word calls forth in this encounter, for, as Heidegger says, the poetic word "speaks into what has already been decided."[33] And, it is this fateful decision (*Entscheidung*) that unfolded the unique human destiny (*Geschick*) of Western humankind that decides our "time," our "age." It is in this way that the origin speaks to our present and future. For Heidegger, the poetic word provides the possibility of a different "measure,"[34] by no means calculative, thus a different decision to be taken for an "other" beginning that is in tension with that which was initiated by the ancient Greeks.

We respond to Heidegger's later thinking as it is turned to the poet Hölderlin to appreciate the ineradicable and originary (*ursprüngliche*) significance of ancient Greek thought in post-modern (i.e., post-metaphysical) context. To say 'originary' here is to acknowledge, as Heidegger does, that we yet make our way about from out of the origin of thinking—deliberately not to say here "philosophy"—bequeathed to us from the ancient Greeks. This *Denken* must include the poets who also "think" and who, through their poetizing (*Dichtung*), "determine a time" (*eine Zeit bestimmt*).

27. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72; emphasis added.

28. Grossmann, "The Myth of Poetry," 34, refers here to Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 53:173.

29. I am aware of the criticism that Heidegger does "violence" to Hölderlin's text as he reads it and translates it even contrary to philological expectation. Heidegger himself acknowledges that his is a violent reading. I shall not engage this criticism directly here, inasmuch I attempt a thoughtful reflection according to the productive interpretation set forth here. For one such critical view of Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, see Andrzej Warminski, "Monstrous History."

30. Although Heidegger tells us that he offers remarks rather than an interpretation in the strict sense of the word, his "explication" of the meaning of the text has its hermeneutic guideline. Thus, e.g., he writes (126) that interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry "depends, however, not only on our knowing the wording but on how essential a guiding view we have of what poetry history and truth are, and what 'is' in general and of what is experienced as 'being.'" This spells out Heidegger's interpretive *prejudice*, his approach to Hölderlin's texts in general, thus it being inevitable that his reading of Hölderlin reading Sophocles would manifest Heidegger's central preoccupation in thought, i.e., the question of the meaning of being.

31. See here Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

32. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 78.

33. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 9.

34. Heidegger, "poetically man dwells…" *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

Heidegger, therefore, listens most of all to Hölderlin's poetry as he reads Sophocles. It is Sophocles who discloses what is perhaps t*he most essential thought* that must ever be thought meditatively, i.e., as a matter of the meditative thinking that, for Heidegger,[35] is to be pitted against the calculative rationality that dominates our time:

> πολλα τα δεινα κουδεν ανθρωπου δενοτερον πελει
>
> ["*Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch über den Menschen hinaus unheimlicher waltet.*"]
>
> [Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing beyond the human being prevails more uncannily.]

This poetic word from Sophocles—having what Heidegger would call a "distinctive intonation" (*ausgezeichnete Betonung*), thus a profundity of the originary that nonetheless reaches into our present in its "historical essence" (*geschichtliches Wesen*)—is at the core of Heidegger's own thoughtful encounter or "confrontation" with the ancient Greeks.

With these words, Sophocles tells—and *fore*-tells, thus *decides fo*r the historicality of Western humankind—"the most uncanny 'essence' of the human being." As Heidegger puts it, "poetizing" not only determines a time, but it fore-tells something: "To tell something that, prior to this, has not yet been told. A properly unique beginning [*ein eigener Beginn*] thus lies in whatever is said poetically."[36] It is this decision that we—we who are now "here" to hearken what Sophocles said, and still says to us—are called to understand. Concerning 'decision', Heidegger claims: "What is decision here [in our epoch]? What is ownmost to decision is determined by what is ownmost to crossing from modernity into what is other than modernity."[37] Heidegger seeks a crossing from modernity, which includes the present age of technology, into another beginning.[38] He sees the danger of the technological in a sense more fundamental than given in the concept of technology as something merely instrumental and anthropological, according to which conceptions technologies are subject to human control. Thinking fundamentally, then, Heidegger warns: "the danger has grown to the extreme, since everywhere there is uprooting and—what is even more disastrous—because the uprooting is already engaged in hiding itself, the beginning of the lack of history is already here."[39]

Hence, heedful of the danger, we are called to understand what is uncanny about the human being, aware thus of the fundamental determination of Western humanity, i.e., its basic concepts and their unfolding onward into the present century's dominance of planetary technology. This requires an overcoming (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics. In relation to the origin of the work of art, Heidegger (1999, 354-355) tells us:

> Overcoming of metaphysics is, however, not discarding the hitherto existing philosophy but rather the leap into its first beginning, without wanting to renew this beginning—something that remains historically [historisch] unreal and historically [geschichtlich] impossible. Nevertheless, mindfulness of the first beginning (out of the pressing need for preparing for the other beginning) leads to distinguishing inceptual (Greek) thinking, which favors the misunderstanding that by this retrospective observation a kind of "classicism" in philosophy might be what one is striving for. But in truth, with the "retrieving" question that begins more originarily, the solitary remoteness of the first beginning opens out to everything that follows it historically. In the end the other beginning stands in a necessary and intimate but hidden relation to the first beginning…[40]

This speaks to us of what is yet part of our task in "essential thinking" (*wesentliche Denken*) today, as if "standing out" (*ek-sistent*) from the present of our place and time into our future and following Hölderlin's imagery of the river in "The Ister," *we, too, turn back to our source*, to the origin from out of which the first beginning set itself forth in thought, word, and deed.

Heidegger's turn to Hölderlin serves to remind us that, as Charles Bambach observed, "Hölderlin, as poet and as thinker, stands at the threshold of modernity. That is, he stands over an epoch whose birth and genesis was marked by the trauma of revolutionary violence and political upheaval […] Hölderlin crafted his poetic verse as a response to what he perceived as an age of revolutionary transformation. Writing at this threshold, Hölderlin would come to understand his own epoch as an age of transition between the lost power of ancient Greek tragic art [… and] a new epochal time of

35. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 52. Ralph Mannheim, translating the verse as it is given in Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, states it thus: "There is much that is strange, but nothing that surpasses man in strangeness." This translation likewise fits the essential concern of being unhomely, being "estranged" from the homely. Taking note that Heidegger's translation of the verse into German is different from that of Hölderlin, Warminki ("Monstrous History," 196) comments: "Hölderlin translates the opening of the choral ode by rendering the Greek not as *unheimlich* but as *ungeheuer*: *Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts Ungeheuer als der Mensch*. Much is monstrous. But nothing more monstrous than man." In his reading of "The Ister," Heidegger, of course, is aware of Hölderlin's translation of the *Antigone* (published in 1804), the English translation given (p. 70) as: "there is much that is extraordinary, yet nothing more extraordinary than the human being." But even then, this translation Heidegger (p. 70) takes to be a more mature translation than that Hölderlin provides in 1801: "*Vieler gewaltige giebts. Doch nichts ist gewaltiger, als der Mensch*." "There is much that is powerful. Yet nothing is more powerful than the human being."

36. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 8.

37. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, §44, 63.

38. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, §89, 124, identifies Nietzsche as the philosopher heralding the end, i.e., completion, of the Western tradition of metaphysics. "To grasp Nietzsche as the end of Western metaphysics is not a historical [*historisch*] statement about what lies behind us but the historical [*geschichtlich*] onset of the future of Western thinking."

39. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, §46, 69.

40. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, §277, 354-355.

freedom and justice."[41] But, more than this, Bambach adds, "Above all, Hölderlin was committed to an idealized vision of ancient Greece as the site for the spiritual origin of the West. For him 'Greece' was less the space of a geographical location than it was the name for an experience of absence, one marked by exile from, and mourning for, a possibility of authentic poetic dwelling. What Hölderlin attempts in his poetry is a complex retrieval of a Greek experience that never happened, of a vision of originary beauty whose power is not historical but futural."[42]

Heidegger understands the beginning that was initiated in ancient Greece for what it is, a commencement that is not merely past but a movement in word, thought, and deed that speaks to us of "that which is coming and futural in what has first been as the commencement."[43] We stand in a moment, "awaiting" what is coming. This awaiting is to be thought not as a passively standing about but rather as "action [*Handeln*] in the realm of the essential."[44] What is required of us is care in the sense of a solicitude that "leaps ahead" (*vorspringende Fürsorge*) of our present while "standing within what is indestructible." For insight into this leap-ahead solicitude Heidegger listens to "the poetic dialogue between Hölderlin and Sophocles." Hölderlin's "turning back" to Sophocles is a return to the origin from out of which "a commencement once occurred [*hat sich ereignet*] in the Greek world"[45] , this commencement grounding the history (*Geschichte*) of Western humankind and speaking to us today through Hölderlin's poetizing.

The words here are entirely momentous; for, our turning back to the source, if it is successful, accomplishes something *futural*, viz., a properly unique beginning that, having returned from the origin, initiates a "second" beginning other than what was initiated in the philosophical thought of Plato and Aristotle (the latter yet governing the quest for planetary ordering that promises a thoroughly technocratic world order). "Then"—at that "time"—when that second beginning is initiated, we might also say, 'we have arrived from far' (in Hölderlin's poetic word— "*her Fernangekommen*…"), i.e., from "afar," from the origin. And, hence, it is in Heidegger's turn to Hölderlin that we may find our way into an appropriation of a poetic word that is necessary for "our age," hence a task about which we may not be indifferent if it is recognized as "properly necessary" (*eigentliche Notwendigkeit*), i.e., necessary for us severally and jointly.

Heidegger on the Task of 'Becoming Homely'

In §9 of *Hölderlin's "The Ister,"* Heidegger speaks of Hölderlin's poetry having its own "care" (*Sorge*), which he describes as "becoming homely" (*das Heimischwerden*). One draws an immediate connection of this word to "*das Unheimliche*," translating Sophocles' word (τα δεινα). For Heidegger, τα δεινα, *das Unheimliche*, "the uncanny," is not only *the fundamental word* of Sophocles' choral ode; it is the fundamental word "of this tragedy [*Antigone*] and even of Greek antiquity itself."[46] Since, in following Hölderlin, Heidegger is concerned with the possibility of dialogue between the foreign and one's own in its significance for becoming homely, we are therefore to heed his guiding remark as he reflects upon the poet's word: "If becoming homely belongs essentially to historicality,"—and we may accept this antecedent as "true"[47] —"then a historical people can never come to satisfy its essence of its own accord or directly within its own language" (taking the consequent here as likewise true). He continues: "A historical people *is* only from the dialogue between its language and foreign languages."[48] The historical people that concerns both Heidegger and Hölderlin are the Germans, the German language thus in dialogue with the classical Greek language given in the poetic word of Sophocles. But, in question here is Western humankind (thus not only the German people), but thereby to "recognize the singular essence of Greek world."[49]

Hölderlin manifests his care in and through his poetic word, and in this way he himself seeks to become homely. But, Hölderlin's word is not merely his own, since such an appropriation must follow from an "enactment" that returns to the source, i.e., to the origin. And, more importantly, it is precisely this kind of enactment that we in our own "time" are expected to undertake, if we are to accomplish our own becoming homely despite the decision taken in that beginning that set us forth along a path upon which we yet find ourselves unhomely rather than having become homely.

Heidegger situates this "becoming homely" in what he calls "the encounter between the foreign and one's own," with the additional and equally essential words that this kind of encounter is to be understood as "the fundamental truth of history" (*die Grundwahrheit der Geschichte*). For Heidegger, such an encounter is to be found in Hölderlin's "dialogue" with the ancient Greek poets Pindar and Sophocles, but especially the latter, hence Heidegger's engagement of Sophocles' *Antigone* through his own en-

41. Bambach, "Poetry at the Threshold," 130.

42. Bambach, "Poetry at the Threshold," 132.

43. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 55.

44. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 55.

45. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 56.

46. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 63.

47. One means 'true' here in the context of Heidegger's complex elucidation of the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*) that he takes to govern the Western philosophical tradition since its explicit beginning in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle.

48. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 65. The German text: "*Ein geschichtliches Volk* ist *nur aus der Zwiesprache seiner Sprache mit fremden Sprachen.*"

49. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 66.

counter with Hölderlin.[50] But, Hölderlin's dialogue *qua* enactment of this encounter accomplishes what is exemplary for those who follow him in his thinking; for, in this dialogue with Sophocles, Hölderlin finds what is *his own*, thus *appropriating* what he has found as his own. What precisely *is* "his own" remains concealed to us except insofar as we situate Hölderlin in the setting of the Occident, thus in the historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of Western humanity. Further, we may interpret this with reference to Heidegger's claim in *Being and Time* that, "Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full and authentic historizing [*Geschehen*] of Dasein."[51] We understand Hölderlin thus as one having his fateful destiny in and with his generation, but as a poet having a destiny that transcends that of his generation insofar as his poetic word emerges from his encounter with the origin and opens up the possibility of another beginning.

In short, it seems that from Heidegger's words, taken in their juxtaposition, one cannot understand the concept, sentiment, or event of "becoming homely" except with reference to an encounter between "the foreign" (*Fremden*) and "one's own" (*Eigenen*). All of this is by no means immediately clear. We are faced with the task of clarifying what Heidegger means by 'becoming homely,' by 'encounter', by 'the foreign', by 'one's own', by 'the fundamental truth of history', and by 'dialogue'. How is one to proceed here?

We may begin by considering what Heidegger says earlier in his remarks, insofar as these remarks identify the conceptual and historical context that concerns Heidegger in his reading of Hölderlin. In §8 of this text, Heidegger opines that, "Space and time comprise the framework for our calculative domination and ordering of the 'world' as nature and history."[52] Heidegger thereby points to the dominance of calculative rationality ordering the "world"—a concept that includes reference to the whole of nature but also the whole of history in the sense of both what happens in history and the writing of history (historiography, *Historie*).[53] As humans we understand ourselves to have our being in a world (hence Heidegger's concept of "Being-in-the-world," *in-der-Welt-sein*), and this world involves both our relation to nature and to history. 'World' here is to be understood initially in Heidegger's sense clarified in *Being and Time*, i.e., as a "context of significance" (*Bedeutsamkeit*) according to which we understand our own "ek-sistence," attending to our ownmost or most proper possibilities of being as we "ek-sist" ("stand out") in time beyond our extant present, but also the "existence" of other beings—things of "nature" such as flora and fauna, towards which we comport ourselves as we denominate them things present-at hand (*Vorhandensein*) or as things "equipmental" or "resources" ready-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*).

