

**INFORMATION**

**foodon**

**Reader**

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## **Some Notes on *INFORMATION (Today)* and Its Reader**

**Encrypted networks, digital currencies, artificial intelligence, data harvesting, algorithmic biases, sentient machines—all are products of twenty-first-century data-based capitalism. As a result, the proliferation of information, and data's nebulous modes of circulating and being processed, fundamentally shape our existence now. *INFORMATION (Today)* is a group show featuring contemporary artists seeking to unravel this phenomenon.**

**Intended as a loose response to the iconic *INFORMATION* show at New York's Museum of Modern Art, curated by Kynaston L. McShine in 1970, *INFORMATION (Today)* at Kunsthalle Basel and the Astrup Fearnley Museet examines how contemporary artists deal with the relentless flow of information and data that inflects the present. MoMA's exhibition was born from the late 1960s and early 1970s dawn of the "Information Age," when advancements in new computing and communication technologies—and, with them, access to information—was suddenly on the rise. And, in the fifty years since, the ubiquity of access and connectivity has arguably lulled us into complacency with its flipside: ever more highly technologized forms of surveillance and the overexposure of our personal data. Exploring the myriad ways in which information signifies in our "post-truth" era, such a show seems more urgent than ever.**

***INFORMATION (Today)* features a selection of international artists loosely culled from the two generations since 1970—which is to say, born after the original *INFORMATION* exhibition—for whom the processing and formalizing of data is among the central tenets of their work. The current exhibition presents a range of artistic positions, including recent work and new commissions in diverse media (from sculpture and painting, to video and performance, and from the undeniably material to the wholly immaterial), thus providing an overview of some of the most promising and challenging practices grappling with data, technology, and information today.**

**Collected in this reader are essay excerpts, entire articles, book chapters, printed illustrations, one poem, and smartphone screenshots of fragments of texts that are being read by the participating artists of *INFORMATION (Today)*. When asked what discursive material has accompanied them—either as background research in their practice at large, or in thinking about their contribution to this exhibition specifically, or even more generally in their thinking about how data and information occupy our lives—this is what the artists shared with us. It is exciting to make these texts available to those who wish to explore the information (as it were) behind *INFORMATION (Today)*. The result is a bootleg object of sorts—a low-fi photocopied reader, as might be produced for a university course or shared among friends—meant to be spread "under the arm," so as to offer an informal circuit of information dispersion that reaches beyond the exhibition itself. It is available for free and is intended for educational and research purposes.**

**Selected by Lawrence Abu Hamdan**

**Material from  
Ian Stevenson, *Birthmarks*. vol. 1 of *Reincarnation and Biology: A  
Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (Westport, CT:  
Praeger, 1997), 653–54, 657, 729, 731–34, 743, 1013–15, 1131, 1135, 1151–54.**

REINCARNATION  
AND BIOLOGY

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A Contribution to the Etiology  
of Birthmarks and Birth Defects

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VOLUME 1: BIRTHMARKS

*Ian Stevenson, M.D.*

## REINCARNATION AND BIOLOGY

*A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*

Ian Stevenson, MD

In 1997 the psychiatrist and professor at Virginia School of Medicine, Dr. Ian Stevenson published his life work, "Reincarnation and Biology: The Etiology of Birthmarks". The book was the result of field work in Asia, Turkey, Lebanon, across Africa and Alaska, in which he interviewed and investigated claims of reincarnation with particular attention to the correspondence of birthmarks on the reincarnated subject to the circumstances of their death in their previous lives. Stevenson's book is a strange and beautiful mix of narrative literature, forensic analysis, biological data, historiography, theology and conflicting scientific hypotheses. In focusing on the claim to reincarnation rather than the ethnography of a single people, Stevenson's monologue chronicles a collectivity of people who exist at the threshold of the law and for whom injustices and violence have otherwise escaped the historical record due to colonial subjugation, corruption, rural lawlessness and legal amnesty. Perhaps, counter to the intention of the author, what we see in his collection is not reincarnation as a scientific fact, but reincarnation used as a medium for justice. In the birthmark, testimony is stored in the body of the next generation, ensuring the survival of minor histories in the face of religious conversions, destruction of language and property, colonial occupation and territorial annexation.

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Daw Khin Ma in 1984, she said that the families were *not* related. However, they were certainly well acquainted. Ma Ahmar Yee's mother, Daw Hmwe, had a close friendship with Daw Khin Ma's mother, Daw Khin Pu. In addition, U Hla Thoung and his older brother, Ko Sein Maung, had been schoolmates of Ma Ahmar Yee and had often stopped at her house as they walked together back to their homes in Ywathit village.

### *The Life and Death of Ma Ahmar Yee*

Ma Ahmar Yee was born in Ywathit village in about 1944. Her parents were U Hgnet Yoe and Daw Hmwe, and she was the second of their five children. Ma Ahmar Yee attended school up to the ninth grade. She never married, but worked as a trader in cloth. At the end of her life she was living in Tatkon with her mother. (I think her father had died; he had certainly died by the time of our study of the case.)

Daw Hmwe considered Ma Ahmar Yee distinctive in several qualities: She was unusually pious, extremely clean, and fond of cosmetics.

On the evening of March 23, 1974, Ma Ahmar Yee traveled as a passenger on a truck going north from Tatkon to Mandalay. The truck was principally carrying heavy boxes containing cakes of unrefined sugar. The boxes were placed on the floorboards of the truck and a tarpaulin was laid over them. The back of the truck had no roof, but did have some iron framework. Twelve cloth merchants who wanted to purchase cloth in Mandalay for their shops were traveling as hitchhikers. They were all sitting or sleeping on the tarpaulin. At about 2:00 a.m. of the following morning (March 24, 1974) the truck was passing the village of Kyidaungone, just north of Meiktila, when one of the rear wheels came off. The driver panicked and lost control of the truck, which overturned. Most of the passengers found themselves then pinned under the heavy boxes of sugar or under the truck. Some of them seem to have been crushed to death. The survivors began to call for help, and villagers came to the scene with kerosene torches and lamps. However, the gasoline tank of the truck had been broken, and the gasoline flowed out. Some of the wounded and struggling passengers shouted to the villagers to keep their flaming torches away, but this warning came too late. The gasoline ignited, and soon the whole truck was ablaze. A fire brigade eventually arrived, but too late to be effective. U Mya Maung (one of U Win Maung's informants), who had been riding with the other passengers, was thrown clear of the truck at the moment of the accident, and he survived. One other passenger survived, and so did the driver and his assistant, who presumably were protected by the roof of the truck's cab. The other 10 passengers all died, either of crushing injuries or burns.<sup>5</sup> The bodies had become "stuck on the road with melted road-tar and molasses. They had to be removed by spade-work."

<sup>5</sup>Two other children born after this accident have had memories of being other passengers of the truck who died in it, but I am not reporting their cases in detail in this volume.

It is worth remarking, however, that one of them, Maung Min Min Aung, had no birthmark whatever, although the person whose life he remembered (Ma Ah Bi) had been burned in the accident as badly as Ma Ahmar Yee had been. The informant for this information was U May Maung, who was Maung Min Min Aung's father. Testimony for the second of these other cases was complex and to some degree contradictory.

The survivors were admitted to the Civil Hospital in Meiktila, and the dead bodies were taken to the hospital morgue. Afterward, they were transferred to Tatkon and buried in the Public Cemetery there. Ma Ahmar Yee was about 30 years old when she died.

We have not been able to obtain a satisfactory description of the burns and injuries on Ma Ahmar Yee. In 1981 Daw Hmwe told U Win Maung that "the birthmarks [on Ma Khin Hsann Oo] seem to correspond with the injuries suffered by my daughter." Yet in 1986 she told Daw Hnin Aye that when she went to the morgue and first saw Ma Ahmar Yee's body, she became overcome with fright and ran away from the coffin. So she may not have had a good view of the injuries.

U Mya Maung, who was one of the four survivors of the accident, was taken to the morgue (on a stretcher) and was asked to identify the dead bodies so that their relatives could be informed of the tragedy. He gave U Win Maung brief descriptions of the injuries of different victims as he remembered them in 1983. Of Ma Ahmar Yee he said: "The face was not affected; many parts of the body were burned. It seemed to have been crushed by the boxes." U Mya Maung said that having been asked only to identify the bodies he had made no special effort to note the injuries and that his inspection was "brief and casual." The bodies were "all covered with dirt, tar, and molasses." Therefore he also could not furnish an adequate description of Ma Ahmar Yee's injuries.

*The Interval between Ma Ahmar Yee's Death and Ma Khin Hsann Oo's Birth*

I think the pertinent dates in this case are precise. That of Ma Khin Hsann Oo's birth comes from her horoscope, the date of which was taken from a written record made in a notebook; the note would have been made soon after her birth. The date I have given for Ma Ahmar Yee's death is that on the tombstones of the passengers killed in the accident who were buried in the Public Cemetery at Tatkon, where U Win Maung himself examined them. (Dates on tombstones are usually correct, although I found one in error in Turkey, in the case of Dellâl Beyaz.) If we accept the dates as accurate, as I think we should, Daw Khin Ma was about 2½ months pregnant with Ma Khin Hsann Oo when Ma Ahmar Yee died.