Invariably, we seek to understand the "place" or "site" (*topos*) of our own ek-sistence, conceived to be in nature, i.e., upon this planet "Earth" conceived as "environing world" (*Umwelt*) and as "lived-world" (*Lebenswelt*), in a particular house, this particular village, town, city, State, etc.; but, more vitally, as having a "home" or "homeland" (*Heimat*) in which one is "autochthonous" (*Bodenständigkeit*), i.e., having what Heidegger calls a "rootedly-capable homeland" (*wurzel-kräftige Heimat*).[54] Furthermore, we seek to understand our ek-sistence in history, i.e., in this particular day that is situated in a particular "epoch" or "age"—as in "Greek antiquity," "modernity," "the Renaissance," the "Enlightenment," "postmodernity," the "Age of Technology"—our "lived time" thus to be understood in Heidegger's sense in which we have both our historicity (*Historicalität*) and temporality (*Temporalität*).

In what he calls our "Age of the World Picture" (*die Zeit des Weltbild*) with reference to "the novelty of modern technology" (*das Neuartige der modernen Technik*), we find Heidegger characterizing this as a time of "pervasive measurement of the world in a calculative, discovering, and conquering manner." Steeped in our calculative mode of thinking, venturing forth across the global terrain to discover, the human conquers where he wills so to do. This is all "undertaken by modern human beings in a way whose distinctive metaphysical feature is modern machine technology."[55] What the purpose or direction of this pervasive measurement is, Heidegger wonders, is itself in doubt: whether this "serves merely to bring about a position within the planet as a whole that secures this humanity a suitable 'living space' for its lifetime, or whether such securing of space and time is intrinsically determined in such a far-reaching manner as to attain new possibilities of this procedure of conquering space and of time-lapse and to intensify this procedure."[56] More importantly, for

50. I have engaged Heidegger's attention to Sophocles' *Antigone* elsewhere (Swazo, "Preserving the Ethos: Heidegger and Sophocles' *Antigone*" (2006) and refer interested readers to that paper rather than rehearse that interpretation here.

51. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 436.

52. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 48.

53. Michael Murray, "The Question of Being and Time" (13-57) provides a succinct clarification in writing of "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*), "historiography" (*Historie*), and "history proper" (*Geschichte*): "(i) *Historicity* is the fundamental structure constitutive of the being of man and grounded in temporal being-in-the-world. Temporality is understood as the temporalizing unity of past, present, and future. Grounded in temporalizing, historicity is the domain of the phenomenology of historical existence, (ii) *Historiography* may be defined as the discipline and science of the writing of history; in short, the work and methods of historians of all sorts. Historiography must be rooted in a general concept of science which presupposes and is possible only for an historical being such as man. (iii) *History* most properly speaking is the eventuation of those most basic epochs in which Being is necessarily revealed and/or concealed. Heidegger calls history in this sense *Seinsgeschichte* or Being-as-History." For a further overview of the attention to history in late nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophy, see Leslie Paul Thiele "Review: Heidegger, History, and Hermeneutics."

54. For an informative discussion of Heidegger's concept here see Robert Metcalf, "Rethinking 'Bodenständigkeit' in the Technological Age."

55. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 48.

56. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 48.

Heidegger, insofar as this situation is evaluated *metaphysically*, "it remains undecided whether, and in what way, this will to planetary ordering will set itself its own limit."

This is the essential obstacle with calculative thinking: it is oblivious of any limit to human endeavors despite the finitude of human knowledge and the elusiveness of ontological and epistemological certainty. Citing Hölderlin's attentiveness to "the river," Heidegger reminds us that the poet says in his "The Voice of the People" (*Stimme des Volkes*) that the river rushes on "unconcerned with our wisdom" (*unser Weisheit unbekümmert*). This is an enigma even as the relation of that which vanishes and that which is full of intimation is enigmatic, hence a challenge to human wisdom. The challenge for us today is to discern this enigmatic relation precisely because, as Heidegger instructs, "Both are, at the same time, in a concealed, unitary relation to what has been and what is of the future—thus to the temporal."[57] If we are to speak presumptively, we may take note of Heidegger's reminder that a river is a "distinctive and significant locale at which human beings, though not only human beings, find their dwelling place."[58] Thus, to attend to the poetic word about the river is to attend to its essential significance as a place of gathering. What matters here is what humans are to accomplish thereby—*to dwell*. This is what we are called to hear in the poet's thinking as he speaks to our future after having turned back from the source, from the origin.

Heidegger recognizes the enigma in the poet's word and, thereby, utters a cautionary note: "If the Greek world has its own historical singularity, then it can never in any respect be repeated in an imitative sense."[59] When Hölderlin accomplishes his encounter of the foreign, obtains his insight into the origin and then turns back, he does not do so with the purpose of imitating the Greek historical singularity, i.e., what we know as "the first beginning" of Western philosophical thinking. No, instead, the poet "fore-tells" in intimation of *beginning anew*. Thus, if we anticipate a second beginning that does not imitate the Greek historical singularity but truly begins anew, then what it means to dwell is other than what has been transmitted to us in the conceptual framework of classical Greek political thought. Perhaps it is to be said that Hölderlin attempts to unconceal the meaning of a different allegory, found in the imagery of the river as the gathering place for human beings in their quest to dwell. After all, as Heidegger relates, "αλληγορια [allegory] is a proclamation of something else by way of something, by way of something familiar that can be experienced sensuously [i.e., by way of our senses]."[60] But one must consider Hölderlin's attentiveness to the river as gathering place.

In its usual everyday conception, 'dwelling' means that which one inhabits or possesses as accommodation, housing. Heidegger is quick to tell us, however, that Hölderlin thinks more essentially: "Dwelling takes on an abode and is an abiding in such an abode, specifically that of human beings upon this earth."[61] The point of such dwelling, therefore, is not merely to abide in some physical place, such as when one says one finds one's rest in one's house. Rather, Heidegger clarifies, "Rest is a grounded repose in the steadfastness of one's own essence." Note the words spoken here— 'grounded'; 'steadfastness'; 'one's own'. These words call out to us to hear what is of concern to Hölderlin. When a human being dwells, s/he accomplishes and persists in a grounded repose—not in some "actual" place that is this or that house or even this or that city in the classical and modern senses. The repose occurs "in" or "where" or "when" one finds "one's own essence"; and, in that finding one persists in a resolve that is steadfast, attentive to one's own essence to remain in this grounded repose.

But, importantly, Hölderlin writes: "Here"— at the river as gathering place— "however, we wish to build." This desire "to build" seeks its fulfillment—the human to have a steadfast grounded repose, but also to build. *What* is one to build? *How* is one to build? Heidegger intimates what is unconcealed yet concealed in the word of the poet:

> The river "is" the locality that pervades the abode of human beings upon the earth, determines them to where they belong and where they are homely [heimisch]. The river thus brings human beings into their own and maintains them in what is their own. Whatever is their own is that to which human beings belong and must belong if they are to fulfill whatever is destined to them, and whatever is fitting, as their specific way of being. Yet that which is their own often remains foreign to human beings for a long time, because they abandon it without having appropriated it. And human beings abandon what is their own because it is what most threatens to overwhelm them. One's own is least of all something that produces itself of its own accord. One's own must come to be appropriate. And in turn, whatever has become appropriate needs to be appropriated. All this is true only on the presupposition that initially human beings are not and indeed never "of themselves," or through any self-making, in that which is their own. In that case, however, to dwell in what is one's own is what comes last and is seldom successful and always remains what is most difficult.[62]

57. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 12.
58. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 12.
59. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 13.
60. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 16.
61. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 20.
62. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 21.

The human quest is to have a steadfast repose in what is homely, thus for human beings to have their ownmost "fitting" place. But, for long time— "in" the first beginning and since "then"—the human has abandoned the "place" that is fitting for him as human being. Venturing forth, seeking repose yet risking all (including his own manner of being), he is not steadfast in his building and hence does not dwell in a fitting way.

The river, Hölderlin tells us, dwells "beautifully" in its journey, in its vanishing back to its source and in flowing forth full of intimation. It becomes homely through that journey, being both "here" and "there," in the "here" of its becoming homely and in the "there" of its origin and its onward becoming that is at once unconcealed and concealed in its intimation, hence its enigma (*Rätsel*). The river is enigmatic inasmuch as, "The river is at once locality and journeying in a concealed and originary unity."[63] Heidegger opines that, "Locale and journey belong together like 'space and time.'" That said, however, Heidegger cautions against a technological conceptualization of "space-time" as we seek to understand the poetic insight that locale and journey belong together. Hence he says: "We do not need to refer at great length to the achievements of the technological era or the world picture belonging to it in order to show that we 'get the picture' about the 'spatio-temporal world', and that via our calculations and machinery, we have such convincing power over its 'spaces' and 'times' that the space of our planet is shrinking and the annual seasons and years of human life are being condensed into diminutive numerical values for the purposes of our calculative planning far in advance."[64]

In short, Heidegger's caution turns us away from calculative thinking if we are to discern the enigma in Hölderlin's poetic thought. We are not to understand 'locale' and 'journey' calculatively. Rather, the poetic word calls for our thoughtful reflection, i.e., our meditative thinking; for, it is only through such thoughtful reflection that we may appreciate what is essential (because it is both originary and full of intimation, thus futural)—and thus what is other than mere "value" for calculative planning as human beings traverse the planet yet fail to apprehend the essence of poetic dwelling. The technocratic order of calculative planning is far removed from all poetic dwelling; for, thoughtful reflection—all meditative (*besinnliche*) and essential (*wesentliche*) thinking—is "higher than" calculative thinking, inasmuch as, thus Heidegger remarks, 'order' means here "calculable and ordered rationality."[65] This rationality concerns itself only with a technological efficacy—"The only thing that is ever questionable is how we can measure and fathom and exploit the world as quickly as possible, as securely as possible, and as completely as possible."[66] Yet, again it must be said, such calculative efficacy is far removed from the accomplishment sought in poetic dwelling. The former seeks to produce results; the latter seeks an *essential repose*.

So, it will not do to think Hölderlin's poetic word calculatively, i.e., by way of a calculative rationality that conceives of locale and journey spatio-temporally. Speaking presumptively, Heidegger offers his guidance: "we must presumably learn to look toward the historicality of human beings and its essential ground if we wish to grasp the essential scope of the river and its fullness."[67] Hence, we have before us a task of thoughtful reflection, viz., to understand this historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of human beings, i.e., that essential history that belongs to us, but also and at the same "time" to understand the "essential ground" (*Wesensgrund*) of this historicality. For Heidegger, at issue here is "we" human beings who belong to that "history" that discloses "the essence of Western humankind" (*das Wesen des abendländischen Menschentums*).[68]

To think this essence is to think of the human being in the "essential relations" of human ek-sistence: "the relation to world, the relation to earth, the relation to the gods and to alternative gods and false gods."[69] One cannot apprehend what it is for Western humanity to become homely without discerning the import of these essential relations in what Heidegger calls their "enigmatic unity." This essential unity is to be thought, however, not merely in terms of the historicality of Western humankind; for, at issue in "The Ister" is the encounter between the foreign and one's own. If what we seek is to dwell beautifully, as does the river, then we must be mindful that the contemporary process of globalization is such that it "covers over," as Heidegger says, "to a large extent the 'misery' into which human beings are thrust by technologization,"[70] thus by "the will to planetary ordering."[71] To pit our meditative thinking against calculative thinking is to anticipate that the will to planetary *ordering* does not promise planetary *dwelling*, i.e., what Hölderlin intimates as the task of "becoming homely in what is one's own."

Returning, then, to §9 of Heidegger's remarks on "The Ister," we recall the central discussion of the encounter between the foreign and one's own that Heidegger sees to be the fundamental truth of history. If Heidegger is correct that, "Coming to

63. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 39.
64. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 39.
65. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 40.
66. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 41-42.
67. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 42-43.
68. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 43.
69. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 43.
70. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 44.
71. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 48.

be at home is thus a passage through the foreign,"[72] then we today cannot ignore this passage through the foreign as if it were inconsequential or that we could remain indifferent to this task. Heidegger presents the bare outline of an argument for us to ponder: "And if the becoming homely of a particular humankind sustains the historicality of its history, then the law of the encounter between the foreign and one's own is the fundamental truth of history, a truth from out of which the essence of history must unveil itself. For this reason," Heidegger continues, "the poetic meditation on becoming homely must also for its part be of a historical nature and, as poetic, demand a historical dialogue [*Zwiesprache*] with foreign poets."[73]

Central to Heidegger's engagement of Hölderlin's poetic word is his understanding that Hölderlin's "poetic meditation and telling is concerned with *finding and appropriating [what is one's own]*."[74] But, as with Hölderlin this is a matter of engaging the classical Greek poets, and so we must do likewise if we are to clarify what is incomprehensible, i.e., enigmatic, in Hölderlin's poetic word in due time to find and appropriate what is our own. It is, therefore, entirely salient that in Part Two of his remarks on Hölderlin's "The Ister" Heidegger examines and reflects upon what he calls "the Greek interpretation of human beings," and this not in Plato's dialogues or Aristotle's treatises but in Sophocles' *Antigone*. The key to this interpretation Heidegger finds in a choral ode of that tragedy. In this ode a poetic word was spoken, which is to say more precisely and in all import, that a *decision* [*Entscheidung*] was taken, a decision fateful for the Greeks and essential for the destiny of Western humankind since the beginning of that tradition of thought:

> Πολλα τα δεινα κουδεν ανθρωπου
>
> Δεινοτερον πελει.

Heidegger (1996a, 57-58), as we noted earlier, provides the German text qua interpretation:

> *Vielfältig das Unheimlichen nichts doch*
>
> *Über den Menschen hinaus unheimlicher waltet.*

Again, in the English translation:

> Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing
>
> beyond the human being prevails more uncannily.[75]

"The uncanny"—*das Unheimliche*—such is the human being, one who is strange, estranged, thus unhomely, despite all his "venturing forth," despite all his "ingenious" ways to bend the earth to his will, despite his labor to "produce" his settlements and his "courageous governance of the towns" (*der Herrschaft über die Städte*). Yet: "*Überall hinausfahrend unterwegs erfahrunglos ohne Ausweg kommt er zum Nichts*" ("Everywhere venturing forth underway, experienceless without any way out he comes to nothing.")[76]

The choral ode concerns this uncanniness of the human being who, despite all his productive labor, comes to nothing, having throughout all his venturing forth remained unhomely. It remains so today, as the human being of modernity has ventured forth with his calculative rationality, advancing the power of technology for a planetary ordering seemingly without limit and without evident purpose, and even without the semblance of any ecological imperative. From the beginning onward into the present of "the age of the world picture," "the age of technology," this uncanny human being has ventured forth—for what? "...for the sake of risk," the poet says: 'risk', *der Wagnis*, τολμα. In venturing forth the human being "forefeits the site" of his being (*verlustig der Stätte ist er*), becomes unhomely (in the Greek: απολις), all for the sake of τολμα.