Many Buddhists believe that this fact would make it impossible for Ma Ahmar Yee to have reincarnated in the body of Ma Khin Hsann Oo. My associates and I have studied other cases among Buddhists in which the previous personality died after the conception of the subject who later remembered the life of the previous personality; but individual informants rarely learn about such anomalous cases, and the tradition persists in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka that according to Buddhism they should not occur. Daw Hmwe, Ma Ahmar Yee's mother, learned about Ma Khin Hsann Oo's statements concerning a previous life, and she went to visit her at Ywathit when she was still a young child. She had seen her daughter's body after her death and before its burial; and she said that the birthmarks on Ma Khin Hsann Oo seemed to correspond with the wounds on her daughter. She did not question the honesty of Ma Khin Hsann Oo's parents. Nevertheless, she sus-

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**Figure 9-7** Birthmarks on the back of Ma Khin Hsann Oo's upper trunk and arms as they appeared in May 1981.

Daw Khin Ma said that no member of the family, on her side or her husband's side, had had any birthmarks like Ma Khin Hsann Oo's.

**Comment.** Ma Khin Hsann Oo's largest lesion, the one around the middle of her trunk is a type of giant hyperpigmented nevus known as a "bathing trunk nevus" (Hodgman, Freedman, and Levan, 1971; Reed et al., 1965; Solomon and Esterly, 1973). In addition to the large lesion on the trunk, there are frequently multiple satellite lesions scattered about the body, as on Ma Khin Hsann Oo's skin. In about 10% of patients with this condition a malignant melanoma develops within the lesion (Greeley, Middleton, and Curtin, 1965).

Although I did not see Ma Khin Hsann Oo as a baby, or even as a child until she was 9½ years old, from a comparison of the photographs taken when she was younger and the lesions that I saw in 1984, it seems to me that the lesions had

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**Figure 10-1** Birthmark on the right upper neck of Cemil Fabrıcı in 1967, when he was 32 years old. This mark, an area of scarring with alopecia under the mandible, corresponded to the wound of entry on Cemil Hayik. It was about 2 centimeters long and 1 centimeter wide.



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She thought the two families might have been distantly related, but said that they were not so closely related as Cemil Fahrıcı believed. I now think that Cemil Fahrıcı was using the word "brother" loosely, as many Asian informants do; they sometimes apply this word to distant relatives and even to unrelated members of the same community. It is more important that the two families knew each other before the development of the case. Both had homes in Antakya, although both also had spent some time in villages outside the city. It would, however, have made little difference to the evaluation of Cemil Fahrıcı's statements about Cemil Hayik if the two families had *not* known each other personally. The details of Cemil Hayik's life were as well known in Antakya as those of Robin Hood in England. I do not think that Cemil Fahrıcı could have said anything about Cemil Hayik that his family did not already know. (I should add that no informant claimed that he had done so.) This means, therefore, that the case derives its interest with regard to paranormal features from Cemil Fahrıcı's birthmarks.

#### *The Life and Death of Cemil Hayik*

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My comparison of Cemil Hayik with Robin Hood was deliberate and, in more than one respect, appropriate. It is particularly so with regard to the difficulty of dissecting fact from legend. Cemil Hayik really did exist, however, whereas Robin Hood has not been clearly identified with any single known person.

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My first information about Cemil Hayik came from Cemil Fahrıcı's own detailed account of what he still claimed to remember about the first Cemil's life and death. This had no value as evidence of paranormal knowledge, because, as I have explained, Cemil Fahrıcı had many opportunities to learn about Cemil Hayik normally. I regarded what he said as only a rough guide to what I should enquire about from firsthand informants. Of these, the most valuable were Cemil Hayik's sister, Rüzane, and the ex-gendarme, Haydar Elçi, who had taken part in the final hunt for Cemil Hayik. Each spoke of some events not mentioned by the other; but their accounts agreed on nearly all details when they remembered the same events. One discrepancy in their testimony concerned the number of cartridges remaining to Cemil Hayik when he killed himself. Haydar Elçi said that, when the shoot-out ended, Cemil still had more than 100 cartridges left—he actually said 103, as if someone had counted them and he had remembered the number. Rüzane claimed that Cemil Hayik shot at the policemen until he had only two cartridges left—one with which to kill his brother and one for himself. Since she was not an eyewitness of the shoot-out (and Haydar Elçi was), I concluded that she had heightened the drama in her brother's death. Haydar Elçi, on the other hand, could qualify only as a secondhand informant for much of what he said concerning the circumstances and course of Cemil Hayik's earlier career as a bandit.<sup>1</sup> Since, on

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<sup>1</sup>I think the reader is entitled to know that Haydar Elçi claimed that he himself could remember 40 previous lives of which the first was that of Alexander the Great. Does this pretension disqualify him as a reliable witness for the events with which we are here concerned? That it should not do so seems to me shown by the rather close agreement between his statements and those of other informants.

the whole, Rüzane's account accorded with that of Haydar Elçi (and those of other informants), I have combined the different testimonies in the following summary of Cemil Hayik's life and death.

Cemil Hayik was born (probably) in 1912 in the village of Kaharnub, which lies in the mountains about halfway between Antakya and the smaller town of Samandağ. His father, Mehmet Hayik, was the chief of a group of bandits. He was the object of an intense hunt by the French police. It appears that Cemil Hayik first took up banditry as a sort of apprentice to his father.

In about 1932, two men ravished two of Cemil Hayik's sisters. One of them was a rejected suitor for one of the sisters, so the rape had the motive of revenge against the family. Cemil Hayik found these rapes an intolerable affront to family honor. He waited for an opportunity and then killed the rapists. (Haydar Elçi said that before this episode Cemil Hayik had already killed two other men who had led the police, searching for his father, to their house in the mountains.) The police then began to hunt for Cemil Hayik, whose friends persuaded him to surrender. He did so, was tried, and condemned to death. While in prison he feigned illness, so that he was transferred to a hospital; from there he contrived to escape by exchanging clothes with his wife when she visited him.

After his escape from prison, Cemil Hayik resumed the life of a bandit and continued to evade the police for upwards of 2 years. He survived by robbing travelers on the rather isolated roads between Antakya and Samandağ. (Even in the late 1960s and 1970s, the curving, hilly road that joined these places, which are about 30 kilometers apart, passed through wild and sparsely inhabited country; in the 1930s it must have provided many opportunities for a bandit to appear without warning—and to disappear almost as quickly.) Cemil Hayik took from the persons he stopped on the road only enough money for his food, cigarettes, and ammunition. Even his opponent, Haydar Elçi, conceded that Cemil Hayik—apart from murder—led an almost blameless life. As for murder, while he was a fugitive he appears to have killed only persons who tried to betray him to the police and the police themselves. If he had special needs in Antakya or wished to visit members of his family living there, he would disguise himself in women's clothes and move about the city unnoticed.

At one time the police arrested Cemil Hayik's younger brother, İbrahim, and detained him in prison as a kind of hostage; but İbrahim managed to escape and fled to the mountains, where he joined his brother in brigandage.

In the mid-1930s, when these events were taking place, the government of Turkey was working firmly, but peacefully, for the return of Hatay to Turkish sovereignty. Under the circumstances, Cemil Hayik might have assumed the role of a patriot resisting Turkey's French oppressors. But he did not do so, and although he attracted much sympathy,<sup>2</sup> no one appears to have regarded him as a partisan sol-

<sup>2</sup>A reader of this report having expressed surprise that anyone could describe Cemil Hayik's career as "blameless" (apart from murder) and at his having "attracted much sympathy," it seems important to emphasize that the events narrated here took place in a remote part of Turkey in the (continued)

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dier. This was anyway an unlikely development, since he belonged to the Arab minority of Hatay that did not favor the detachment of Hatay from Syria and its union with Turkey.

Nevertheless, outlawry of the type practiced by the Hayik brothers required the aid, or at least the fearful acquiescence, of the other mountain people. This support gradually diminished, and, at the end of at least 2 years, a man at whose house the Hayik brothers had stopped to eat succeeded in sending a message to the police about their whereabouts. A squad of police surrounded the house and shooting began. Although the police had a large number of men, the affair was not one-sided. According to their sister, Rüzane, the Hayik brothers killed three policemen and wounded seven. The police then managed to pour gasoline on the roof of the house and set it on fire. As the fire consumed the house, the shots from inside it ceased. Then the ensuing silence was broken by two more shots followed by silence again. Cautiously, the police approached the house and kicked the door open. Haydar Elçi was one of the first to enter. They found the bodies of Cemil and İbrahim Hayik lying together on the floor.

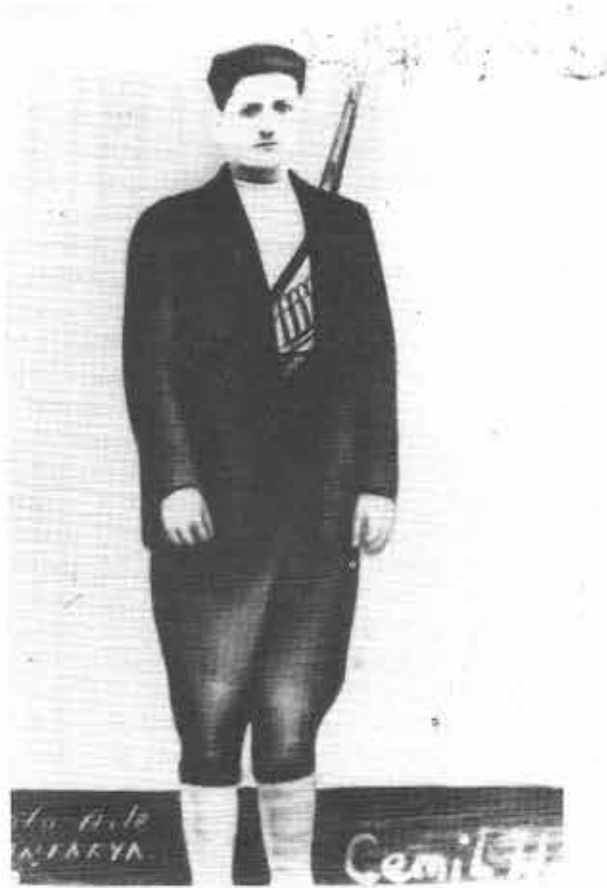
Both bodies had wounds under the chins and at the tops of the skulls. Bullets had evidently entered under the chins and exited at the tops of the heads. Both Haydar Elçi and Rüzane Hayik Yıldırım remembered the wound of entry in Cemil Hayik as in the midline of the neck under the chin rather than to one side or the other. Haydar Elçi gestured with both his hands to indicate that the exiting bullet had lifted up the top of Cemil Hayik's skull.