But what does the human being risk in abandoning the "site" of his being? He risks the fateful decision that is ever-present for him, viz., whether he will *remain unhomely* or *become homely*. A decision hitherto was made. That is the insight of the poet's word spoken from out of the origin in Sophocles' *Antigone*, as both Hölderlin and Heidegger understand. "Then," at that "time," the decision taken set Western humankind along manifold ways of being unhomely, even as he has arrived at the "time" of ordering the whole of Earth to his productive use, as if all such productive planning and global settlement could and would give him his "home." For all this, he remains uncanny, "estranged" from the homely, lacking in the essential action of becoming homely. In and for his calculative rationality, the human "gathers" the whole of being into a planetary order. This is a gathering not in Hölderlin's sense but one that conforms to the "technologization" of Earth. Reading Heidegger, Albert Hostadter explained, we are gathered to the end of putting "everything that discloses itself into the position of stock, resource, material for technological processing."[77] The implication is disturbing, as Hofstadter adds: "Contemporary man's technological 'things' bear his technological 'world' in their own distorted way—distorting man's earth, his heaven, his divinities, and, in the end, himself and his mortality." Such productive distortion is by no means the equivalent of the accomplishment the poetic word seeks, viz., *to dwell beautifully on the earth with care*.

The question, then, is how he is to *perform* this essential action. Heidegger discloses the way when he tells us that what is most thought-provoking in this, our thought-provoking "time," is that we are not yet thinking—not *yet*, but an action that is manifestly possible. This he has told us, which we can appropriate in juxtaposition to his statement that think-

72. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 49.

73. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 49.

74. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 49, italics added.

75. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 57-58.

76. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 58 & 59.

77. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* 84.

ing *is* the essential action. "We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal."[78] But, the *building* (verbal sense here) that has *dwelling* (verbal sense here) for its goal is not the self-assertive production of calculative planning. Further, Heidegger corrects this former remark by moving us to think of the "essential relation" of building and dwelling rather than conceive a means-end schema. Problematic to the modern conception is that "dwelling is not experienced as man's being; dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being."[79]

But if we are to appropriate dwelling as our basic character—and do so in contrast to modernity's characterization of humanity as *Homo faber* (in its Latin sense that asserts unequivocally "H*omo faber suae quisque fortunae,*" i.e., "Every man is the architect of his own fortune")[80] —then we realize the significance of Sophocles' "fore-telling" and Hölderlin's "intimation" as Heidegger sought to explicate: "In our translation," Heidegger clarified, "the word [*Unheimliche*, uncanny] is to be conceived in a more originary way. The uncanny means that which is not 'at home', not homely within whatever is homely […]. Being unhomely is no mere deviance from the homely, but rather the converse: a seeking and searching out the homely, a seeking that at times does not know itself. This seeking shies at no danger and no risk."[81] It is with these words in mind that we are to consider Hölderlin's attentiveness to the "venturing forth" that Sophocles narrates.

Recalling the above, we consider that, despite the complexity of Heidegger's lifelong quest to clarify "the meaning of being (*Sein/Seyn*)," there remains the singular simplicity of the fact that he ever calls into question our comportment (*das Verhalten*) towards and involvement with beings—towards human beings when we conceive them merely as "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*) "rational animals," the unity of their animality and rationality, however, as yet undetermined; towards nature with all of its diverse flora and fauna, all reduced to "things ready-to-hand" (*Zuhandensein*), thus as "resources." It matters to the manner of human dwelling whether our comportment lets beings be, releasing them—Heidegger uses the term *Gelassenheit*[82]— to what they are, how they naturally are, without being exposed, transposed, reposed, disposed, according to this or that productive utility that accords with human "mastery" of the earth. It is for humans a daily task to discern what is fitting (*das Schickliche*) for the manner of being of all beings and to let them be fitting, thus to have their proper locality, their ownmost dwelling, in the site of their own being. Accordingly, Heidegger reminds: "the human being is the one who is open for what is fitting and the one who, in being human, is pointed toward what is fittingly destined [*dem Geschick*]."[83]

Hölderlin complained of our "human, too human" mania, of lack of due care to what is fitting, when he wrote in "Hyperion's Fate Song" (*Hyperions Shikaalslied*—taking it here out of verse and presenting it as prose: "But it's our fate to have no place to rest as suffering mortals blindly fall and vanish from one hour to the next like water falling from cliff to cliff, downward for years to uncertainty."[84] Like the water, like the river, he said. The analogy is salient. Key to Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin's "The Ister" is his assertion that, "The river is the journeying of human beings as historical in their coming to be at home upon this earth."[85] But, he rephrases his claim to say: "The river is the journeying of a historical coming to be at home at the locale of this locality." The course of the river is representative of the course of Western humanity's historicality since its beginning in Greek antiquity.

For Hölderlin such is the fate (*Schicksal*) of human beings who, *risking themselves* (i.e., risking their essence), "blindly fall," i.e., have their historicality while oblivious of their fate and their destiny as they venture forth and come to nothing (*das Nichts*), to uncertainty (*die Unsicherheit*), despite the long vanished "rubble of antiquity" and modernity's insistence on having an absolute and unshakeable foundation in the certitude of being and knowing (*fundamentum absolutum inconcussum veritatis*). And what then does the poet say?

> But you still shine, sun of heaven!
> You still green, holy earth! Still
> the rivers rush into the sea, and
> shady trees whisper in the height
> of day. Spring's blissful song sings
> my mortal thoughts to sleep. The
> plenitude of the all-living world
> nourishes and fills with drunkenness
> my starving spirit.[86]

Such was the view of Hölderlin in his early years (1797, 1799), which contrasts to the uncertainty of his later years when he asked in his posthumously published poem, "In Lovely Blue" (*In lieblicher Bläue*): "*Giebt es auf Erden ein Maass? Es giebt keines*" ("Is there on earth a measure?

78. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* 143.

79. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* 146.

80. This is the sense attributed to the Roman statesman Appius Claudius Caecus in his *Sententiae*, as cited in Pseudo-Sallust, *Oratio ad Caesarem de Re Publica*, 1.2., "*fabrum esse suae quemque fortunae*." Hannah Arendt, in her *The Human Condition*, uses the term *homo faber* in the sense of "the fabricator of the world." For a discussion of the latter, see Bronislaw Szerszynski, "Technology, Performance, and Life Itself" (2003).

81. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 74.

82. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* is translated as *Discourse on Thinking*.

83. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 127.

84. Hölderlin, "Hyperion's Fate"

85. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 32.

86. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, 8.

There is none.").[87] The youthful Hölderlin sang the praises of nature, as in the words of Hyperion: "To be one with everything that lives, to return in blissful self-oblivion into the all of nature, that is the summit of thoughts and joys […]"[88] To accomplish this "unity," however, requires that "virtue lays aside its wrathful harness, the mind of man its sceptre […]." Such was the young Hölderlin's intimation of the kind of comportment that is required of Western humanity.

The challenge in this poetic word is to contemporary technological man—to lay aside his wrathful harnessing of all things, to set aside his presumption to mastery of the Earth, to accept a primordial covenant with all beings, thus to "make beautiful the world."[89] Such a "thought" sets aside all calculative rationality in favor of *Gelassenheit*, releasement of beings into their own manner of being. Yet, to do this is difficult if it remains unclear whether there is yet a measure on the Earth; for, as Hyperion said to Bellarmin, it takes but "a moment of reflection" for him to be cast down from the height of blessed thought: "I begin to think, and find myself as I was before, alone, with all the pains of mortality, and my heart's sanctuary, the world's oneness, is no more; nature's arms are closed, and *I stand before her like a stranger* and cannot comprehend her."[90]

The "I" here is none other than the human who, as the most uncanny of beings, stands in the midst of nature estranged and thus finds the essential yet primordial covenant with beings incomprehensible. The human being in time becomes the self-assertive *ego*, the self-affirming 'I' who thereby becomes unhomely: "Amongst you I became so very rational, learnt to distinguish myself perfectly from what is around me, and now I'm set apart in the beautiful world, expelled from the garden of nature in which I grew and bloomed, and shrivel under the noonday sun."[91] Such is the consequence of the modern mind's drive for an indubitable subjectivity that ever seeks to possess its "objectivity."[92] Yet, from antiquity to modernity, there is only privation: "What is loss when man thus finds himself in a world which is his own?" Hyperion asks.[93] In his youthful demeanor, Hölderlin (2015, 15) states his stern judgment: "But let no one say it's fate that parts us! It's we, we ourselves who do it! [We] take our delight in plunging into the night of the unknown, into the cold alien terrain of some other world, and were it possible, we would quit the sun's realm and storm beyond the bonds of our wandering star. Alas! for man's wild breast there can be no home […]."[94]

Such is the quest of he who has himself become the "technicized animal" (*technisierte Tier*), already in our day daring to wield the instrumental power of his Promethean technology not only to *endanger* this planet to the point of total ecological decay but with an even greater hubris to *abandon* it after having produced a wasteland.[95] Yet, perhaps not so easily does the poet escape the press of fate. In a parting blessing, Hyperion's "father" Adamas told him: "'There is a god in us,' he added more calmly, 'who steers our fate like rivers of water, and all things are his element. Be this god with you above all!" The problem of lack of measure for the later Hölderlin is precisely the lack of such a god. "But if," David Kleinberg-Levin writes, "in these dark times, the gods have abandoned us, if their spirit will no longer inhabit our hearts, then it seems that the hope expressed elsewhere is here utterly shattered. In many writings, the poet leaves little doubt that he can see nothing but a tragic freedom of will, and misery spreading across the land—land once favored, and now abandoned, by the gods."[96]

Heidegger's words of 23 September 1966, given in an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* and posthumously published on 31 May 1976 under the title, "*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*" ("Only a god can save us

87. David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life: Reading Hölderlin's Question of Measure After Heidegger* (21-22) comments: "'There is none' means for the poet, that the people are living in a time of banishment, abandoned by the gods. But if it also means, as his writings clearly tell us, that the people are living in a time of unbearable hardship, inexcusable injustice, and extreme forms of political repression, one could perhaps speak of a 'state of exception' (*Ausnahmezustand*), understanding this word […] as indicating a crisis that opens up an exceptional time for something new to emerge." Kleinberg-Levin (24) adds, "although 'it sounds like a token of hopelessness and despair' it should rather be read as an intense way of calling his contemporaries to take part in the struggle for their own destiny, taking to heart the question of the right measure for building and dwelling in a poetic way on the holy earth. For the gods have not directly given us human beings this measure, plainly putting it in our hands […]. Instead, what the gods have given us is the announcement of a fateful task. Thus we are called upon to realize the fitting measure in the way we build and dwell, mindful of the earth and the sky."

88. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, 8.

89. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, 9.

90. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, 9; italics added.

91. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece*, 9.

92. See, e.g., historian of science Charles Coulston Gillispie's *The Edge of Objectivity: An Essay in the History of Scientific Ideas*. In Chapter 3, "The New Philosophy," Gillispie wrote: "The thought of René Descartes moved across the gap in the scientific revolution between the physics of Galileo and the prophecies of Bacon. In its success it complemented each. In its failure it announced the need for a scientific declaration of independence from philosophy." In his review of Gillispie's "founding document" in the new history of science, Stephen Toulmin (1961) characterizes Gillispie's central thesis: "The crucial thing about the modern scientific movement for him is the pursuit of 'objectivity', which means to him, the solid intellectual security brought to empirical inquiry by the use of numerical measurement and mathematical analysis."

93. Hölderlin, *Hyperion's Fate*, 14.

94. Hölderlin, *Hyperion's Fate*, 15.

95. Keng, ambassador from Terra (Earth), in science fiction author Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, 306-307, describes Earth's future with unmistakable and portentous clarity: "My world, my Earth, is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and gobbled and fought until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt. We destroyed ourselves. But we destroyed the world first. […] We failed as a species, as a social species. […]Well, we had saved what could be saved, and made a kind of life in the ruins, on Terra […]."

96. Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 25.

now"), leave Hölderlin's disquiet about "the flight of the gods" (*Flucht der Götter*), i.e., of the gods that have been (*gewesenen Gotter*), an open question.[97] There he said: "Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that *by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god*, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline" (emphasis added). Thus, Heidegger intimates a role for both thinking (*Denken*) and poetizing (*Dichtung*) in preparing for the possible appearance of "a god" (not to think here monotheistically). He adds, "I see the situation of man in the world of planetary technicity *not as an inextricable and inescapable destiny*, but I see the *task of thought* in this, that within its own limits it helps man as such achieve a satisfactory relationship to the essence of technicity" (emphasis added).

This relationship is yet possible in pitting meditative thinking and the word of the poet against the technologically driven calculative rationality that "uproots" the human being from the Earth. Thus, Heidegger relates, "For me, Hölderlin is the poet who points into the future, who waits for a god, and who, consequently, should not remain merely an object of research according to the canons of literary history."[98] It is from Hölderlin's return to the origin of Western humanity's poetic and conceptual ground that Heidegger conceives of the possibility of a "conversion" (*Umkehr*) to be prepared "only in the same place where the modern technical world took its origin."

Reading Hölderlin reading Sophocles is how Heidegger sees that *Umkehr* in its potentiality for being (*Seinkönnen*) *qua* potentiality. Hence does Heidegger reflect upon Hölderlin's "In lovely blue…" with anticipatory attention to the words that hold out that potentiality: "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth."[99] There is merit to man's erecting of edifices, to his building of settlements, to his cultivating of the land, to his husbandry of animals, and so on. Yet, in the age of technology Heidegger clarifies, "Merits due to this building, however, can never fill out the nature of dwelling."[100] That is what Hölderlin would have us understand. For all his building guided by the intensified productive power of mass-scale technology, the human being who is unhomely but desires to become homely, to *dwell*, must *let* the earth *be* as earth, let the human *be* as *mortal* being, and let beings, in general, be *what* and *how* they are independent of modernity's manipulative subjectivity. Calculative rationality and its modern technicity seek *mastery* rather than encourage a comportment of *releasement* (*Gelassenheit*). Yet, it is the latter that is necessary to the task of thinking in our destitute time.[101] Absent this practice of releasement, we remain subject to the mastery of fate, to the law of temporality, as Alabanda said to Hyperion: "But all the works of men have in the end their punishment, and it's only gods and children whom Nemesis doesn't strike."[102]

97. Heidegger, "*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*," *Der Spiegel*; "Only a God Can Save Us Now," in Sheehan, *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*.

98. Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us Now."

99. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 211 ff.

100. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.

101. Werner Marx, *Is There a Measure on Earth?,* takes up from Hölderlin the challenge in thought that is needed in our destitute time and thinks Heidegger's thought further (*weitergedacht*) in view of a possible ethics, thus opening up a path to another thinking.

102. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece,* 120.

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The Balkans Geo-psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s, Julija Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek developed a unique discourse within psychoanalysis - the psychoanalysis of the Balkans. Their cultural and political analysis represented the Balkans as a pathological region of nations suffering from the syndrome of an "archaic mother." They propose in their different ways that the subject (nation) must radically separate from oedipal attachment to the attachment to nationalism as unemancipated Oedipus and subordinate to the authority of the symbolic father, that is, to the West. At the heart of such an approach is a conservative policy of labeling the Balkans as primitive behind Kristeva and Žižek loom self-orientalization and geopolitical de-identification with the Balkans as a precondition for their cosmopolitan and universalist identity.

Keywords:
Kristeva;
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The Balkans Geo-psychoanalysis

The *Mittel Land* of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* invokes both the Balkans and Central Europe, and Central Europe has been imagined as "a transitional zone between proper Western civilization and the unfathomable identity of Russia."[1] This transitional status is intensified in the Balkans, which, in addition to being part of the East/West, is also seen as a bridge between the Christian North and the Muslim South. And both Western and Eastern Christianity, as well as Islam, are established in the Balkans, and their practice coincides with ethnic and national lines. The Balkans was never colonized in the modern sense. Rather, during the centuries of Ottoman rule, strategies of repopulation, religious conversion and polarization were introduced to control the territory, and Balkan people came to perceive each other (and themselves) as both colonial rulers and as colonial subjects. This inscribed ambiguity left the Balkan nation-states emerging in the 19th century particularly vulnerable to *representational* colonization by "proper Western civilization," and to aspirations of "European" identity. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the period of the formation of the Balkan nation- states on the ruins of the Ottoman empire, it was common practice for the intellectual elite to study in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, or Istanbul—whichever imperial capital had exerted the strongest cultural and linguistic influence on a particular region. Because of the inherent ambiguities I have described, the Balkans, within its own discursive space, replicates the dynamics of center-to-periphery identity formation by shifting geopolitical pathology to the eastern neighbor.[2] In so doing, Balkan nations not only orientalize the "other" but also occidentalize themselves as the West of the "other." *Balkanism*, as a system of discourse-geography, accounts for ways in which the geopolitical ambiguity of the Balkan space has been internalized into the Balkan identity both through *self-orientalization* and hegemonic representation.[3]

This essay focuses on the Balkan discourse-geography as a hidden contingency of the intellectual work of two Lacanian psychoanalysts, Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek. Their iconic status as global intellectuals and the sheer volume of their work have generated an equally industrial-sized body of criticism. However, most of that criticism has taken their work at face value as stemming solely from the tradition of the European discourse of rationality. In what follows here, instructed by Gramsci's concept of intellectual labor as social *praxis* and its self-empowerment through marginal geography, I bring to bear a specifically Balkan gaze upon Kristeva's and Žižek's respective discourses on exile and universality, emphasizing their own Balkan origins and the discursive geography of the region as dissonant infrastructure to their self-proclaimed universalism and cosmopolitanism.

In conceptualizing their intellectual production more broadly, I invoke some basic concepts of Gramsci, such as geographic and historical specificity as central to both intellectual labor and the internal plurality of the subject. This concept of Gramsci, and others, are particularly resonant in today's climate of tension between the homogenization of global capitalism and the cultural diversity of immigrant labor, which has displaced the economic conflicts of global capitalism onto culture and identity. Gramsci's work is also foundational to the interdisciplinary area of cultural studies (which includes Balkan and other "area" studies). Many of the academics and writers working in these fields are themselves expatriates who identify with the subaltern groups about which they write or from which they come and whose dislocation operates as radical resistance to the cultural orthodoxy of their host nations, the former colonial centers.

The work of Kristeva and Žižek, on the other hand, offers a reverse, dissident response to exile which discursively subjugates the Balkans and immigrants to European symbolic dominance. Under the sign of psychoanalysis of the Balkans their work promotes the internalization of the Balkans' geopolitical location as the other of Europe and produces a negative version of the Balkans' subjectivity as failing Oedipus which pathologizes immigrants' subjectivity on the basis of the incestuous bond with the lost space. This pathologization is achieved by invoking

1. Tomislav Z. Longinović, "Vampires like Us" in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 39-55.

2. Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54.4 (Winter 1995): 917-931; hereafter cited parenthetically as "Nesting."

3. See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); hereafter cited parenthetically as *Imagining*.

the Lacanian theory of the split subject as a universal structure of modern subjectivity which replicates the cognitive split between empire and colony as symbolic father and archaic mother. This universal scheme ignores the subversive role of geography and history in the formation of Balkan subjectivity. This "situational intensity and sensitivity"[4] lacking in Kristeva's and Žižek's work is central to Gramsci's concepts of intellectual labor and individual subjectivity.

In elaborating convergences in Kristeva's and Žižek's work and in their personal histories, I acknowledge and account for divergence within those areas, including in the circumstances of their displacement from Bulgaria and the ex-Yugoslavia respectively. I argue, however, that even with these differences, each offers an exclusionary discourse of radical conservatism, framed in the language of desire, as an idiosyncratic form of intellectual labor.

Bulgarie, ma sous-France

The history of Julia Kristeva's dislocation from her Bulgarian origins is well known. She was born in 1941 and received a largely francophone education. After graduating from the University of Sofia with a degree in linguistics, in 1965 she received a scholarship from the French government that enabled her to pursue graduate studies in Paris, where she quickly made her mark on the French intellectual scene, studying with such eminent scholars as Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Emil Benveniste, among others. Soon after her arrival in Paris she became part of a circle of intellectuals identified with the avant-garde literary journal *Tel Quel* (and eventually married one of its founding editors, writer Philippe Sollers. She herself published in the journal as did Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and other prominent figures of the Parisian literary scene. She was at first a Marxist and student rebel, then she began studying with Lacan and incorporating his ideas on subjectivity into her work on structural linguistics. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) one of Kristeva's doctoral theses, combined Bakhtin's Marxist theory of polyphony in language with the Lacanian notion of the split subject, a unique theoretical position reconciling bourgeois aesthetics with the revolutionary field of text. It was this work which definitively launched her as the leading literary theorist of her time.

Kristeva's "politics of signification" discursively transforms intellectual labor from an agent of symbolic-material intervention into a purveyor of desire for signifiers and self-signification as a permanent source of revolt and creative negativity. Her concept of "exile" as a state of cosmopolitanism originates not so much from her life in Paris as from her experience of herself as a liberated, fully Oedipalized subject exiled from her maternal space of birth: "exile is already in itself a form of *dissidence*, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country, or language…"[5] She extends this concept of dissidence to the idea of "Oedipal revolt" against the maternal space and posits that the subject exists in the tension between the joy of speech (desire for the father) and the seduction of the pre-lingual state of maternal unity (desire for the mother). In and through the tension created by these opposing forces, the desiring subject and autonomous speaker is constituted. She herself, in order to become a fully Oedipalized subject, had first to demonize her Bulgarian identity according to her own theory of abjection: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*."(3) From exile, she writes with "love" to Bulgaria as the geopolitical abject:

Subject/abject[6]

You suffer from chaos, from vandalism, from violence. You suffer from the lack of authority. You suffer from corruption, the absence of initiative, the sloppiness that redoubles an unprecedented brutality on the individual level, the arrogance of the mafia and the scams of the newly rich.[7]

Her message to Bulgarian citizens is, following her example, to "…undergo a psychoanalysis or psychotherapy"(182) in order to join European civilization successfully. Kristeva discursively reintroduces the colonial paradigm into European geopolitics via her politics of signification in the same way the Lacanian split subject is articulated through her theory of poetic language. The maternal drive for the lost space supplies endless raw material for building the cultural capital of the French nation.

Consistent with her theory of poetic language and the prelingual state of *chora*, the archaic drive for the mother remains underneath language as a permanent prelingual drive rupturing symbolic conventions into new expressive forms. Language is central to Kristeva's work on more than one level. As a Lacanian psychoanalyst, she adheres to the principle that language is essential to the symbolic order which provides the pre-existing culture and rules, forms the ground for the subject emerging from the archaic maternal—the *chora*. The French language in particular, in addition to being a tool with which she articulates her project of Oedipal revolt, is emblematic of her own "resurrection" as a cosmopolitan intellectual.

> And yet Bulgarian is an almost dead language for me. That is, a part of me was slowly extinguished as I gradually learned to speak French, first from Dominican nuns, then at the Alliance Française, then at the university. Finally, exile cadaverized this old body and substituted it with another, fragile and artificial, at first, then more and more indispensable, and now the only living one: French. I am almost prepared to believe in the myth of resurrection when I examine the divided state of my

4. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2000), 466.

5. Quoted in Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement*, (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 195.

6. In Serbia 2005. Photo by the author (http://www.agora8.org/1a.htm).

7. Julia Kristeva, *Crisis of The ~~European~~ Subject*, Translated by Susan Fairfield, (New York City, NY: Other Press, 2000), 176: hereafter cited parenthetically as *Crisis*.

mind and body.[8]

The centrality of the French language to Kristeva's intellectual project was graphically illustrated in May, 2003, when she received a *Doctor Honoris Causa* degree from her Bulgarian *alma mater*, University of Sofia. She gave a speech on that occasion whose subject was "Language, Nation, and Women."[9] As the title indicates, this speech touches upon the main themes of her work, and in it she directly acknowledges her allegiance to France and her love and admiration for the French culture and language: "I love the logical clarity of French, the impeccable precision of the vocabulary, the niceness of judgment...." From the outset, however, her devotion to the French language was evident to her largely Bulgarian audience since she actually delivered the speech in French. (There was a token passage in Bulgarian at the end).

Kristeva's predilection for all things French has implications far beyond self-aestheticization. Her elevation of France and its language to the top of her civilizational hierarchy depends upon the abjection of her maternal country and language. This is made clear in the controversial essay, "Bulgarie, ma Souffrance,"[10] in which she describes a return to her homeland in 1989, just before the fall of the Berlin wall. She laments the "garbage and flies on the streets of Sofia" and, even more, the lapses of taste revealed by the deteriorated state of the national language: "…they stuffed into this poor language of sensitive peasants and naïve thinkers a whole arsenal of tasteless and rootless loanwords."[11] However, given her own disclosure that "Bulgarian is an almost dead language for me…," one must question just how qualified she is to render judgment upon it.

The title of this essay and its tone—even more than the derogatory comments about the Bulgarian language and the lack of aesthetics in the public sphere—reveal the repression and unhappiness of her early years living under a hardline Communist regime. Kristeva has written very little about this period but she does touch upon it briefly in the speech at University of Sofia, providing a strong clue that her fiction is, at least in part, autobiographical:

> …I have no intention of inflicting a confession upon you, rest assured. This is not the time, and I have written novels for that purpose. In short, I will say only that I consider myself a cosmopolitan intellectual (this word alone was sufficient grounds for persecution in the Bulgaria of my childhood), of European citizenship, French nationality, and Bulgarian origin. Aside from the bitterness and wounds, I retain a grateful memory of my studies in Bulgaria….[12]

Bulgarian scholar Elena Gueorguieva elaborates on the autobiographical aspect of Kristeva's fiction in an essay entitled "Images of Bulgaria in the Fiction of Julia Kristeva", pointing out that in the novel *The Old Man and the Wolves*, "Santa Barbara," the novel's setting, is a fictional representation of Bulgaria. It is a place where people have become "wolflike," deeply steeped in murder and crime, where "Aggression remains the only counterweight to depression."[13] This is strong condemnation, only thinly disguised, and provides evidence that the unhappiness and repression of Kristeva's early life drive her abjection of her maternal space.

For Kristeva, then, the Balkans and France do not meet as two subjects, two equal codes, but rather as French subject and Bulgarian abject: "The abject has only one quality of the object-that of being opposed to *I*."[14] Within her project of "Oedipal Revolt," she pits Bulgaria as European archaic drive against France as Europe's Symbolic and as a result she loses psychological heterogeneity to the simplified structure of geopolitical differentiation and hierarchy. In other words, the term "archaic mother" has quite different connotations in the respective contexts of European geopolitics and the theory of poetics. In the first case it evokes established geopolitical stereotypes and, in the second, it works to reveal fresh nuances of textual interpretation.

Kristeva implicitly offers her own biography as a model for immigrants' Oedipal emancipation, and it is difficult not to read the portrayal of the biblical Ruth, "The Model Émigrée,"[15] in *Strangers to Ourselves*, as her idealized *alter ego*. Ruth, the princess of Moab, married a Jew, stopped mourning her maternal space and was rewarded by becoming the matriarch of Jewish royalty, ancestor of David's line: "The reprehensible immigration is thus inverted into a necessary condition for the accomplishment of

8. Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt. The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 2*, Translated by Jeanin Herman, (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 243: hereafter cited parenthetically as *Intimate*.

9. Julia Kristeva, "La Langue, la Nation, les Femmes" ("Language, Nation, Women") Edition Université de Sofia, 2002; hereafter cited parenthetically as "Language". A copy of the speech in the original French was sent to me by Professor Dimitar Kambourov, who was present when Kristeva received the *Doctor Honoris Causa* degree and heard her speak. He reports, "I would say that people who know details concerning Kristeva's intellectual itinerary would not be that surprised by the fact that she gave her speech in French...in fact, there was widespread opposition to what she did then." (Personal communication, March 19th 2007. Quoted by permission).

10. According to John Mowitt, "though the uncanny remains unthematized in "Bulgarie ma souffrance',the encrypted mother returns here in national guise. I am thinking, obviously of the pun that unsettles her title, where Bulgaria is both where she suffers a delay, a site of pain, but also her beneath or under France." (61) John Mowitt, "Strangers in Analysis: Nationalism and the Talking Cure," *Parallax* 4.3 (1998): 45-63.

11. Julia Kristeva, "Bulgarie, ma souffrance," *L'infini* 51 (autumn 1995): 42-52. Translated as "Bulgaria, My Suffering," in *Crisis* (163-183).

12. "Language" (4).

13. Elena Guéorguiéva, "Images de la Bulgarie dans l'Oeuvre Romanesque de Julia Kristeva," *Etudes balkaniques*, 2.3 (2001): 215.

14. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S, Roudiez, (New York City, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

15. Bonnie Honig, "Ruth, the Model Emigree: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration," in *Political Theory. An International Journal of Political Philosophy*, 25.1 (February 1997): 112-136.

Ruth's destiny."[16] Kristeva's interpretation of the story of Ruth shows that she desires immigrants, Bulgarians, and the Balkans, to desire *her* French-ness and in this self-appointed role as signifier of the other's desire, she becomes an avatar of cultural hegemony.

Although distant in space from each other, French immigrants and the Balkans are, in Kristeva's register, related within the discursive framework of her own exilic identity. While the Balkans symbolize the mad, archaic mother, the immigrants are angry children and both are equally dangerous to the symbolic father. As Kristeva points out, France has a long history of openness to immigration and the granting of citizenship. However, with the influx of North African immigrants, both the French cultural right and left began to question whether citizenship should be granted to them because of their exotic culture and potentially competing loyalties. In this debate, Kristeva praised the *Committee on Nationality* (*Commission de la Nationalite*) chaired by Marceau Long, the head the *Council of State*, and supported "the existing fusion of *nation* and *Etat"* while rejecting "the idea of an 'ethnopluralistic' society."[17] She argues that "The homogenizing power of French civilization, which has been able to take in and unify over the course of centuries various influences and ethnic groups, has been tried and tested [but immigrants] do not give up their particularities."[18] Kristeva even accuses Third World immigrants, since their arrival in France, of "…Balkanizing the cultural, political, and economic forces of European people…."(54) Indeed, she lays the blame on immigrants for the "gruesome course" that French civil society has taken since the French Revolution. She recognizes her own destructive drive for the lost Balkan space in the Arab youth who, unable to accept the symbolic father, rebel against him with the incestuous madness of fundamentalists:

> "People who adhere to fundamentalist Islam are rebels against colonialism or against the misery of the Arab world, against Zionist imperialism, against rich, colonial France, against banks, or against a consumer society."[19]

Kristeva recognizes the antipathy to French authority among French Arab youth, but locates the source of their rebellion in the unconscious of the colonial subject rather than in the injustices of French imperialism. From her psychoanalytic perspective, the real source of conflict between immigrant labor and global capital is not the unequal distribution of wealth and resources, but the universal structure of the Oedipus. Her articulation of "intimate democracy" and the social "consensus in the unconscious" reflects both the inherent paradox of her subject-position and her ignorance of colonial history. Discursive subjugation of the diversity of immigrants' experience to the universal signifier of the Lacanian subject is the foundation of her concept of "strangeness."

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva confronts her own strangeness in the immigrants she writes of. She identifies four kinds of otherness: the other as immigrant in France; the other as the French host to the immigrant; the other as her own unconscious projection of a foreigner; and, finally, unconscious projection of herself as the other onto her fellow citizens. All of these forms of otherness have the unconscious as their foundation, and thus it must be recognized as the psychosomatic foundation of democracy which allows for both diversity and unity. However, the corollary to accepting that unconscious fantasies constitute the other, is accepting that the symbolic castration and repression of prohibited desire is the foundation of otherness just as much as of symbolic expression. Intrinsically, then, psychoanalysis as the science of the unconscious becomes the ultimate arbiter of political and personal diversity, yet deeply invested in homogenizing identity, erasing colonial histories, and holding the key to cultural hegemony.

Defining "unconscious," in general, and the Balkans, in particular, both as the foundation and the refusal of the subject, "the improper facet of the proper self,"[20] Kristeva politicizes Oedipal subjectivity. The split from the mother engenders the desiring subject, and Kristeva's constitution of her own exilic identity epitomizes this process. That is, she denounces the Balkans only to create a prohibited desire for the place. This prohibited desire, the precondition for Oedipal subjectivity, is in fact the madness of the subject and the only truth about the subject. So the danger and truth about her is in the prohibited Balkans, her maternal space. Immigrants' hair, face, smell, clothes--all endanger the continued repression of the forbidden bond. This makes it absolutely essential that the politics of signification come down on the side of the subject who, recognizing her *doppelgänger* in the abject, must self-identify with the hegemonic culture in order to preserve the boundaries of the symbolic.

Kristeva's support of the French government's prohibition of Muslim schoolgirls' wearing headscarves is a specific example of her refusal to recognize Diasporic signification, or any aspect of immigrant identity formation that does not conform to the French symbolic system or rests on the incestuous bond with lost maternal space.[21] Sociological study of the Islamic tradition in Europe reveals

16. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), 70; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Strangers*.

17. Willian Safran, "Citizenship and Nationality", *International Political Science Review*, 18.3 (1997): 317.

18. *Strangers*, (194).

19. Julia Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, translated by Brian O'Keeffe (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2002), 106; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Revolt*.

20. Sara Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva. Psychonalysis and Modernity*, (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 189.

21. I am not suggesting that Kristeva is racist. However, I agree with David Macey's assessment that she cannot "escape the confusion that surrounds the entire French debate about citizenship and nationality. All too often, it is forgotten…that in many cases the offensive 'Muslim woman in a headscarf' is, and has from birth been, a French citizen." David Macey, "Rebellion, or, Analysis," *Radical Philosophy*, (March/April 2006): 47.

that Islamisation of the immigrant identity in an alien space produces neither a simple nor an incomplete self. Rather, in the absence of a spatial connection, Islamisation offers "lineage of belief" with the tradition of the lost space.[22] For example, a young Turk interviewed by a French sociologist had reported that in order to remain in Germany after his mother requested that he return permanently with her to Turkey, he joined a Mosque, a compromise which satisfied his mother and permitted him to stay in Germany and attend university. Not only had he emancipated himself from the traditional family by signifying himself as an Islamist, he had also found his identity as a European in the exclusionary environment. "In fact Muslim religiosity serves the individual as a means of constructing himself as the *same* and as *different* within the society (my italics)."(300) Thus European Muslim identity can provide a middle ground between living in a space and being excluded from it.[23] According to Schirin Amir-Moazami,

> "The hybrid character of identities, represented by *in-between* formations, demands a redefined understanding of borders and markers in the context of migration. Such an understanding has to go beyond the *either/or* scheme: Islamic *or läique*, modern or traditional, the self or the other, etc."[24]

Gramscian "hybrid character of identities…" is precisely what Kristeva ignores in her articulation of her own exilic identity and of the state of "exile" in general. Yet, for immigrants themselves, hybridity is practical solution for cultural conflict.[25]

Defending the French cultural dominance Kristeva constructs the Balkans as a discursive trope and then abjects her own construction just as she abjects unoedipalized immigrants. One might argue that she posits equality in the very existence of the shared unconscious. In other words, however much we may differ in looks or culture, are we not all strangers to ourselves and others because we repress desire? Yet there remains the crucial question of who claims and exercises the power to repress and interpret this desire, tand this is the exact point at which the complexity of Kristeva's discourse deteriorates into the banality of imperialism. It is also a *self*-orientalizing discourse in the sense that she locates and subjugates her Bulgarian origins as the east to her French supèrego. Then, replicating the operation of "nesting orientalisms" in Balkan identity formation, she orientalizes "strangers" in order to maintain her French superego as the West.

Père-version

The year the Berlin Wall fell, 1989, was a benchmark for both Kristeva and Žižek. It was the year she visited Bulgaria and began to comment sporadically on Eastern Europe. That same year, Slavoj Žižek published his first major work in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.[26] Neoliberalism was on the rise, along with a general presumption of the end of ideology. Žižek not only refutes the death of ideology but also argues that the proclamation of its death represents ideology in its purest form. Ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia and elsewhere and the rise of European nationalism have proven Žižek correct in that argument. Writing in the context of the ideological storm raging in ex-Yugoslavia, in vivid language that drew from continental philosophy (Kant, Hegel), psychoanalysis (Lacan) and Anglo-Saxon popular culture, he soon established himself as an East European political philosopher like none other, not only because of his ideas, but also the prodigious volume of his work. In addition, Žižek's work, carried out in conjunction with his role as the most prominent member of what is now known as the Slovenian group of Lacanian psychoanalysis, was instrumental in revealing the existence of a flourishing philosophical scene in the formerly Marxist East.

Žižek was born and educated in Socialist Yugoslavia, earning a Ph.D. from the University of Ljubljana and eventually completing a second dissertation while studying in Paris with Jacques-Alain Miller. The Lacanian Group in Slovenia began to coalesce around him as its political leader in the context of the final disintegration of the Yugoslav state and he and other members of the Group worked within the Slovene youth alternative movement as dissidents to the Slovene pro-Yugoslav Communist government. Two publications in particular nurtured this spirit of dissent: *Mladina* (*Youth*), run by the communist youth, and *Nova Revija* (*New Review)*, run by older, more nationalistic writers. Žižek began publishing in *Mladina* in the 1970's. Žižek was also the intellectual standardbearer of another dissident group, NSK *Neue Slovenische Kunst* (New Slovenian Art), an art collective composed of "Laibach," a rock group; "Irwin," a group of painters; and the theater group *Scipion Nasice* (Sisters of Scipion Nasice). Promoting the idea of "culture as state" Žižek and the NSK developed a dissident strategy of "overidentification" which mocks the state by appearing to take it more seriously than it takes itself.[27]

Becoming engaged in national politics through his collaboration with NSK and the Lacanians, Žižek was politically active during the formative years of the new Slovene state, running

22. Quoted in Nikola Tietze, "Managing Borders: Muslim Religiosity Among Young Men in France and Germany," in *Muslim Traditions and Modern Techniques of Power*, ed. Armando Salvatore, (Munster-London: Lit Verlag, 2001), 295; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Muslim*.

23. "In other words, Muslim religiosity is a means for dealing with ambivalence, so that borders lose their power of separation. Continuity and discontinuity, 'Orient' and 'Occident', difference and identity, dogma and heresy become compatible." (305).

24. Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Hybridity and Anti-Hybridity: The Islamic Headscarf and its Opponents in the French Public Sphere", in *Muslim* (324). For the critical status of Kristeva's exile in the French context, see Winifred Woodbull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb. Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 88-133.

25. For the critical status of Kristeva's exile in the French context, see Winifred Woodbull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb. Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 88-133.

26. Slavoj Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Press, 1989); hereafter cited parenthetically as *Sublime*.

27. Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine*, *Leibach and NSK,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Presss, 2005), 110.

unsuccessfully for a seat on the collective presidency in 1991. The Socialist and multiethnic Yugoslavian state had officially nurtured progressive thinking around class divisions during a time of resurgent reactionary geopolitical and ethnic identifications, and the Lacanians were able to exploit the residual Marxist rhetoric of class equality, while promulgating a psychoanalytic explanation of the inter-ethnic violence capturing the political and theoretical attention of the West. At this time when Yugoslavia was literally in flames, their discursive strategy was to identify the Balkans as the Lacanian *Real*, which worked as theoretical reinforcement to the nationalist rhetoric of Balkan otherness in the new Slovenian state.[28]

The impetus toward the establishment of a Slovene state, and the success of Žižek's and his Group's psychoanalytically-mediated political *praxis* in that context had much to do with the Slovenes' historical self-identification with Central Europe rather than with the Balkans. ("Back to Europe where we always belonged" and "This is a choice between Europe and the Balkans" proclaimed Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of Slovenia for 10 years, then President from 2002-2006). Historically, the concept of "Central Europe" has fluctuated according to the contingencies of European geopolitics, and it still does fluctuate from nation to nation. In the 1970's and 1980's, toward the end of the Cold War, emphasizing culture and subjectivity, political dissent, ethnicity and individual desire, it gained fresh currency as an alternative to the East/West ideological and geopolitical binary. Freud and psychoanalysis, as Central European avatars of modernity, have been an important influence on the post-cold war construction of Eastern European cultural identity, with psychoanalysis becoming both the paradigm of Central European subjectivity and a discourse of dissent against political repression. Slovenia, a few hours by train from Vienna and the most liberal of all six Yugoslav republics, was fertile ground for such new expressions of dissent to take root and flourish.

But it was the "French Freud"[29] and "French Oedipus"[30] who assigned Žižek and his Lacanian friends the mission of bringing subjectivity to Slovens. When Žižek returned to Slovenia after studying in Paris with Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and intellectual heir, his group took over the avant-garde magazine *Problemi* and used it as a medium for channeling the precepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis into Slovenian public discourse. Mladen Dolar, who also studied with Miller in Paris, remembers his own and Žižek's return to Slovenia in the 1980s as a sort of mission to establish a Lacanian outpost there, encouraged by Miller:

> "We had been publishing Lacan in *Problemi* and *Analecta* for years, and [Miller] was grateful for that. He thinks very strategically and didn't have anyone else published in Eastern Europe. To him, we were the last stronghold of Western culture on the eastern front."[31]

Miller's injunction to Žižek and Dolar to spread the Lacanian gospel reflects not only a desire to establish psychoanalysis as a discursive hegemony on the "eastern front" (i.e. the Balkans spearheaded by Slovenia), it also shows Miller's naturalization of the cognitive map of Europe, which, since the Enlightenment, had divided European space into the rational West and the irrational East, a division that has shaped the Western discourse of rationality (including psychoanalysis) along the lines of colonial exclusion.[32]

In a letter to Trieste psychoanalyst Edoardo Weiss (May 28, 1922) Freud makes clear that the people directly to the south of his native Austria—the Slovenes--do not meet the Oedipal civilizational standard. This is Freud's response to Weiss' complaint that a Slovene patient is not responding to therapy: "… our analytical art when faced with such people, our perspicacity alone cannot break through to the dynamic relation which controls them."[33] Southern Slavs in general, Freud argued in his clinical history of the "Rat Man," are anal; not only do they have a proclivity to sodomy, they also dream of shit as a sign of gold and good luck.[34]

The Lacanian group adopted Freud's cognitive map of Europe as a basis for its own particular form of psycho-cultural discourse. This is apparent when Žižek, articulating a project of national rebirth through psychoanalysis, takes up the case of the failing Slovene Oedipus where Freud's discussion with Weiss concerning the "immoral Slovene" leaves it. Instead of questioning Freud's implicit geopolitical bias, overidentifying Žižek returns to the original pronouncement of "unanalyzability" to diagnose the collective condition of the Slovene Oedipus:

> The "immoral" Slovene mentioned does not just embody the paradoxical way enjoyment and the Law are linked, but hides yet another surprise, which leads to the key to the Slovene national fantasy, to the theme of the "maternal superego", to the theme of the mother (not the father) as the bearer of the Law/

28. Tonči Kuzmić, *Hate-Speech in Slovenia. Slovenian Racism, Sexism and Chauvinism*, (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Open Society Institute-Slovenia, 1999).

29. Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics. Freud's French Revolution*, (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1978), 49.