Blood along the floor indicated that one body had been dragged across it after being wounded. It was noted that the heads of both bodies pointed south—toward Mecca. It was clear that the police shots had not killed either of the Hayik brothers. The acceptable hypotheses were that they had both killed themselves, one a little after the other, or that one had killed the other first and then killed himself. Ahmet Yılmaz said he believed Cemil Hayik had killed İbrahim with a shot under the chin to show that he was not killed by the French gendarmes.

The French police put the two bodies onto a horse, carried them into Antakya, and displayed them publicly for a day or two in front of the Court House. (Rüzane Hayik Yıldırım said that the bodies were taken first to the government hospital, where examinations confirmed that the brothers had not died of wounds received from the police guns.) The bodies were then turned over to the family for burial.

Cemil Hayik and his brother died in 1935. Haydar Elçi thought, somewhat unsurely, that the month was December. I tried to find records of the shoot-out in the provincial archives of Hatay. Unfortunately, when the French withdrew from Hatay in 1939, they took with them many of their records, and others were dis-

<sup>2</sup>(continued) 1930s. To most people of the area at that time it would have seemed right—almost obligatory—for Cemil Hayik to have killed the rapists of his sisters. After that, Cemil Hayik did little harm except to the police and their informers; and his activity against the police, who had the additional stigma of being French or employed by the French, would have earned him more credit.



**Figure 10-2** Cemil Hayik. The photograph was apparently signed and printed for sale as a postcard.

persed. I was told that nothing useful in the way of documentation had survived from the period of the French government of Hatay.

The fame of Cemil Hayik died slowly. I have a photograph of him that includes his signature and appears to have been taken from a postcard sold by an enterprising photographer in Antakya (Figure 10-2). He apparently became a folk hero among the Arabic-speaking minority of Hatay.

#### *An Announcing Dream*

I mentioned earlier that Mikail Fahrıcı had a dream about Cemil Hayik after his death. The sole informant for the content of this dream was Mikail's wife,

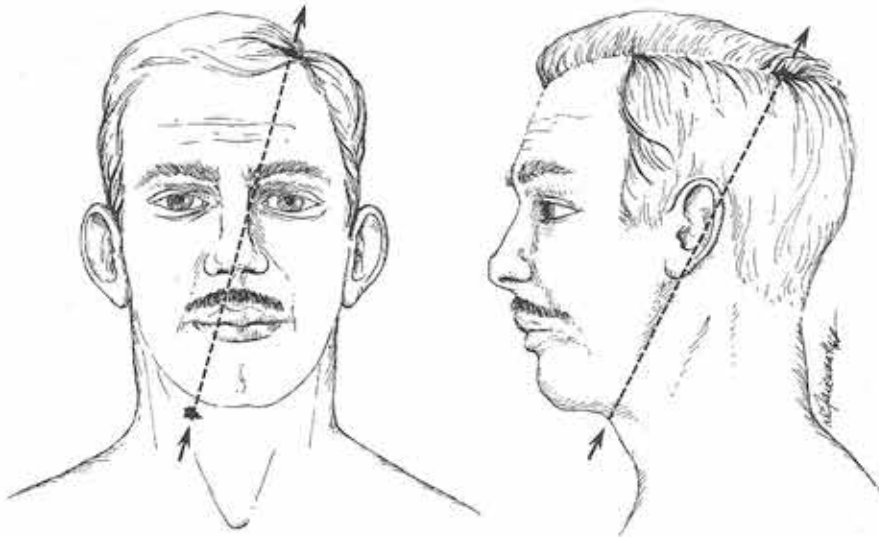


Figure 10-5 Presumed trajectory of the bullet that killed Cemil Hayik.

wounds—Rüzane Yıldırım and Haydar Elçi—knew about a birthmark on the top of Cemil Fahrıcı's head that corresponded with the wound they described on the top of Cemil Hayik's head. (I did not ask Ahmet Yılmaz about this detail.)

Figure 10-5 provides an artist's sketch of the trajectory of the bullet through the head of Cemil Hayik, based on the assumption that Cemil Fahrıcı's birthmarks correspond to Cemil Hayik's wounds.

Cemil Fahrıcı said he had never suffered from any discomfort in his throat. He did not mention to us the toothaches that Besime Fahrıcı Erkek had said he suffered from in childhood. He *had* suffered from headaches. I have already mentioned them and believe they were concomitants of anxiety that he had experienced in the presence of blood. There is no reason to think that they were a physical expression of residues from the bullet that killed Cemil Hayik.

#### *Comments on the Evidence of Paranormal Processes in the Case*

I have already discounted down to a negligible value nearly all of Cemil Fahrıcı's statements about the life of Cemil Hayik. The one matter on which he may have told something not known to everyone in Antakya is unverifiable. I refer to his claim that Cemil Hayik, at the end of the shoot-out with the police, first killed his brother, İbrahim, and then killed himself.

The strength of the case rests, therefore, almost entirely on the correspondence in location between Cemil Fahrıcı's birthmarks and the wounds on Cemil Hayik. I consider this correspondence adequately close.

## DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN BIRTHMARKS AND THE EVIDENCE OF REPORTEDLY CORRESPONDING WOUNDS

### INTRODUCTION

Readers up to this point may have supposed that apart from some occasional errors in details (which I have mentioned in the case reports), I always learned of a satisfactory correspondence between the wounds or other marks on the previous personality and the subject's birthmarks. This is not true, because although I did find close correspondences in the great majority of the cases, in some I did not. I propose in this chapter to discuss these discrepant cases and to offer my, admittedly uncertain, conjectures about how the discrepancies may have arisen.

The postmortem reports (and other medical documents) that my associates and I have obtained free us for the cases in which they apply from relying on the memories of informants about the nature and location of the fatal wounds on the previous personality. Written reports (like oral ones) are no more reliable than the persons making them, and when I have seen a postmortem report that showed signs of being hastily and carelessly written, I have sometimes wanted to discard it. I have not permitted myself to do this; once committed to accepting postmortem reports for some cases we must include them as part of the evidence in every case for which we have one.

In all, my associates and I obtained 62 documents (or summaries of such documents) bearing on the previous personality's wounds and cause of death. Of



these, 56 were medical documents, mostly postmortem reports, but also a few hospital records or physician's notes; 4 were photographs showing the previous personality's relevant lesion; 1 was a newspaper account that gave details of how the previous personality had died; and 1 was a summary of a police report describing the location of wounds. In this count I have included only cases in which I myself was directly involved in the investigation, omitting cases studied only by my associates without my participation or guidance. I myself examined the birthmarks and birth defects of all but 4 of the subjects of this group.

I decided that I would count as a satisfactory correspondence only those cases in which the relevant wound or other mark and the birthmark, projected onto a normal-sized *adult* body, would both be within an area 10 centimeters square. Figure 13-1 shows a human figure assumed to be 1.75 meters tall, which is the height of the 50th centile of 18-year-old American men and 19-year-old British men (Tanner, 1978). The large and small squares on the right chest of the figure represent areas 10 centimeters square and 5 centimeters square. The drawing should assist readers in judging the correspondence in location between the wounds (or other marks) and the related birthmarks and birth defects.

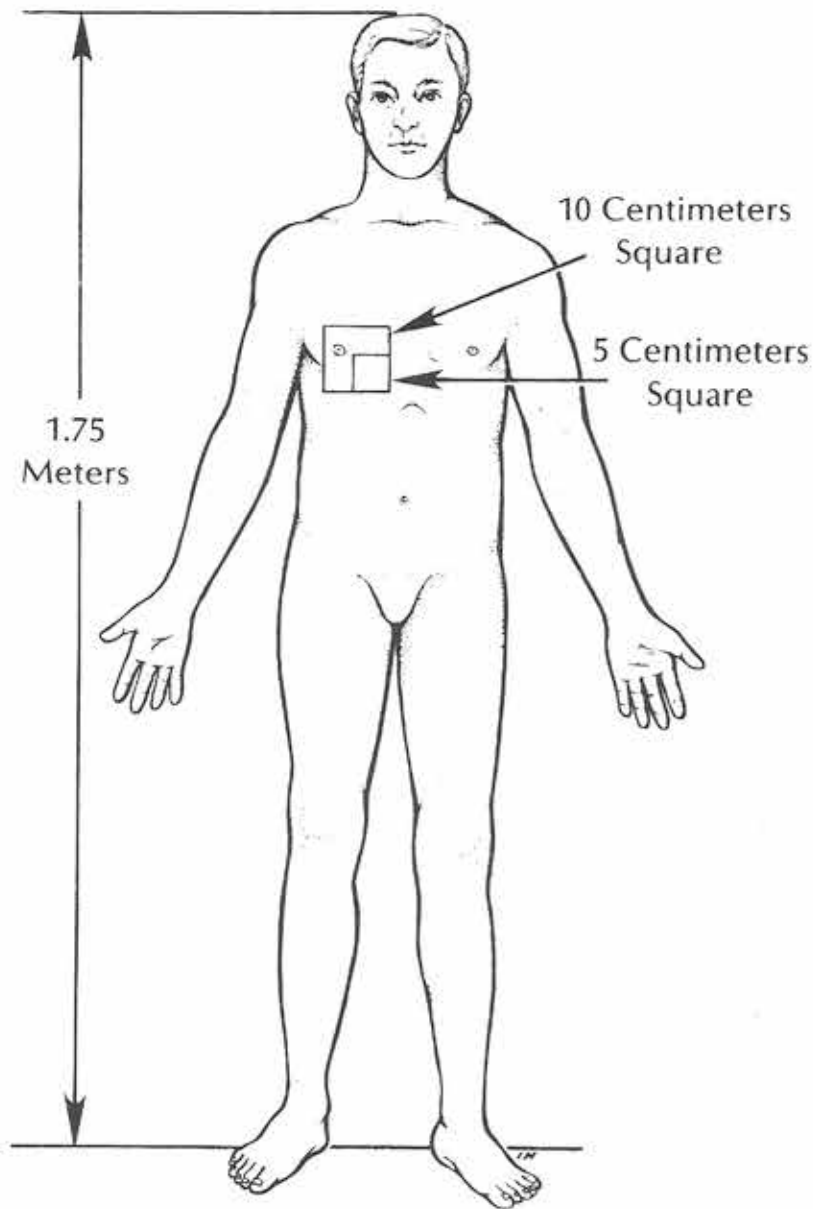
In many cases of this work the pertinent wounds and birthmarks would fall within a much smaller area, such as one 5 centimeters square. This is particularly true of wounds and birthmarks on the head and neck. It seemed best, however, to adopt correspondences within the larger square. Restriction to the smaller square might lead to exclusion of some cases in which a birthmark had shifted in position without the subject's parents having noticed this. (In the two cases with the largest reported shift of the birthmarks after birth [Nasruddin Shah and Bhopal Singh] I accepted the statement of the subject's mother concerning the birthmark's location at the time of the subject's birth.)

A shorter allowed distance would also exclude some correct correspondences between wounds and birthmarks because of imprecision on the part of the pathologist. The task assigned the forensic pathologist is to determine the cause of death. Pathologists who identify a shotgun wound that has penetrated vital organs and blood vessels are usually content to describe it as in the "left chest," "lower back," or (even) "left loin." They usually give the diameter or other dimensions of the wounds, but rarely state their exact distance from anatomical marks.

Table 13-1 summarizes my judgments about the correspondences using the criterion I have mentioned. (The lists include a few subjects with birth *defects* that I describe in later chapters of this work; but most of the subjects of the cases listed had *birthmarks*.) I have divided the cases with satisfactory correspondence into those with stronger and those with weaker evidence.

Readers can judge for themselves the evidence in most of the cases that I think have stronger evidence (Category A1), because this work contains reports, usually detailed, of all but five of them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The subjects of the five cases not described in separate reports of this work are: Susan Eastland, reported elsewhere without reference to the birthmark or medical document; Yogesh Yadav (*continued*)



**Figure 13-1** Human figure drawing of a person represented as 1.75 meters in height. The squares on the right chest show the proportionate size on such a person of areas 5 centimeters square and 10 centimeters square.

<sup>1</sup>(continued) (mentioned briefly in Chapter 14); Shiv Shankar Sengar (mentioned in Chapters 13 and 23); Vinod Singh (mentioned briefly in Chapters 14, 22, and 23); and Naripender Singh.



hood and adulthood (Pack and Davis, 1956). Nevertheless, some *are* present at birth, and as many as 2.4% (Pack and Davis, 1956) or even 2.7% (Pratt, 1953) of newborn infants have one or more.

My third point—one that I made in Chapter 1—is that, although hyperpigmented macules and other nevi do figure in some of the cases with which this work is concerned, most of the birthmarks I have described are not in this group. Instead, the majority of them (apart from the experimental birthmarks) have such other features as hypopigmentation, a puckered scarlike appearance, hairlessness, and a tendency to be depressed below the surrounding skin as often as they are elevated above it. (Nevi tend to be flat or elevated above the surrounding skin.) In addition, many of the birthmarks with which this work is concerned have unusual sizes, shapes, and details that are lacking in commonly observed birthmarks.

Finally, I wish to remind my readers that one of the principal purposes of this work is that of beginning to explain why a person has the *particular* birthmarks he or she has and not others. I think that it contributes to our understanding of the causes of the uniqueness of each human being. The birthmarks contribute to that uniqueness in the persons having them; the birthmarks themselves correspond to unique experiences had by a deceased person, and perhaps they have arisen from these experiences.

#### THE NORMAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CASES: ACAUSAL COINCIDENCE

If 2.5% of newborn babies have a birthmark—let it be of any kind—we should expect that many babies would have one at any particular site, and many would have one at the site where a deceased person had been wounded. If, however, *two* birthmarks correspond to two wounds on a deceased person, the likelihood of coincidence becomes much reduced. Table 15-1 lists the subjects of 34 verified cases who had two or more birthmarks related to a previous life. I have listed only cases described (or at least briefly mentioned) so far in this work. Later sections of the work add many more cases to this group, but the cases here listed will suffice for the point I wish to make. I have not included in the list any of the cases with birthmarks corresponding to holes for earrings, although these subjects had birthmarks on both ears.

We can assess the probability of a person's having two birthmarks that correspond in location with two wounds (or marks) on another person. The surface area of the skin of an average adult male is 1.6 square meters (Spalteholz, 1943). Let us imagine this area spread onto a flat surface in the form of a square. The sides of the square would each be approximately 127 centimeters long. If we divide the area of this square into smaller squares each having sides 10 centimeters long, the larger square would contain the equivalent of about 160 such smaller squares. The probability that a person will have a single birthmark corresponding in location to a wound within the area of any of the 160 smaller

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squares is only  $1/160$ .<sup>1</sup> However, the probability of his or her having *two* such birthmarks in corresponding different squares would be  $1/160 \times 1/160$ , or 1 in 25,600. In making this calculation I have used a generously large area for the smaller squares imagined: 10 centimeters by 10 centimeters. For many of our subjects the correspondence in location between wound and birthmark is much closer than squares of this size require. For example, the central point of the birthmark on Hanumant Saxena's chest was less than 5 centimeters from the central point of the shotgun wounds that killed Maha Ram Singh (established by the postmortem report); and the distance between the site of the birthmarks and the sites of wounds in the case of Chanai Choomalaiwong (although we have no postmortem report in his case) would have been even less than 5 centimeters. In cases with the sites of wound and birthmark within areas of 5 square centimeters, our hypothetical sheet of skin measuring 1.6 square meters would contain the equivalent of about 645 squares, each 5 centimeters square. In such a case the probability of two birthmarks corresponding in location with two wounds would be  $1/645 \times 1/645$ , which is 1 in 416,025. Figure 15-2 (reproduced here for convenience from Figure 13-1) shows a human adult represented as 1.75 meters tall. The two squares drawn on the right chest represent areas 10 centimeters square and 5 centimeters square.

The calculation of probability by itself takes no account of two other factors in a case. First, it does not allow for the unusual details corresponding to wounds or other marks that many of the birthmarks have. I devoted Chapter 12 entirely to a discussion of such details, and I hope that I was able to show that, although we cannot handle this feature quantitatively, we must not ignore it on that account. These details are an important part of the unusualness of the birthmarks with which we are here concerned. In Table 15-1 I have noted the existence of such unusual details in 12 of the 33 cases. Table 15-1 also reminds readers that we obtained verifying medical documents for 12 of these 33 cases.

Second, a calculation of probability by itself tells nothing of the context in which these birthmarks occur. I refer to all the other features that occur in nearly every case, especially statements by the subject expressing claimed memories of a previous life and associated unusual behavior that harmonizes with what was

<sup>1</sup>This estimation assumes that birthmarks occur with the same frequency on all parts of the skin. In fact, Pack et al. (1952) showed that nevi (pigmented moles, in their terminology) occur appreciably more often on the head and neck, the upper extremities, and the trunk than on the lower extremities. Apart from the paucity of moles on the top of the head (mentioned further below) and the lower extremities (where few of the birthmarks with which this work is concerned occurred), the differences in the incidence of moles in different regions of the body are not sufficient to affect the interpretation of the estimates that I make in this section.

The data of Pack et al. show that pigmented moles almost never occur above the hairline on the head. Readers will have noted, however, that several subjects of cases already described in this work had birthmarks in this area. These included: Nirankar Bhatnagar, Daw Aye Myint, Chanai Choomalaiwong, Necip Ünlütaşkaran, Dellâl Beyaz, Cemil Fabrici, Umar Khan, Wilfred Meares, and Sunita Khandelwal. (Not all of these had hyperpigmented nevi [moles]; some had scarlike hairless areas.)

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# Appendix B

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## SUMMARY OF RELEVANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN BURMA (MYANMAR)

The British took Burma in three bites. With the First Burmese War of 1825-1826 they acquired, for their Indian territories, Assam with Manipur, as well as Arakan and Tenasserim in Burma proper. After the Second Burmese War of 1852, the British annexed the province of Pegu, which amounted to their having the lower third of the country, often known as Lower Burma. After the Third Burmese War of 1885, the British annexed Upper Burma. They deposed and sent into exile Thibaw, the last King of Burma. A period of pacification by the British followed, because many Burmese continued to struggle for independence in guerilla warfare.