30. *Revolt,* (74).

31. Robert S. Boynton "Enjoy Your Žižek", an interview in *Lingua Franca*, October 1998: http://www.robertboynton.com/articleDisplay.php?article_id=43

32. For a perceptive account of Europe's discursive divisions during the Cold War, see Chapter 1 "The barbaric Left" in Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Positions Tbe Cultural Politics of Left and Right*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 41-64.

33. Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso Press, 1996], 8; hereafter cited parenthetically as *For They Know*.

34. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition, Vol. XII*, translated from German under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, (London: Hogarth Press, 1968): 187-203; hereafter cited parenthetically as *SE*.

Prohibition.[35]

According to Žižek's Lacanian interpretation, Slovenes are excessively attached in their "national fantasy" to the Mother. The absence of the Father, the bearer of internal law/Prohibition, engenders a "national fantasy" formed around maternal prohibition of external pleasures and creates the "impediment" to subjectivity expressed in the Slovene's sexual impotence and immorality. Only the Symbolic and internalized Law of the Father, through inner prohibition, engenders enjoyment as a form of transgression. And, Žižek concludes, "… we Slovenes – 'unanalyzable" according to Freud-had to wait for Lacan to find a meeting with psychoanalysis; only with Lacan did psychoanalysis achieve a level of sophistication that rendered it capable of tackling such foul apparitions as the Slovenes."(9) In other words, Žižek accepts and perpetuates Freud's privileged perspective and Lacanian language as the site of national self-transformation. And when subjectivity has been restored to Slovenia, what becomes of the "unanalyzable" identity attributed to it by Freud and Žižek? It may be transferred to the "other" Balkans via the Lacanian concept of the *Real*, the pre-symbolic world.[36] Not only did this discursive strategy reproduce the hoariest of representational cliché's about Balkan violence, but was also really *self*-orientalizing in its adherence to the scheme of "nesting orientalisms" in Balkan identity-formation.

Žižek established himself as an analyst of the Balkan political situation at a time when the world was struggling to understand a sudden explosion of nationalism among the Yugoslav ethnic groups. *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*, appeared in 1994 when the Bosnian war was at its height. In this book, Žižek analyzes the Balkans, and particularly the sexual violence of the war in Bosnia using Lacanian theory and language to relate the violence to the Lacanian "father Thing" (*père-jouissance* or, *père-version,* one of Lacan's famous puns). That is, soon after Žižek called upon Slovenes to abandon their incestuous bond with the archaic mother and to ground their enjoyment in the Name-of-the-Father, he turned to Bosnia to diagnose the general conditions of the declining Oedipus and the resurgence of the primal father as the political enjoyment of the Balkans' nationalism. For instance, the Serbs committed horrendous rapes of Bosnian Muslim women and often sadistically forced the father to watch the rape of his daughter. Here is Žižek's interpretation of one such hypothetical instance, in which he situates the ritualized sexual violence in the Lacanian pre-Symbolic, and circumvents the question of ethnicity by focusing on the "father Thing" in the cruelty of the rape:

> Because his desire is split,
> divided between fascination with
> enjoyment and repulsion at it;
> or –to put it another was-because
> the implicit knowledge that the
> victim is *enjoying* her suffering, the
> observer's ability to act – to rescue
> the victim-woman from the torturer
> or from herself – bears witness to
> the fact that he became 'dupe of
> his own fantasy' (as Lacan put it
> apropos of Sade): *the blow aims at*
> *the unbearable surplus-enjoyment*.[37]

Following Lacan, Žižek presents both facets of the "Father's enjoyment" here: the symbolic and the pre-symbolic. The former sets the rules and parameters of normative order, and his joy is separate from the *Real*. The father in his pre-symbolic aspect (the primal father from *Totem and Taboo*), on the other hand, is the owner of all women and the object of his sons' hate, and the source of sexual violence. He is also exempt from castration. The Bosnian father hypothesized by Žižek epitomizes the pre-symbolic, the primitive, the Balkan *Real*, one who still enjoys (by force) the incestuous bond. As such, he is inseparable from the history of the established pathology of the place itself, as are the rest of the people living there. This particular Lacanian dyad of *Père-Jouissance* discursively replaces the "un-analyzable Slovene" with the Bosnian father as primitive other who is all too readily analyzable by Žižek himself as symbolic father and phallic authority.

Père-version ("Father-thing")

In October, 2003, "In Search of Balkania", an exhibition of avant-garde Balkan art, opened at the *Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum* in Graz. The aim of the exhibition was to revive the Balkans as "a site of intellectual endeavor and cultural desire."[38] The above photograph of Žižek is reproduced in the "User's Manual" and was exhibited in Graz by Irwin, the NSK art collective. The same photo adorns the back cover of Žižek's book, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), while the front cover displays Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio's painting, *The Virgin and Child*. Both images refer to Freud's visit to Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina) in September, 1898, and to his first paper on the unconscious, "The Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness," published the same year in *Monatschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*. The article in question concerns Freud's forgetting the proper name of an Italian painter, Luca Signorelli. The names "Botticelli" and "Boltraffio" kept coming to mind in place of "Signorelli." Freud theorized that his forgetting the name was the result of the unconscious mechanism of sexual repression.

The constellation of signifiers in the photo suggests the following: Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic couch was covered with a carpet sent to him from Sa-

35. *For They Know*, (55n).

36. Mladen Dolar, another prominent Slovene Lacanian, discusses Freud's visit to the Slovene caves in Divača in 1898, where he unexpectedly met the notorious anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna, Dr. Karl Lüger. Dolar describes the cave as "..this metaphorical abyss of the unconscious" where "..the Master missing from the symbolic makes an unexpected appearance in the Real." The Balkans is the *Real*, Europe's unconscious, where its repressed desires and violence emerge. And, as Dolar writes, "Finally it is the place of the unanalyzable." Mladen Dolar, "Freud in Yugoslavia," unpublished manuscript.

37. *Metastases*, (75).

38. *In Search of Balkania: A User's Manual*, (Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 2003), 2.

lonica by his distant relative[39] (and future brother-in-law), Moritz Freud.[40] Moritz, in addition to being a carpet dealer, was also rumored to be involved in the white-slave trade. Historian Peter J. Swales suggests that Freud may not only have suspected this, but may have enjoyed the possibility that the carpet in his therapy room bore a tenuous connection to the reputed Turkish excess of sexuality. As Freud reported in his article: "[A colleague] had told me what overriding importance these Bosnians attached to sexual enjoyments. One of his patients said to him once: 'Herr, you must know, that if *that* comes to an end then life is of no value.'[41] The "un-analyzable Slovene" lies in a position to be analyzed not by Freud but by the symbolic Other immanent in the *mise en scène*. He rests on the "Bosnian' carpets, boxed as if *in utero* on the day of Lacan's birth, with Courbet's painting, *l'Origine du Monde,* hanging above him. The painting was originally commissioned by Halil Bey, a Turkish diplomat and collector of erotica. When the diplomat was called back to Istanbul from Paris, the painting came eventually into the possession of Lacan's second wife Sylvie Bataille-Lacan, the former wife of Georges Bataille.

During his short visit to Trebinje, Freud walked upon the carpets of a former harem that had become a tourist attraction. The visit to the harem, Swales explains, could well have evoked the exotic aura of the carpet on his consulting couch at 19 Berggasse, and conjured up a fantasy of himself as a sexual despot in a seraglio inhabited by female patients lying upon the famous couch, ready for analysis as a kind of "epistemological coitus."[42] "And here," Swales concludes his study of Freud's visit to Herzegovina, "… I allude, of course, to how over time Freud would create for himself a *de facto* harem-Martha, Minna, Emma, Fanny, Marie, Helen, Lou, Anna, the Princess, etc.-with the royal couch as its very organizing principle."(62)[43]

Balkanism and Intellectual Labor

Žižek uses the psychoanalytic language of desire to construct a comprehensive political philosophy and Kristeva to advocate "oedipal revolt" as a unifying culture of Europe. Both of these intellectual projects are antithetical to what Said calls "the spatial consciousness exemplified in Gramsci's 'southern question.'"[44] That is, considerations of regionalism and cultural hybridity, as well as historical contingencies of time and place, are absent from their analyses except in essentializing contexts such as Žižek's elaboration of the Lacanian "father Thing" as endemic to Bosnian violence or Kristeva's reference to immigrants' hair, face, smell, clothes. The lack of Gramscian "spatial consciousness" in Kristeva's and Žižek's work extends to their own relation to their Balkan origins. As we have seen in the case of Kristeva's theorizing of Bulgaria and Žižek's of Slovenia and the ex-Yugoslavia, they discuss their respective maternal spaces only in elaborately intellectualized (and depersonalized) terms through the medium of Lacanian theory. This careful distancing of themselves from their origins constitutes a sort of textual "dog that did not bark in the nighttime" that alerts one to the unacknowledged centrality of Kristeva's and Žižek's Balkan origins to their writing about the region, and also identifies elements of that work as "Balkanist."

Bulgarian-American historian Maria Todorova posits that what we know about the Balkans can't be separated from *how* we know as the essence of the question, "What is the Balkans?" can't be answered without examining the conditions of knowledge about the region. The Balkans as a stable representational scheme which originated in travelogues, literature and Western journalism may now be seen as a discursive problem rather than as "truth." When Todorova named this process of representation "balkanism", she named two contradictory elements: the Balkans as an object explained by rational knowledge and a space abandoned by rational knowledge.[45] Todorova acknowledges orientalist character of balkanist discourse, but as Milica Bakić-Hayden writes, "Todorova shows that *balkanism* independently developed a rhetorical arsenal of its own via its specific geo-political religious and cultural position…"[46] Bakić-Hayden goes on to elucidate "nesting orientalisms" as an important element in Balkan identity-formation. According to this scheme, in the Balkans " … the designation of 'other' has been appropriated and manipulated by those who have themselves been designated as such in orientalist discourse." (922) Specifically, the Slovenes see themselves as more civilized than the Serbs, who are farther East; the Serbs, in turn, see themselves as more civilized than the Albanians. In addition, such representational schemes based on spatial hierarchies have been internalized as essential identities because they allow and justify exclusion of the other.

Rastko Močnik's account of the status and function of *balkanism* within the context of globalization provides a framework to illustrate how Kristeva's exegesis of "archaic mother" and Žižek's of the "father Thing" fit into the scheme of Balkanist discourse. According to Močnik, two major *a priori* structures of

39. Ernst Jones, *The Life and Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol I*, (New York City, NY: Basic Books, INC., 1954), 2.

40. Peter J. Swales, "Freud, Death and Sexual Pleasures: On the Psychical Mechanism of Dr. Sigmund Freud, *Arc de Cercle* 1 (2003): 62; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Psychical*.

41. *SE, Vol.III* (292).

42. *Psychical* (62).

43. Regarding Freud as "primal father" see Ralph Blumenthal "Hotel Log Hints at Illicit Desire That Dr. Freud Didn't Repress", in *New York Times* INTERNATIONAL / EUROPE | December 24, 2006. sister.http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/world/europe/24freud.html?emc=eta1

44. Edward Said, "Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element, and the Methodological Imperialism," *After Colonialism and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakas, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1990), 28.

45. *Imagining*.

46. "Nesting," 920.

domination and subordination govern *balkanism* as politics and as identity: the first is *horizontal* antagonism among the Balkan *ethnies*, in which each of them is a potential aggressor; the second is a *vertical* system of co-operation between each of these parties and the European Union. Within this system of *antagonisms* and *co-operation,* stereotypes of Balkan character emerge as *knowledge* and as *identities*. The Balkan identity becomes complete only when the geopolitical map has been fully inscribed and reflected as an ambiguous and incomplete self and as such is a supplement to global ideology in its very archaic closeness. Kristeva's "Oedipal Revolt" naturalizes both aspects of this scheme proposed by Močnik: horizontal antagonism in relationship to the Balkans as the primitive other, as maternal space, and as dangerous neighbor, and vertical cooperation with the established geopolitical hierarchy (France, as symbolic master). In the case of Žižek, since all elements of his hierarchical scheme are geographically within the Balkans, the concept of "nesting orientalisms" is a useful supplement to situating his discourse in Močnik's proposed structure of *balkanism*. However, in the case of Žižek as well as Kristeva, the transcendent vertical allegiance is to the universal subject and to psychoanalysis.

The line between the established geopolitics of the European *Grossraum* and Freud's metapsychology blurs in the Balkans. As I have shown, the geo-political map of the divided and hierarchized Europe preceded--and influenced--the development of Freud's theory of subjectivity. And the latent geopolitics of psychoanalytic language as both arbiter and symptom of modernity have made the Balkans, because of their strong tendency toward internalization of dominating discourses, particularly susceptible to its implied universalism. However, Oedipal structure imposed as a universal to every national subject does not, as Kristeva would have it, serve the analytic function of individual emancipation. Rather, it becomes a geopolitical performative in nations aspiring to enter the privileged geography of the West. Miller sent Žižek and Dolar to establish a foothold for Lacanian discourse—but, more importantly, to rid Slovenia of its taint of Balkanness and "unanalyzability" and to establish a climate of psychoanalytic rationality there that would embody "the most radical contemporary version of the Enlightenment."[47]

Miller's charge to Žižek and Dolar implies that the geopolitical aspect of their mission is an essential part of their intellectual project. When Žižek identifies with Freud's stereotype of the "un-analyzable Slovene," he is both *in* and *out* of the European discourse of rationality.[48] He is *out* because, as the object of the imperial gaze, he embodies the immoral and irrational substance of Europe; he is *in* by adopting imperial discourse, the symbolic Other that he has found in analyzing the Bosnian father via the "father Thing." It is at this moment of analysis that Žižek discovers both the symbolic Father and universal subjectivity. The relationship to the Bosnian father as the Balkan other reveals the meta-otherness as pure cogito, the symbolic Other that had already marked Žižek as the "un-analyzable Slovene".

Discovery of himself as symbolic Other at the moment of analyzing the Bosnian father has enabled Žižek to split from the Balkan substance; it has also purchased him a universalist gaze on global labor, immigration and multiculturalism—as well as status as a global, rather than Balkan, intellectual. Speaking now from the place of the empty signifier which negates the incestuous substance of the maternal space and leads to its positive universality, Žižek hopes to do for global immigrant labor what the symbolic Other has done for him--to split it from its consubstantial relation with culture and territories. "Castration," according to the logic of the signifier, introduces the distinction between an element and its (empty) place of the symbolic Other. More precisely, it produces the primacy of the schematic place over the element and ensures that every positive element occupies a place which is not 'consubstantial' to it--that it fills a void which is not its own.[49] And, according to Žižek, the "logic of the signifier" is represented in the "true conservatism of the Eurocentric Left" that has placed its trust in the violence of the negative since the Jacobin terror.[50]

On behalf of the symbolic Other and against the particular other Žižek uncovers "working class politics" and "productive antagonism" underneath the immigrant labor and Kristeva's multicultural tolerance. He inveighs against regression into the sensibilities of national taste, therapy, and otherness, because they are all anodynes that displace the productive antagonism of class struggle basic to Marxism. "National taste, therapy, and otherness" are also, of course, prominent themes in Kristeva's work and, in one of the few instances where he actually mentions her, Žižek warns, "… there is a danger that issues of economic exploitation are converted into problems of cultural tolerance. And then you have only to make one step further, that of Julia Kristeva in her essay 'Etrangers à nous memes,' and say we cannot tolerate others because we cannot tolerate otherness in ourselves. Here we have

47. *Sublime*, (7).

48. Žižek's *ambivalent* discursive position is evidenced when he proclaims his antagonism to "identity politics" and yet deploys Balkanist stereotypes in his own discourse ("Bosnian father" and "un-analyzable Slovene"). He also claims to be aware of the mechanisms of Balkan identity formation such as "nesting orientalisms", but there is no evidence that he takes them into account that they have influenced his own subject-position. "The fantasy which organized the perception of ex-Yugoslavia is that of the Balkans as the Other of the West: the place of savage ethnic conflicts long ago overcome by civilised Europe, …". Slavoj Žižek, "Ethnic Dance Macabre" in *The Guardian* (UK) Aug 28, 1992.

49. *For They Know,* (231).

50. *Tiklish,* (374).

pure pseudo-psychoanalytic cultural reductionism."[51]

Kristeva's position is much more complex than Žižek's observation would indicate. She is an immigrant dislocated from her traditional culture, a trained psychoanalyst (Lacanian, as is he) and she denies class conflict for all of these reasons. Marxism in Bulgaria (as in Yugoslavia) was, for decades, a total discourse that regulated human relations and identities. In its practical totality, Marxism embodied the *local* culture. Kristeva declares herself "an exile from socialism and Marxist rationality."[52] How can this position be reconciled with "working class" sensibilities without simultaneous regression to "the obsessional dialectic of the slave" of Hegelian political terror, and shattering her precious universalism?(294) "Working class" for Kristeva is not just an economic concept, but the equivalent of her repressed Bulgarian identity, of political machinery that "excludes the specific histories of speech, dreams and *jouissance*."(294) She cannot extricate herself from the language of dissidence. She acts from the unconscious and produces the freedom of intimacy, and her whole identity is at stake when confronting Marxist language: "The intellectual, who is the instrument of this discursive rationality, is the first to feel the effects of its break-up: his own identity is called into question, his dissidence becomes more radical."(295) Refusing to see labor in terms of economic exploitation and demanding instead psychological tolerance is the way in which she refuses the obvious and insists on the impossible, denying exploitation for the sake of the radical gesture of repressing her own past that opens her to the empty space of signification.

From Gramsci to Harold Garfinkel, "doing" philosophy is just one kind of social practice, one that produces transcendental knowledge that sees itself as privileged in relation to what it mediates. When Edmund Husserl gave his famous Vienna lectures in 1935 "Philosophy in the Crisis of European Mankind" and follow them up with the Prague lectures "The Crisis of European Science and Psychology" on the problems of modern philosophy and science at a time of emerging anti-Semitism, he reminded Europeans of the Greeks' discovery of transcendental rationality and the need of the continent to return to the principles of universality. However, because Husserl was a Jew, no one would publish the lectures. They were eventually published in 1936 in Belgrade in international year book called *Philosophia* by Arthur Liebert as *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*. It is ironic that this book, which is concerned, in part, with an important mathematical concept (transcendental rationality) discovered in the Balkan peninsula, could only be published there. This, of course, does not alter the internal argument made by Husserl that transcendental rationality is independent of its location. Nor does it alter the internal logic of the Pythagorean theorem. However, the implications of publication in the local space in itself valorizes the concept of transcendental rationality, while undermining Žižek's version of hyper Cartesianism.

The split and the significational transaction between the two contexts, internal-universal and external-local replicate the ushering in of European universality by the Enlightenment, when the Western part of Europe created its marginal space by relegating the Eastern part to a second serfdom.[53] As historians have recently argued, Voltaire and the Enlightenment divided European space into the rational West and the irrational East, a division that has shaped the Western discourse of rationality (including psychoanalysis) along the lines of colonial exclusions. The philosophy of the Enlightenment constructed Eastern Europe and the Balkans as the dangerous exterior, "the dark side of the collective Europe," the place of Europe's forbidden desire, of vampires, unruly feminine sexuality and tribalism.[54] That is, all that West had to discharge in order to become the center of the world--the Empire--was ascribed to the East as the constitutive dark counterpoint to Enlightenment. Relations here have traditionally been fixed by a sort of "cognitive paranoia," whereby the West constructs the identity of the "other" part of Europe--known to Freud as well as to Žižek.[55] Lacking its own Enlightenment and corresponding Eastern European Cartesianism, this geopolitical "other" either submits to (and internalizes) the externally imposed identity or completely rejects it. So when *Žižek* insist that *cogito* is," … the authentic moment of discovery, the breakthrough, occurs when a properly universal dimension explodes from within a particular context and becomes 'for-itself,' directly experienced as such (as universal),"[56] he subscribes to the Enlightenment's "cognitive paranoia".

To return briefly to Husserl in this context, he argued that Galileo was a great discoverer and a great concealer because his hypothetico-deductive method concealed the very local foundation of his transcendental knowledge. Similarly, we find that, in the case of both Kristeva and Žižek, the transcendental scheme of the Lacanian split subject conceals the split geopolitical identity upon which their interpretation and application of the Lacanian theory of subjectivity is founded. The East from which both Kristeva and Žižek extricate themselves by means of psychoanalysis was constituted from a

51. Žižek: "There is nothing to be said against tolerance. But when you buy this multiculturalist tolerance, you buy many other things with it. Isn't it symptomatic that multiculturalism exploded at the very historic moment when the last traces of working-class politics disappeared from political space? For many former leftists, this multiculturalism is a kind of ersatz working-class politics. We don't even know whether the working class still exists, so let's talk about exploitation of others." (Interview, http://www.lacan.com/Žižek-measure.htm)

52. *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), 299.

53. Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe 1740–1985: Feudalism to Communism.* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

54. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

55. See Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation,* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

56. Slavoj Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," http://consellodacultura.org/sentidos/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/Žižek_santiago.pdf.

Cartesian "bone." However, the geopolitical split of the Balkans does not inevitably produce a split subject position as it has with *Žižek* and Kristeva. I can attest to the heterogeneity of intellectual work in the Balkans and to the fact that hegemonic culture and its politics of representation has been a common theme for intellectuals from the region, whether working within the Balkans or as expatriates.

It is illuminating to compare Kristeva, for instance, with her compatriot Tzvetan Todorov, who emigrated from Bulgaria to France about the same time as she. They were members of the same intellectual circle during their early years there and, as adherents of Mikhail Bakhtin, were instrumental in introducing his dialogical work into the overly static context of French structuralism.[57] From this point on, Kristeva's and Todorov's intellectual trajectories diverge. In the first chapter of his book, *The Morals of History*--about the use of the symbolic system of the advanced culture, Catholic Spain, to colonize the natives of South America--Todorov, discussing the Bakhtinian concept of *exotopy* explains it as "nonbelonging to a given culture." And, he writes further, "According to Bakhtin, not only is *exotopy not* an obstacle to thorough knowledge of this culture, it is the necessary condition of it."[58] He goes on to quote Bakhtin: "It is only in the eye of an *other* culture, that the alien culture reveals itself more completely and more deeply."(4) In other words, in order to be illuminated, a culture needs to be dialogically in relation to "other" cultures rather than to abject them.

Kristeva substitutes the Lacanian split, fragmentation of the self, for dialogue with the Other. For her, there is only the Oedipal *split* between the Balkan morbid abject and the French imperial symbol. For Todorov, the concept of "primitive" signifies only the relation of power; for Kristeva, it is a regressed stage of European civilization localized in the Balkans. Imperialist, Christian exaltation, not *exotopy*, is what she expresses when she writes, "I am almost prepared to believe in the myth of resurrection when I examine the divided state of my mind and body."[59]

Žižek may usefully be compared with his former Slovene leftist friends Rastko Močnik and Tomaž Mastnak, particularly with regard to questions of racism and immigration. Močnik's book, *How much Fascism?* (1993) is focused on European racism and was inspired by such events as the beating of a Bosnian student, closing of the Slovenian borders to Bosnian refugees, and the surge of nationalism and political repression in Slovenia. Žižek's numerous analyses represent Yugoslavia as a dead system without class divisions—only populations regressed into the joy of nationalism with *jouissance feminine* substituted for the class principle. According to Močnik, however, Yugoslav self-management socialism had, in tandem with nationalism, a democratic discourse worth exploration and political investment that has been lost in Žižek's homogenizing scheme.[60] In fact, Žižek's intellectual activism--and that of the NSK and the other Lacanians--were carried out within this vibrant climate of political and cultural debate.

While Žižek was discovering Christian ethics after the destruction of the Bosnian Muslim community, Tomaž Mastnak saw in the Bosnian genocide the configuration of a new European Christian identity and regression to the Christian politico-theology of the Muslim as enemy.[61] Both Močnik and Mastnak remain active in Slovene civil society, committed to the progressive critique of power, and, in particular, to exposing government abuses of the human rights of ex-Yugoslav immigrants. Žižek, on the other hand, at the time he was politically active in the 1990's, enthusiastically supported state institutions and was even willing, in the name of "pragmatic politics" and Leninist discipline, to tacitly condone as a silent executioner human rights abuses by the state while his party was in power.[62]

Roland Boer perceives Kristeva and Žižek as seeking a means of redemption, a "way to salve the ravages of capitalism." Žižek has "recovered a militant Leninist Marxism through Pauline Christianity." And, Boer posits, "Their moves to Christianity function as substitutes for a sidelined Marxism (in Kristeva's case) or as a complement to recovered Marxism (in Žižek's case). And for both it is a redemptive program."[63] Kristeva has followed Arendt's politics of personalized narrative and public aesthetic and Heidegger's

57. Todorov is author of a text widely viewed as the definitive work on Bakhtin: *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

58. Tzvetan Todorov *The Morals of History*, translated by Alyson Waters, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 4.

59. *Intimate*, (243).

60. Rastko Močnik, *Koliko Fašizma?* (How much of a Fascism?"), translated from Slovene to Croat by Srecko Pulig, (Zagreb, Croatia: Bastard Press, 1998), 17.

61. Tomaž Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order,* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

62. Two Slovene students, Jasminka Dedić and Jelka Zorn, supervised by Vlasta Jalušić, a founder of the Peace Institute in Ljubljana, carried out an inquiry into the erasure of citizen's files by the Slovene government. Their book deals with the social and political consequences of the discrimination. It contains a detailed documentation of the Kafkaesque secret "erasure" by the government of over 18.000 ex-Yugoslav citizens residing in Slovenia at the time when Žižek's party held power. It also addresses the broader question of "organized innocence" and the complicity of media and public intellectuals in maintaining silence about a policy that was not "a 'legal' error arising from incompetence in legal matters, but a deliberately discriminatory political act for which national leaders at the highest level were responsible." (*The Erased-Organized Innocence and the Politics of Exclusion,* Ljubljana, Peace Institute, 2003, 16); also see Chris Colin, "Slovenia's Vanishing Act," *Mother Jones* (January 11, 2007); Jelka Zorn, "Borders, Exclusions and Resistance: The Case of Slovenia," *International Social Work and the Radical Tradition*, Michael Lavalette and Ian Ferguson (eds.) (Birmingham UK: Venture Press 2007), "Ethnic Citizenship in the Slovenian State," *Citizenship Studies*, 9.2 (May 2005): 135-152; Brad K. Blitz, "Statelessness and the Social (De)Construction of Citizenship: Political Restructuring and Ethnic Discrimination in Slovenia," *Journal of Human Rights*, 7 (2006): 453-479; Barbara Beznec, "The Impossible is Possible: An Interview with Aleksandar Todorović, initiator of the movement of the erased and founder of the DIPS (the Association of Erased Residents of Slovenia) and the CIIA (the Civil Initiative or Erased Activists," *Časopis za Kritiko Znanstvo* XXXV.228 (2007).

63. Roland Boer, "The Search for Redemption: Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek on Marx, Psychoanalysis and Religion, *Philosophy and Society*, 32.1 1 (2007): 174.

radical withdrawal from instrumental rationality into authentic intimacy and therapy. On this path she has abandoned the Hegelian dialectical foundations of Marxism and particularly Hegel's philosophy of the state-- responsible, in her view, for state terror. Žižek, for his part, has returned to everything abandoned by Kristeva: the Hegelian philosophy of the negative, Leninism, and Maoism. Kristeva's intimate democracy based on otherness and tolerance contrasts sharply with Žižek's insistence on culture as state, working class politics, and hate. I must confess to some skepticism regarding Boer's thesis that Kristeva and Žižek in their different ways sublimate lost socialism through psychoanalysis and Christian love. I am inclined to argue, on the basis of the Gramscian emancipatory epistemology of *praxis* that, on the contrary, psychoanalysis and Christian love allow them to be at home and enjoy the contradictions of capitalism.

Revisiting Močnik's version of the hierarchical structure of *balkanism*, I emphasize here—once again--that Kristeva's and Žižek's *ultimate* vertical allegiance is to Cartesian rationality and universal subjectivity. And this ultimate allegiance is also central to a broader contextualization of their "intellectual labor" through elaborating the Gramscian principles they honor in the breach.