For half a century the British governed Burma as a province of the Indian Raj, but in 1937 they responded to growing agitation among Burmese nationalists by separating the country from India. In the 1930s also some small steps were taken toward Burmese self-government, at least in domestic matters. The Second World War overtook and arrested this slow development.

During the period of British control, Christian missionaries had been particularly successful among the Karens, an important minority of the country. The mission education qualified many Karens for administrative posts and led some of them to think of political separation from the Burmese. The British, pursuing a general policy of "divide and rule," appear to have fostered Karen nationalist aspirations. At least some of the Burmese afterward believed that the Karen insurgency of the late 1940s and 1950s would not have occurred without earlier British incitement (Htin Aung, 1967).

Early in 1942 the Japanese Army defeated the British in Malaya (now Malaysia) and captured Singapore on February 15. Even before that they had invaded Burma, where the British put up little resistance and retreated into India. The Japanese then occupied Burma for 3 years.

By the summer of 1944 the British Army in eastern India had become strong enough to beat the Japanese Army in battles at Kohima and Imphal, and the Japanese retreated into Burma. The British gradually advanced against them, and the Japanese retreated farther. In the early months of 1945 the British were able to capture Meiktila (March 3) and Mandalay (March 20). Pyawbwe, southeast of Meiktila, fell to the British on April 10, and Rangoon (now Yangon) on May 2. The remnants of the Japanese Army were then mopped up (Allen, 1984; Slim, 1961). The bombing and fighting associated with the defeat of the Japanese Army devastated much of Upper Burma.

Some Burmese nationalist leaders of the 1930s had become impatient with delays on the part of the British in according self-government to Burma. The Japanese Government, preparing for World War II, had made contact with the Burmese nationalists. In 1941 a group of 30 Burmese leaders went to Japanese-controlled territory and took military training. Back in Burma they organized a "Burma Defense Army" under General Aung San, who initially sided with the Japanese.

When the Japanese first occupied Burma, they represented themselves as coming there to liberate it from the British, and most Burmese leaders expected that they would achieve independence with Japanese assistance. This hope had led Aung San and others to serve under the Japanese Army. However, within a few months it became clear that the Japanese had no intention of granting independence to Burma. Its soldiers treated the country like a conquered province. Although many exceptions must have occurred, the Japanese soldiers acquired a reputation for rudeness and cruelty. The Japanese Military Intelligence Service, the Kempei Tai, became notorious for its ruthlessness including the use of torture—for example, pulling out fingernails with pliers—during interrogations. The publications of Htin Aung (1967), Rodriguez (1983), and Russell (1958) contain vivid descriptions of the misconduct and cruelty of Japanese soldiers in Burma.

The relationships between the occupying Japanese Army and the Burmese people varied widely. An important factor was the attitude of the Japanese military unit toward the Burmese in its region. Some Japanese treated the Burmese with great consideration, and the Burmese of that locality would cooperate with them and even help them. In other areas the Japanese treated the Burmese almost like slaves and naturally generated animosity. In areas where the Japanese had mistreated the Burmese, the villagers turned against the Japanese as they retreated, and they sometimes caught, tortured, and killed stragglers of the defeated Japanese Army.

When Aung San realized that the Japanese had no intention of letting Burma become independent, he began secret negotiations with the British. In March 1945—as the Japanese Army was being defeated—Aung San and his

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Malaya (now that they had been divided into India.

It had become a major power, and the British, who had been able to control the region, were able to withdraw from Southeast Asia (Burma) on May 2, 1948; Slim, a Japanese Army

was impatient to return to Burma. After contact with the Japanese, leaders went to Burma, where they initially

viewed themselves as leaders expected to bring hope had led to a change within a few years of independence. The province acquired a reputation for service, the use of torpedoes. The events of 1958) contain a history of Burma.

The Burmese military, with the Japanese military, had fought with them almost like the Japanese had misbehaved, they retreated, the defeated

on of letting the British. In 1948, San and his

troops openly mutinied against the Japanese and thereafter fought on the British side (Htin Aung, 1967; Nu, 1954).

After the war, the British Government agreed to complete independence for Burma, and this took effect on January 4, 1948. Unfortunately, in 1947, during the interval before independence after the war, General Aung San, who was the obvious and designated leader of independent Burma, was assassinated with members of his provisional cabinet by a political rival. Leadership then devolved on U Nu. He was a reluctant politician who would have preferred the life of a scholar or a monk. Nevertheless, he struggled valiantly with the country's problems until he was finally replaced on March 2, 1962, in a coup d'état by the commander of the Burmese Army, General Ne Win. Burma then began a long period under a military dictatorship. In 1989 the name of the country was officially changed to Myanmar. The name of the capital, Rangoon, was changed to Yangon; and some other place-names were also changed.

During most of the 14 years between Burma's independence and General Ne Win's assumption of power, the country suffered an appalling series of insurgencies, which retarded its recovery from the destruction that had occurred during the Japanese occupation. Several insurgent groups fought the government and each other. They included Communists, Karen nationalists, and discontented residues of General Aung San's Burma Defense Army, which then called itself the People's Volunteer Organization and soon, leaderless, split into fragments and became bands of insurgents. For a time the Burmese Government failed badly to contain, let alone suppress, the insurgency. In early 1949, for a time, the Burmese Government controlled Rangoon but almost nothing else in Burma. Its task was magnified by the activities beginning in early 1950 of a Chinese Nationalist Army which, driven across the border by the Chinese Communist Army, established itself with supplies from Taiwan and began to treat a large part of the Shan States (northeastern Burma) as its own territory.

In the event, the Burmese Army slowly prevailed against the insurgents, although important pockets of insurgency remained until the late 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the Karens and other minority groups presented some threat to the central government into the 1980s. They still controlled part of the country's territory. During the period of insurgency, frequent defections occurred as members of one group or another changed sides. In these lawless times many persons tried to settle old accounts with enemies, so that private crimes were sometimes concealed under the guise of public duty. Some of the insurgent groups became gangs of brigands (called dacoits in Burma, as in India). The dacoits could shelter their activities behind the appearance of acting for one or another insurgent group. Persons armed for civil defense against the insurgents could also turn dacoit and use the arms furnished by the government for private advantage. The cases of Maung Tin Win and Maung Than Htay illustrate this evolution.

On six occasions between 1948 and 1974 the Burmese Government declared amnesties for the insurgents. The government usually set the amnesties for the date of some important anniversary. Insurgents who surrendered them-

selves and their arms at such times were given pardons and indemnification from prosecution for crimes they may have committed. This permitted dacoits to return to their villages and resume normal lives without repenting for any misconduct or being punished for it. An example of this type of resolution occurred in the case of Maung Aung Than.

Further details about the insurgencies in Burma can be found in Htin Aung (1967), Silverstein (1977), M. Smith (1991), and Trager (1966).

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**Selected by American Artist**

**Material from  
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# **DARK MATTERS**

ON THE SURVEILLANCE OF BLACKNESS

**SIMONE BROWNE**

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Duke University Press Durham and London 2015



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## INTRODUCTION, AND OTHER DARK MATTERS

“The CIA can neither confirm nor deny the existence or nonexistence of records responsive to your request.” Sometime in the spring of 2011, I wrote to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to request the release of any documents pertaining to Frantz Fanon under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). At the time, I was interested in Fanon’s travels to the United States of America in 1961, possibly under the nom de guerre Ibrahim Fanon, to receive treatment for myeloid leukemia. He arrived in the United States on October 3, staying at a hotel in Washington, DC, where he was “left to rot,” according to Simone de Beauvoir, “alone and without medical attention.”<sup>1</sup> Fanon was a patient at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, from October 10, 1961, until he died of pneumonia on December 6, 1961. He was thirty-six. I didn’t get any documents from the CIA except a letter citing Executive Order 13526 with the standard refrain that the agency “can neither confirm nor deny the existence or nonexistence of records,” and further stating that “the fact of the existence or nonexistence of requested records is currently and properly classified and is intelligence sources and methods information that is protected from disclosure.”

Fanon’s FOIA files that were released to me by the FBI consist only of three declassified documents: Document #105-96959-A—a clipping of a 1971 *Washington Post-Times Herald* article on Fanon’s “Black Power Message” and its continuing influence on the Caribbean island of Martinique, where he was born; Document #105-96959-1—a once “SECRET” memo on Fanon dated March 9, 1961; and Document #105-96959-2—a book review of David Caute’s 1970 biography *Frantz Fanon*, filed under “extremist matters,” which says of Caute that “his methodology bears the Marxist stamp” and that “he is no friend of the United States or of a free society.” Document #105-96959-A, the news clipping, names *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963)

as Fanon's most important book, stating, "its sales have run unusually high lately, especially among young Negroes." Document #105-96959-2, the FBI's own review of Cauter's biography, describes Fanon as a "black intellectual," a "radical revolutionary," and "a philosophical disciple of Karl Marx and Jean Paul Sartre, [who] preached global revolt of the blacks against white colonial rule," and says that Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is "often quoted and misquoted by Stokely Carmichael and other black power advocates, both foreign and domestic." This review also claims that "Fanon's importance has been inflated into exaggerated dimensions by the need of black revolutionaries for philosophical justification and leadership." Traces of Fanon's influence appear in other declassified FBI documents where either he or his published books are named, including some documents that detail the bureau's surveillance of the Black Panther Party.