Gramsci's "philosophy of *praxis*" challenged not only Cartesian subjectivity as pure *cogito*, but also the Cartesian elevation of abstraction over the senses. According to Gramsci, the subject, acting from various points of resistance beyond political institutions and traditional Marxist revolutionary thinking, transcends imposed divisions and opens strategic opportunities for resistance to hegemony—thus negating Cartesian exclusionary subjectivity. In place of the self as abstraction, Gramsci offers the intersubjectivity of histories reflected in the internal plurality of a subject who speaks from a specific historical and geographic location as the nodal point of an "inventory of traces."[64] Gramsci was also able to conceptualize the intimate, historical, and geographical intersections of his own life as a heuristic source of new alliances and resistances. That is, the Gramscian "intersubjectivity of histories" not only casts into relief Kristeva's and Žižek's reliance on the universal scheme of the Lacanian split subject, it also points to Gramsci's origins in the poor, rural South of Italy as influential to his later work with the labor movement in the North of Italy and to his intellectual *praxis* in general. His observation and experience of class identity formation in the extremely diverse cultural and economic regions of early 20th-century Italy led him to awareness of the significance of cultural diversity in productive class conflict, a revision and extension of Marxist economic determinism.[65] His ability to incorporate his origins in a marginalized, poor region of Italy into his intellectual *praxis* contrasts with Kristeva's and Žižek's psychoanalytically-mediated decoupling of their intellectual production from their own geopolitical origins in the Balkans. Kristeva's "cosmopolitanism" depends upon her abjection of her Bulgarian origins and Žižek's universalism on replacing "consubstantiation" of geographical space with the "empty signifier."

Psychoanalysis is a discourse of power with particular implications in the Balkans, as I have shown. Through their use of psychoanalytic theory, and the language of desire, Kristeva and Žižek implicitly align the subaltern geography of the Balkans with global capitalism, discursively subjugating the region to the European Union--the new superpower--and its cultural universalism. This process coincides with the European unified market's demand for "rational demographic composition"[66] which was Gramsci's characterization of highly functional American labor. Demographic functionality and universal subjectivity are two abstractions which stand for, and conflate two things: the interior of the individual and the exterior of the market. Discussing Oedipal eroticism as structural demand by the European single market, J. H. H. Weiler, clarifies the connection between economics and cultural universalism which undergirds Oedipal structure:

> Not only have local products come under pressure, even national products have lost their distinctiveness. The very transnationalism of the Community, which earlier on was celebrated as a reinvention of Enlightenment idealism, is just that: universal, rational, transcendent, and wholly modernist.[67]

Weiler's formulation of the Single Market as a synthesis of economics and transcendent rationality affirms Deleuze and Guattari's conception of global capitalism as a unity of nations and national identities structured around Oedipalized desire, the universal structure of the civilized subject. Oedipal structure based on the Law of castration is the very core of capitalism. Writing from his jail cell in 1928 Gramsci had, already, "caught the connection between Fordism and psychoanalysis"[68]:

> The truth is that the new type of man demanded by the rationalization of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been rationalized.[69]

In other words, rationalization of production requires "intimate revolt" against

64. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1979), 25; Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the *Prison Noteboooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geofrey Nowell Smith (eds.), (New York City, NY: International Publisher, 1971), 324; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Prison*.

65. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (1986), 10 (2): 5-27.

66. *Prison*, 281.

67. J. H. H. Weiler, "To be European Citizen. Eros and Civilization", in *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era,* Kjell Goldmann, Ulf Hannerz, Charles Westin (eds.), (London: Routledge, 2000), 176-77.

68. Eli Zaretsky, "Narcissism, Personal Life and Identity: The Place of the 1960s in the History of Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 13. (2008): 95.

69. *Prison*, 296-97.

pre-symbolic sexuality and demands that erotics be placed under the sign of the universal Law as the precondition to successful application of Fordist principles to industrial production and development of "a new type of worker." Gramsci situates psychoanalysis at the very center of the Fordist model:

> "Regulation" of sexual instincts, because of the contradictions it creates and the perversions that are attributed to it, seems particularly "unnatural". Hence the frequency of appeals to "nature" in this area. "Psycho-analytical" literature is also a kind of criticism of the regulation of sexual instincts in a form which often recalls the Enlightenment, as in its creation of a new myth of the "savage" on a sexual basis (including relations between parents and children).[70]

In this brief passage, Gramsci addresses the relation of industrial capitalism to the Oedipal structuration of labor. The productivity of labor, he discerns, has an intimate erotic dimension; unsignified desire obstructs the planned conditions of production. Psychoanalysis, in its dual role of promoting the language of sexual emancipation and regimenting sexuality, resolves contradictions of capitalism by deploying Oedipal structure into labor's intimate self-identification. In place of Gramsci's model of social *praxis* as unity of mental and manual labor, Kristeva and *Žižek* offer a radical split between the two, *assigning to their own intellectual labor the task of managing the desire of "the new type of worker."*

Kristeva and Žižek have universalized the crisis of global capitalism by deploying the universality of human subjectivity. But, unlike Gramsci, they truly believe that pure capitalism--Kristeva's Gaullist version or Žižek's Maoist version--is better than living under conditions of failing modernity. The psychoanalysis of the Balkans is a case in point. When Kristeva calls Bulgaria her "maternal space" to be abjected, or Žižek invokes the "father Thing" to be submitted to the Law, to the single market of the European symbolic, their intellectual task of universalizing the crisis of the post-Communist Balkans resolves into *self-orientalization*. Kristeva's and *Žižek*'s geographic asceticism subjugates the Balkans to the master signifier of Oedipal orthodoxy erasing the heterogeneity of histories and people and with it the erotics of resistance.

70. *Prison*, 294-95.

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FEATURED POET: ARTHUR BROWN
Editor's Note

I recall holding the view that poetry, and literature in general, have little or nothing to do with truth or inquiry. Elements of analytic philosophy, strongly discursive thinking habits, and so the primacy of arguments, brought me to the conclusion that the poet does not exactly engage reality. I own all the responsibility for this wretched view as it cannot possibly be blamed on the nature of philosophical reason or the methods of analytic philosophy.

The change that came over me was relatively simple but hard fought: truth comes in fragments from relentless empirical and conceptual analysis and truth comes from poetic/literary revelation (and from other sources). "Revelation" here is fully secular and means, essentially, a direct perception of truth. I seemed to have learned, as a necessary aspect of this process, that revelation is perhaps more difficult than analysis (or all the methods of social and natural science but interestingly related to those methods).

The revelation that is achievable from poetry clearly depends on the relationship between words and experience that somehow shape themselves into a synthesis that then seems like an actual perception. There is no formula for this achievement but we do know that it is a craft of incredible insight. Work, for the poet, is in some ways like the work of patience and acuity that drives the field biologist. Inputs from the natural world must be focused and filtered to capture the essential slice of reality. For all its depth and durability, the observations of the field biologist are finally driven by the profound details for proper outcomes. For the poet, the patience of observation is without the need for data. There is then a cognitive opening for a seeing that has no other purpose besides seeing (this point is, of course, akin to Kant's disinterested interest).

Poetry can then categorically alter our capacities as observers. In the poems found here by Arthur Brown, one must appreciate the manner in which the meaning and possibility of truthful observation is challenged and affirmed. What is it to finally recognize our status as observers and what finally is the nature of what is observed? How can these be grasped in their immediacy? One might say that we are not accomplished observers until we finally recognize our fascination with the dynamic between what we observe and our awareness of how we observe: these two cross paths to form the conditions for revelation.

Ultimately "observer" and "observation" seem sterile, the dynamic in the above creates the active, fully engaged and reflectively embodied perceiver. Poetry then creates what seems more like perception than words, as if words could transform themselves into literal perceptions. It is almost always the case that words as perceptions focus on what observation forgets or misses.

These are some of my impressions generated by Arthur Brown's fine set of poems in this edition of Janus Head. Everything I just said, which is non-theoretical and untouched by any theory of poetry, is inspired by Professor Brown's poems. Janus Head remains committed to finding and publishing excellent poets and poetry. We see poetry as inquiry and so as one of the many interrelated ways that human beings seek truth and meaning.

John Pauley
Editor

Bird/Wind

Tall Grass

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The Medium

Featured Poet
Arthur Brown

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Bird/Wind

Whirling, nameless, black-tailed and brown,
larger than a sparrow, perhaps a canyon towhee,
a bird came to a standstill in the air—
halted by the wind outside the two glass doors.
It had its back to me, its wings and tail
in disarray; its immobility
flat out in motion hard to reconcile
from where I sat, and at a loss to say
itself what was the matter, so it seemed.
For what had been invisible but known—
the sky in which the bird could fly—now leaned
against it. All its facts had come undone
in that the bird could not maneuver in
so wayward, weird, and racked a medium.

Tall Grass

Alert and frayed against the wind
below the near horizon of the ridge
among the purple flowers and yellow stalks—
mute orator or matador,
a pass of the muleta, now a wave,
a gesture of appeal, another, now
of resignation, bowing, dispossessed;
one instant frantic, calm the next,
one-armed, or single-sleeved, your head a spine,
your spine a moving yellow line
fixed at the end that's underground,
lengthened above, and making visible—
beyond the glazed, foreshortened door,
above the stucco wall, beneath the sky—
the wind unsettling lilac leaves
against the gray and black coyote fence
as figure turns to background then returns;
sensing, signaling, direct, you are
no more or less in time than I,
no more or less embodied, in the round,
a subject and a style—to whom I owe,
as to a human being, a gratitude
that only at one stroke can be expressed
before the wind subsides.

As the Crow Flies

> "The I of vision is not nothingness."
>
> — Maurice Merleau-Ponty

How do we know the crow
is flying farther as we sit and watch?
It flies above the wire and below
from left to right—it rises, circles round,
and disappears behind the cottonwood
into the distance we presume
because we see it less and less.

But what is seeing then—what turns
the light against the retina
to sense, direction, meaning, what you will?
We're speaking of the distance to the eye,
but to the eye there's only stimuli—
the crow a spot of black against light blue
whose flight the light-dark contrast contradicts.

The mind is in the same sky as the crow—
from sky to eye to wire to cottonwood—
and as the crow flies so does time.
It flies in recollection, flies
into the future of our past, into
the past of our own future—flies from these
invisible horizons to that other.

The Stranger

"The structure of the world demands that we
cannot see without *being visible*."

— Jean-Paul Sartre

The aggregate of rock that paves the road
one instant to the next appears to swell;
appears to eyes a body's length away
as might the sea to yellow beady eyes
more distant from the surface overlooked—
the rocks of varied shape and size and color
varied like the waves and waves behind the waves

that roll to shore. The walking man whose eyes
are on the ground—whose look
moves to and from the ground
along a multiplicity of lines
no sooner drawn than lengthened or cut off—
surpasses what he sees. His look
takes up the rocks, whose distance, color, form

were he not walking there would disappear;
takes up the facts and chance of things
behind, before, and on all sides of him—
there in the round beyond the sides revealed.
Were someone opposite, another eye
would see and could be seen to see
the objects of the world that gleam as it does.

Each gleam on every corner of a rock
that makes a buoy for the slanting sun,
the angled surface of each rock,
and every shadow falling from each edge
of rock assure the man, the spectator—
who is his vision and mobility,
a figure on a ground—he's walking there.

In seeing the road he sees a stranger, too.
Our consolations come from humble things,
our look's adherence to a world
composed of earth and sky—
the sense of air, a bluish medium,
diagonal lines that correspond to depth
and give the height and breadth of the horizon.

Eye and Mind

"The painter 'takes his body with him,' says Valéry."

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty

One remembers the position of the body.
It was just as I lay down in bed—
the view out the double glass doors
arrested me. I was leaning on my elbows,
my head up, my legs stretched out in front of me.
In the moonlight after the snowfall

the landscape had changed.
There was something about the colors
or the shapes in tones I took for color—
blue-gray and lighter gray,
blue-gray again, black-green and white,
the silver-green of the Apache plume;

the colors and the lines.
Twice framed and interrupted
by the middle stiles, the lines were horizontal—
illuminated clouds in the higher sky,
dark along the contour of the mountains,
the near hill shaped by juniper and piñon,

the stepped line of the coyote fence,
and, before the doors, the Apache plume,
fork-limbed and gnarled, snow-scraped;
from top to bottom a gradation downward
from horizontal to diagonal—
the Apache plume precipitous.

There is something mysterious about striation,
one thing behind another—cut-outs, collage,
advancing and receding color planes.
One move of the head and everything changes.
Shapes telescope, the lines slide inward—
clouds cover the moon and the colors dim.

Modern Art

"Undoubtedly the first man was an artist."

— Barnett Newman

The mountains up against the sky
stand featureless, blank as a page—opaque
construction paper cut and fixed
against a changing ground; the clouds
suspended in what's left of distance, depth,
and color—yellow sunlight giving way
to pale, nocturnal blue. Belt-high
on that horizon, whose expanse suggests
a girth, a string of golden lights—cut short,
inactive with the edges of the window—
glimmers as it concentrates and brightens.

The juniper and piñon, roughly strewn,
assert a foreground—linear,
like pointing fingers of a skeleton,
or filled in, like the heads in front of you
in some dark theater you had entered
by yourself—while in the middle ground
the nearer lights high up the ridge
suggest the space between the neighbors'
and our own interiors. They do not break
the plane, yet they recall the world outside
the window, hastily dispersed—

the multiplicity of other viewpoints,
framed and picturesque
behind the flat, smooth glass.
The wall and window isolate
this apparition of disparate things
made whole, coherent, radiant—
an object now perceived and now
imaginary, fashioned by the mind.
A medium that's not without extension—
airy, double-paned, transparent, hard,
yet given to reflection, dust, and smudges.

Even this notebook paper, small and lined,
is three-dimensional.
The words come from the inside out, the way
old Moses came to Michelangelo—
a figure slowly recognizable,
a mass, a surface centered by a core,
then giving way, thought better of, removed.
Like Calder's models of the universe,
they, too, form vectors, lines, and ends of lines—
are spaced themselves
in linked and concrete intervals.

But how indifferently the wires and metals
hang this hour of their apprehension.
This hour nothing stirs but dust.
For all that, we can leave the gallery
and watch, under the hemisphere of stars,
the running lights against pale black
and face the wind, the head-on rushing wind
that rises up into the howling wind—
the world's primordial expression
of a depth we only ever sounded in
our rhythmic and chromatic cries.

The Medium

The piñon's scaly trunk, one naked branch,
and twigs—rough charcoal lines that overlay
the waving deep-green juniper, whose leaves
accumulate in mottled spires;

reptilian tragedies, bent back and drooped
in agonies cut short
and leaving space at farther distances
for clustered trees against the earth and sky—

pale pinkish brown, soft white, transparent blue;
the medium adventuring no farther
than the sky, or light-blotched lidded eyes, no nearer
than the window frame, the desk and armchair,

halting at the foreground that we blindly call
the self, although it's hardly more than bone.

Arthur Brown

Arthur Brown is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Evansville living now in Santa Fe, NM. He has published two poetry books and poems in *Poetry*, *Southwest Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Agni*, and other journals. His poems have won the Morton Marr Poetry Prize and the *American Literary Review* Poetry Prize. He has also published essays, most recently in *Janus Head* and *Philosophy and Literature*. The poems published here are from a new manuscript that was a finalist for the National Poetry Series' 2020 Competition.