Although much of the information on the once "SECRET" FBI memo on Fanon, Document #105-96959-1 (figure 1.1), has been redacted, meaning that some of its information is censored, concealed, or otherwise covered up, this memo names Fanon as "the Algerian representative in Ghana for the Algerian Front for National Liberation (FLN)" and notes that he was, at the time, in Tunisia preparing to travel to Washington, DC, for "extensive medical treatment." This memo is from Sam J. Papich, the bureau's liaison to the CIA. It is interesting to note here that the redaction of Document #105-96959-1 took the form of a whiteout, concealing a good portion of the original text with white blocks, in this way deviating from the method of censoring the redacted data with opaque black blocks, rendering any information in the dark. We can think of the redaction here as the willful absenting of the record and as the state's disavowal of the bureaucratic traces of Fanon, at least those which are made publicly available. Here Frantz Fanon is a nonnameable matter. Now dead, yet still a "currently and properly classified" security risk, apparently, as "the fact of the existence or nonexistence" of Fanon's records itself is "intelligence sources and methods information that is protected from disclosure." With this, the redaction and Executive Order 13526 could be understood as a form of security theater where certain "intelligence sources and methods," if in existence, could still be put into operation, and as such could not be declassified.

Fanon's FOIA files form a part of the long history of the collection of intelligence on the many black radicals, artists, activists, and intellectuals who were targeted for surveillance by the FBI. This list includes Assata Shakur,

James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Stokely Carmichael, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the Freedom Riders, Martin Luther King Jr., Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, Claudia Jones, Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, William Edward Burghart DuBois, Fannie Lou Hamer, Cyril Lionel Robert James, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Angela Yvonne Davis, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Josephine Baker, Billie Holiday, the Black Panther Party, Kathleen Cleaver, Cassius Clay, Jimi Hendrix, and Russell Jones aka Ol' Dirty Bastard of the Wu-Tang Clan, among many, many others. The declassified printed matter released to me by the FBI was not particularly revealing regarding any surveillance and monitoring of Frantz Fanon. I was disappointed. My own surveillance of the records of the FBI's surveillance of Fanon had apparently been stalled.

In the foreword to the 2005 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha describes Fanon's dying days as filled with delirium and with a love for liberation:

his body was stricken, but his fighting days were not quite over; he resisted his death "minute by minute," a friend reported from his bedside, as his political opinions and beliefs turned into the delirious fantasies of a mind raging against the dying of the light. His hatred of racist Americans now turned into a distrust of the nursing staff, and he awoke on his last morning, having probably had a blood transfusion through the night, obsessed with the idea that "they put me through the washing machine last night." His death was inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

*Les damnés de la terre* (1961) would be the last of his books that Fanon would live to see published. He was in the hospital in Maryland when he heard some initial reviews of the book and he reportedly stated, "That's not going to get me my marrow back."<sup>3</sup> A letter to a friend penned from his hospital bed captures Fanon's rage "against the dying of the light" as both a battle of the body against disease and an anticolonial praxis:

During a night and day surveillance, they inject me with the components of blood for which I have a terrible need, and where they give me huge transfusions to keep me in shape—that's to say, alive. . . . What shocks me here in this bed, as I grow weaker, is not that I'm dying, but that I'm dying in Washington of leukemia considering that I could have died in battle with the enemy three months ago when I

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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Per letter dated 8-10-2011  
DATE: March 9, 1961

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TO : Mr. L'Allier *L*  
FROM : S. J. Papich *SJP*  
SUBJECT: FRANTZ FANON  
IS - ALGERIA

[Redacted]

(U) The captioned individual is the Algerian representative in Ghana for the Algerian Front for National Liberation (FLN). At the present time Fanon is in Tunisia preparing for a trip to the United States. He plans to receive extensive medical treatment at the National Institute of Health, Washington, D. C.

[Redacted]

**ACTION:**

The above information is being directed to the attention of the Nationalities Intelligence Section.

SJP:ban  
(4)  
1 - Mr. Donahoe  
1 - Liaison  
1 - Mr. Papich

MCT-19  
105-96959-1  
MAR 14 1961

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CLASSIFIED BY 38102/ELV/STP  
DECLASSIFY ON: 25X(1)  
#928908  
per OIA letter dated July 10, 2001

REC-82

52 MAR 17 1961

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED  
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED EXCEPT  
WHERE SHOWN OTHERWISE

FIGURE I.1. "SECRET" FBI memo on Frantz Fanon, Document #105-96959-1.

knew I had this disease. We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all, slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty.<sup>4</sup>

Fanon wrote much of the anticolonial *Les damnés de la terre* as his time was running out. He knew that his cancer was terminal, which brought writing the book “down to the wire,” as he put it.<sup>5</sup> At the time he was in exile in Tunisia after being expelled from Algeria in January 1957 by the French authorities for his work with the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). During his exile in Tunisia, home to the FLN’s headquarters, Fanon took on multiple roles. He worked at the FLN’s newspaper *El Moudjahid*, served in refugee camps run by the FLN near the Algerian border, was *chef de service* at the psychiatric hospital of Manouba, and was also the Algerian provisional government’s delegate to Mali and other African nations. While in exile, Fanon gave a series of lectures at the University of Tunis on surveillance, the psychic effects of war and colonialism on the colonized, and antiblack racism in the United States.<sup>6</sup> In the notes from these lectures, Fanon speaks of the problem of racial segregation in the United States, or the “color bar” as he names it, where antiblack racism is constant and multi-layered, emotional and affective. He mentions the themes of escape and blackness on the move found in Negro spirituals, the haunting lyrics of blues music and social death, Harlem and the writings of African American novelist Chester Himes, the rigidity of the color line and its nagging presence, African American vernacular and code-switching (“quand un Noir s’adresse à un Blanc”) and repressive policing practices (“Quand un Noir tue un Noir, il ne se passe rien; quand un Noir tue un Blanc, toute la police est mobilisée”).<sup>7</sup> Fanon’s lectures on surveillance at the University of Tunis were eventually canceled, by order of the Tunisian government.<sup>8</sup>

During these lectures Fanon put forth the idea that modernity can be characterized by the “mise en fiches de l’homme.” These are the records, files, time sheets, and identity documents that together form a biography, and sometimes an unauthorized one, of the modern subject. In a manner similar to the detailed case histories of colonial war and mental disorders found in the fifth chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in a section of the notes on these lectures titled “Le contrôle et la surveillance” (in English “Surveillance and Control”), Fanon demonstrates his role as both psychiatrist and social theorist, by making observations, or social diagnoses, on the embodied effects and outcomes of surveillance practices on different

categories of laborers when attempts are made by way of workforce supervision to reduce their labor to an automation: factory assembly line workers subjected to time management by punch clocks and time sheets, the eavesdropping done by telephone switchboard supervisors as they secretly listened in on calls in order to monitor the conversations of switchboard operators, and the effects of closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance on sales clerks in large department stores in the United States. This is control by quantification, as Fanon put it. The embodied psychic effects of surveillance that Fanon described include nervous tensions, insomnia, fatigue, accidents, lightheadedness, and less control over reflexes. Nightmares too: a train that departs and leaves one behind, or a gate closing, or a door that won't open. Although Fanon's remarks on CCTV surveillance are short, they are revealing as he suggests that these cameras are trained not only on the potential thief, but also on the employee working on the shop floor who is put on notice that the video surveillance is perpetual. He also noted that workers displayed microresistances to managerial control in the way of sick leave, expressing boredom on the job, arriving late, and sometimes not arriving at work at all. Rather than being thought of as unproductive, such acts must be understood as disalienating, as they are strategic means of contesting surveillance in the workplace.

Although only the notes from these lectures remain, Fanon's observations on the monitoring of audio communications and CCTV are nevertheless instructive for the social diagnosis of alienation and the effects of modernity, surveillance, and resistance that he offers. If one were to read these lectures "optimistically," as Nicholas Mirzoeff has suggested, "had he lived longer, Fanon might have moved away from his emphasis on masculinity to imagine new modes of postrevolutionary gender identity, as part of this analysis of the racialized disciplinary society, a connection made by many radical black feminists in the United States from Angela Davis to Toni Cade Bambara and bell hooks."<sup>9</sup> I enter *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* with this sense of optimism in mind: that in Fanon's works and in the writings of black feminist scholars, another mode of reading surveillance can be had.

*Dark Matters* begins with a discussion of my failed attempt to get my hands on any information from the CIA pertaining to Fanon, his FBI FOIA file, the short notes that remain from his lectures on surveillance, and an excerpt from his letter to a friend recounting the "night and day surveillance" that he experienced as he was on the brink of death as a way to cue surveillance in and of black life as a fact of blackness. My gesture to "The Fact of



Blackness,” one of the English translations of the title of the fifth chapter of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, is a deliberate signal to the facticity of surveillance in black life. First published in 1952 as *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, the book’s fifth chapter in the French original is “L’expérience vécue du Noir.” As Sylvia Wynter and others have noted, the translation of that chapter’s title into English as “The Lived Experience of the Black” in later editions offers a more accurate understanding. It is this slight difference between the two titles—“The Fact of Blackness” and “The Lived Experience of the Black”—that I want to signal here. The “Blackness” in the former could be taken to mean, as Wynter has put it, “Blackness as an objective fact” while “The Lived Experience of the Black” speaks to a focus on the imposition of race in black life, where one’s being is experienced through others.<sup>10</sup> Wynter continues her discussion of Fanon and sociogeny to say that “The Lived Experience of the Black” makes clear that Fanon is dealing “with the ‘subjective character’ of the experience of the black, of, therefore, what it is *like* to be black, within the terms of the mode of being human specific to our contemporary culture.”<sup>11</sup>

Sociogeny, or what Wynter calls “the sociogenic principle,” is understood as the organizational framework of our present human condition that names what is and what is not bounded within the category of the human, and that fixes and frames blackness as an object of surveillance. Take, for example, Fanon’s often-cited “Look, a Negro!” passage in *Black Skin, White Masks* on the experience of epidermalization, where the white gaze fixes him as an object among objects and, he says, “the white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me.”<sup>12</sup> Epidermalization here is the imposition of race on the body. For Fanon, there is no “ontological resistance” in spaces, like that train he rode in France, that are shaped for and by whiteness, where “instead of one seat, they left me two or three,” he writes.<sup>13</sup> *Dark Matters* takes up blackness, as metaphor and as lived materiality, and applies it to an understanding of surveillance. I work across multiple spaces (the airport, the plan of the *Brooks* slave ship, the plan for Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, Internet art) and different segments of time (the period of transatlantic chattel slavery, the British occupation of New York City during the American Revolution, post-9/11) to think through the multiplicities of blackness. This method of analyzing surveillance and the conditions of racial blackness brings historical documents, art, photography, contemporary popular film and television, and various other forms of cultural production into dialogue with critical race scholarship, sociological theory,

and feminist theorizing. For this study, I look to Pamela Z's multimedia project on travel and security, *Baggage Allowance*; Adrian Piper's *What It's Like, What It Is* #3; Caryl Phillips's epistolary story "The Cargo Rap" on prisons, politics, and slavery; and Hank Willis Thomas's commentary on branding and the afterlife of slavery in his *B®anded* series. Part of the argument presented here is that with certain acts of cultural production we can find performances of freedom and suggestions of alternatives to ways of living under a routinized surveillance. In this fashion, I am indebted to Stuart Hall's unsettling of understandings of "cultural identity" that does not see the black diaspora and black experiences as static or singular, but instead as "a result of a long and discontinuous series of transformations."<sup>14</sup> Following Rinaldo Walcott here, my use of the term "blackness" is to "signal blackness as a sign, one that carries with it particular histories of resistance and domination" that is "never closed and always under contestation."<sup>15</sup> Blackness is identity and culture, history and present, signifier and signified, but never fixed. As Ralph Ellison names it in *Invisible Man*, "Black is . . . an' black ain't."<sup>16</sup>

Fanon's "Look, a Negro!" his articulations of epidermalization, and his anticolonial thought have influenced the formation of this book. *Dark Matters* suggests that an understanding of the ontological conditions of blackness is integral to developing a general theory of surveillance and, in particular, racializing surveillance—when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race, and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory and violent treatment. Of course, this is not the entire story of surveillance, but it is a part that often escapes notice. Although "race" might be a term found in the index of many of the recent edited collections and special journal issues dedicated to the study of surveillance, within the field of surveillance studies race remains undertheorized, and serious consideration has yet to be given to the racial subject in general, and to the role of surveillance in the archive of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in particular. It is through this archive and that of black life after the Middle Passage that I want to further complicate understandings of surveillance by questioning how a realization of the conditions of blackness—the historical, the present, and the historical present—can help social theorists understand our contemporary conditions of surveillance. Put another way, rather than seeing surveillance as something inaugurated by new technologies, such as automated facial recognition or unmanned autonomous vehicles (or drones), to see it as ongoing is to in-

sist that we factor in how racism and antiblackness undergird and sustain the intersecting surveillances of our present order. Patricia Hill Collins uses the term “intersectional paradigms” to signal that “oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice.”<sup>17</sup> Indebted to black feminist scholarship, by “intersecting surveillances” I am referring to the interdependent and interlocking ways that practices, performances, and policies regarding surveillance operate.

The concept of dark matter might bring to mind opacity, the color black, limitlessness and the limitations imposed on blackness, the dark, antimatter, that which is not optically available, black holes, the Big Bang theory, and other concerns of cosmology where dark matter is that nonluminous component of the universe that is said to exist but cannot be observed, cannot be re-created in laboratory conditions. Its distribution cannot be measured; its properties cannot be determined; and so it remains undetectable. The gravitational pull of this unseen matter is said to move galaxies. Invisible and unknowable, yet somehow still there, dark matter, in this planetary sense, is theoretical. If the term “dark matter” is a way to think about race, where race, as Howard Winant puts it, “remains the *dark matter*, the often invisible substance that in many ways structures the universe of modernity,” then one must ask here, invisible to whom?<sup>18</sup> If it is often invisible, then how is it sensed, experienced, and lived? Is it really invisible, or is it rather unseen and unperceived by many? In her essay “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” Evelyn Hammonds takes up the astrophysics of black holes found in Michele Wallace’s discussion of the negation of black creative genius to say that if “we can detect the presence of a black hole by its effects on the region of space where it is located,” where, unseen, its energy distorts and disrupts that around it, from that understanding we can then use this theorizing as a way to “develop reading strategies that allow us to make visible the distorting and productive effects” of black female sexualities in particular, and blackness in general.<sup>19</sup> Taking up blackness in surveillance studies in this way, as rather unperceived yet producing a productive disruption of that around it, *Dark Matters* names the surveillance of blackness as often unperceivable within the study of surveillance, all the while blackness being that nonnameable matter that matters the racialized disciplinary society. It is from this insight that I situate *Dark Matters* as a black diasporic, archival, historical, and contemporary study that locates blackness as a key site through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and enacted.

Surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness. This book is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the ways that black people and blackness have come under, or up against, surveillance. Of the scholars that have written about surveillance as it concerns black people, many have taken as their focus the FBI Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that ran from 1956 until 1971 and that saw individuals and domestic political organizations deemed subversive, or potentially so, come under investigation by the bureau with the aim of disrupting their activities, discrediting their efforts, and neutralizing their effects, often through infiltration, disinformation, and the work of informants. Sociologist Mike Forrest Keen's study of the FBI's surveillance of sociologists such as W. E. B. DuBois and E. Franklin Frazier, David Garrow's *The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr.*, Theodore Kornweibel on the FBI's surveillance of the activities of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association through the use of informants and disinformation, or Carole Boyce Davies's writings on the intense FBI scrutiny of Trinidadian activist, Marxist, and journalist Claudia Jones, for example, form part of this scholarly work. Other research examines policing with a focus on racism, state power, and incarceration, such as the works of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, Joy James, Dylan Rodriguez, and more. James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, bell hooks, and Ralph Ellison have all, in different ways, written on being looked at and on seeing black life. For instance, in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, James Baldwin describes black suffering under the conditions of antiblackness where, as he puts it, "it is a very grave matter to be forced to imitate a people for whom you know—which is the price of your performance and survival—you do not exist. It is hard to imitate a people whose existence appears, mainly, to be made tolerable by their bottomless gratitude that they are not, thank heaven, *you*."<sup>20</sup> Toni Cade Bambara's call for emancipatory texts to "heal our imperialized eyes" as well as bell hooks's naming of the interrogating, "oppositional gaze" as "one that 'looks' to document" form part of this critical take on black looks.<sup>21</sup> Ralph Ellison's critiques and quarrels with what is taken as canonical sociology and the ways in which much of its early racial knowledge production was achieved by distorting blackness has been detailed by Roderick Ferguson. In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Ferguson offers an analysis of an unpublished chapter of Ellison's *Invisible Man* where he examines the ways that canonical sociology made itself out to be a discipline through the "sociologization" of black sexuality by way of surveillance. On

sociologization, Ferguson writes, “canonical sociology would help transform observation into an epistemological and ‘objective’ technique for the good of modern state power. This was a way of defining surveillance as a scientifically acceptable and socially necessary practice. It established the sociological onlooker as safely removed and insulated from the prurient practices of African American men, women and children.”<sup>22</sup>

As ethnography, tallying, and “statistics helped to produce surveillance as one mode, alongside confession, for producing the truth of sexuality in Western society,” when this mode concerned the measurement of black human life in the post-Emancipation United States, such racial logics often made for sociology as a population management technology of the state.<sup>23</sup> One example of how such sociologization functioned in relation to blackness is “The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures with Special Reference to the Negro,” Robert Park’s 1918 address to the meeting of the American Sociological Society in which he stated, “The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor an idealist like the Jew, nor a brooding introspective like the East Indian, nor a pioneer and frontiersman, like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primarily an artist, loving life for its own sake.”<sup>24</sup> Park, who in 1925 would become president of the American Sociological Society, continued his address by saying, “The Negro is, so to speak, the lady among the races.”<sup>25</sup> Park’s address is instructive regarding the tenets of gendered antiblack racism that shaped the discipline of sociology in the early twentieth century. It is accounts of blackness like these that influenced Ellison’s quarrels with sociological discourse, or what he called in his introduction to *Invisible Man* “the bland assertions of sociologists,” where in observing, tallying, quantifying, indexing, and surveilling, black life was made “invisible.”<sup>26</sup>

*Dark Matters* stems from a questioning of what would happen if some of the ideas occurring in the emerging field of surveillance studies were put into conversation with the enduring archive of transatlantic slavery and its afterlife, in this way making visible the many ways that race continues to structure surveillance practices. This study’s objects of investigation include the plan of the *Brooks* slave ship, the Panopticon, the *Book of Negroes* as a record of black escape from New York in the late 1700s, branding of enslaved people in transatlantic slavery, slave passes and runaway notices, lantern laws in eighteenth-century New York City that mandated enslaved people carry lit candles as they moved about the city after dark, a set of rules from the 1800s specifying the management of slaves on an East Texas

plantation, and the life of a young woman named Coobah who was enslaved in eighteenth-century Jamaica. If we are to take transatlantic slavery as antecedent to contemporary surveillance technologies and practices as they concern inventories of ships' cargo and the cheek-by-jowl arrangement laid out in the stowage plan of the *Brooks* slave ship, biometric identification by branding the slave's body with hot irons, slave markets and auction blocks as exercises of synoptic power where the many watched the few, slave passes and patrols, manumission papers and free badges, black codes and fugitive slave notices, it is to the archives, slave narratives, and often to black expressive practices, creative texts, and other efforts that we can look for moments of refusal and critique. Slave narratives, as Avery Gordon demonstrates, offer us "a sociology of slavery and freedom."<sup>27</sup> To paraphrase Gordon here, through their rendering of the autobiographical, the ethnographic, the historical, the literary, and the political, slave narratives are sociological in that they reveal the social life of the slave condition, speak of freedom practices, and detail the workings of power in the making of what is exceptional—the slave life—into the everyday through acts of violence.<sup>28</sup>

### Surveillance Studies

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In this section, I provide a brief overview of key terms and concepts, some of them overlapping, as they relate to the concerns of this book. This is not meant to be a comprehensive review of the field of surveillance studies, but rather it is done to put this book into conversation with that body of research and writing and to also introduce the two main, interrelated conceptual schemes of this book: racializing surveillance and dark sousveillance. Research and writing that falls under the rubric of surveillance studies has come from a range of disciplines including sociology, geography, cultural studies, organization studies, science and technology studies, criminology, and critical theory. As an interdisciplinary field of study, the questions that shape surveillance studies center on the management of everyday and exceptional life—personal data, privacy, security, and terrorism, for example. In their introduction to *The Surveillance Studies Reader*, Sean Hier and Joshua Greenberg note that although "a qualitative shift in surveillance took place after 9/11," there still remains a certain absence in the literature "on the pre-9/11 forms of surveillance that made post-9/11 surveillance

possible.”<sup>29</sup> *Dark Matters* seeks to make an intervention in the literature by naming the “absented presence” of blackness as part of that absence in the literature that Hier and Greenberg point to. In the sense that blackness is often absented from what is theorized and who is cited, it is ever present in the subjection of black motorists to a disproportionate number of traffic stops (driving while black), stop-and-frisk policing practices that subject black and Latino pedestrians in New York City and other urban spaces to just that, CCTV and urban renewal projects that displace those living in black city spaces, and mass incarceration in the United States where, for example, black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-four are imprisoned at a rate seven times higher than white men of that age group, and the various exclusions and other matters where blackness meets surveillance and then reveals the ongoing racisms of unfinished emancipation.<sup>30</sup> Unfinished emancipation suggests that slavery matters and the archive of transatlantic slavery must be engaged if we are to create a surveillance studies that grapples with its constitutive genealogies, where the archive of slavery is taken up in a way that does not replicate the racial schema that spawned it and that it reproduced, but at the same time does not erase its violence.

Since its emergence, surveillance studies has been primarily concerned with how and why populations are tracked, profiled, policed, and governed at state borders, in cities, at airports, in public and private spaces, through biometrics, telecommunications technology, CCTV, identification documents, and more recently by way of Internet-based social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Also of focus are the ways that those who are often subject to surveillance subvert, adopt, endorse, resist, innovate, limit, comply with, and monitor that very surveillance.<sup>31</sup> Most surveillance, as David Lyon suggests, is “practiced with a view to enhancing efficiency, productivity, participation, welfare, health or safety,” leaving social control “seldom a motivation for installing surveillance systems even though that may be an unintended or secondary consequence of their deployment.”<sup>32</sup> Lyon has argued that the “surveillance society” as a concept might be misleading, for it suggests “a total, homogeneous situation of being under surveillance” rather than a more nuanced understanding of the sometimes discreet and varying ways that surveillance operates.<sup>33</sup> He suggests that we should look more closely at “sites of surveillance,” such as the military, the state, the workplace, policing, and the marketplace in order to come to an understanding of the commonalities that exist at these various sites. For Lyon, looking at contemporary sites of surveillance requires us to examine

some “common threads” including rationalization (where reason “rather than tradition, emotion or common-sense knowledge” is the justification given for standardization), technology (the use of high-technology applications), sorting (the social sorting of people into categories as a means of management and ascribing differential treatment), knowledgeableability (the notion that how surveillance operates depends on “the different levels of knowledgeableability and willing participation on the part of those whose life-details are under scrutiny”), and urgency (where panic prevails in risk and threat assessments, and in the adoption of security measures, especially post-9/11).<sup>34</sup>

In *Private Lives and Public Surveillance* (1973), James Rule set out to explore commonalities within sites of surveillance as well by asking whether the “sociological qualities” of the totalizing system of surveillance as depicted in George Orwell’s *1984* could be seen in computer-mediated modern systems of mass surveillance in the United States and Britain, such as policing, banking, and national health care schemes.<sup>35</sup> Rule found that although the bureaucratic systems he studied did not function as malevolently as in *1984*, Orwell’s novel served as a “theoretical extreme” from which to analyze a given system’s capacity for surveillance, in other words, how near it comes to replicating an Orwellian system of total control.<sup>36</sup> Using this rubric, Rule concludes that a large-scale and long-enduring surveillance system could be limited in its surveillance capacity in four ways: due to size, the centralization of its files, the speed of information flow, and restrictions to its points of contact with its clientele. Although much has changed with regard to innovations in information technologies, machine intelligence, telecommunications, and networked cloud computing since the time of Rule’s study in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Private Lives* is instructive in its understanding of the workings of centralized and diffused power by state and private actors and institutions, and for identifying earlier developments in what Gary T. Marx has called “the new surveillance.”<sup>37</sup>

What makes “the new surveillance” quite different from older and more traditional forms of social control is laid out by Marx in a set of ten characteristics that these new technologies, practices, and forms of surveillance share to varying degrees: (1) it is no longer impeded by distance or physical barriers; (2) data can be shared, permanently stored, compressed, and aggregated more easily due to advances in computing and telecommunications; (3) it is often undetected, meaning that “surveillance devices can either be made to appear as something else (one-way mirrors, cameras



hidden in a fire extinguisher, undercover agents) or can be virtually invisible (electronic snooping into microwave transmission or computer files”); (4) data collection is often done without the consent of the target, for example with noncooperative biometric tagging and matching at a casino or a sporting event, or Facebook’s prompt to “tag your friends” using the photo tag suggest feature; (5) surveillance is about the prevention and management of risk through predictive or anticipatory means; (6) it is less labor intensive than before, opening up the possibility for monitoring that which was previously left unobserved, like the detection of illegal marijuana grow-ops by thermal cameras set to sense unusually high temperatures or the detection of illicit bomb making by collecting and testing chemical air samples; (7) it involves more self-surveillance by way of wearable computing or “electronic leashes” such as fitness trackers or other means by which people come to monitor themselves; (8) the presumption of guilt is assigned to some based on their membership within a particular category or grouping; (9) technological innovations have made for a more intensive and interiorizing surveillance where the body is concerned, for example, with voice analysis that is said to measure stress as a way to differentiate between lies and truths; and (10) it is now so intense and with reduced opportunities to evade it that “the uncertainty over whether or not surveillance is present is an important strategic element.”<sup>38</sup> With these developments regarding the scope and scale of surveillance, Marx has suggested that perhaps we have become a “maximum-security society.”

For Marx, the maximum-security society is a way to conceptualize how the surveillance that was once figured as contained inside the military base or the maximum-security prison (“perimeter security, thick walls with guard towers, spotlights, and a high degree of electronic surveillance”) now extends out to the whole society.<sup>39</sup> According to Marx, the maximum-security society is predictive, porous, monitored and self-monitored, and made up of computerized records and dossiers, where increasingly choices are engineered and limited by social location. In it, everyone is rendered suspicious at some time or another, while some individuals might be more often subject to what Marx terms “categorical suspicion” given their ascribed membership in certain groups. Notably, for Marx, the maximum-security society is also “a *transparent* society, in which the boundaries of time, distance, darkness, and physical barriers that traditionally protected information are weakened.”<sup>40</sup> Marx’s concept of “electronic leashes” and also what William Staples calls “participatory monitoring” are ways of understanding

how people, objects, and things come to be monitored in remote, routinized, and continuous ways—think of electronic ankle bracelets as a requirement of house arrest or car ignitions fitted with breathalyzers that measure a driver’s breath alcohol content before the engine can be started.<sup>41</sup> People who are subject to such monitoring are also tasked with actively participating in their own confinement by partnering, in a way, with the overseeing body or agency in the check for violations and infractions.

Oscar Gandy’s “panoptic sort” names the processes by which the collection of data on and about individuals and groups as “citizens, employees and consumers” is used to identify, classify, assess, sort, or otherwise “control their access to the goods and services that define life in the modern capitalist society,” for example, with the application of credit scores by lenders to rate the creditworthiness of consumers or put to use for targeted marketing of predatory lending with high-interest loans.<sup>42</sup> The panoptic sort privileges some, while disadvantaging others. These concepts—categorical suspicion, social sorting, maximum-security society, electronic leashes, participatory monitoring, panoptic sorting—along with Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson’s concept of the “surveillant assemblage,” are some of the ways that the field has come to conceptualize surveillance. As a model for understanding surveillance, the surveillant assemblage sees the observed human body “broken down by being abstracted from its territorial setting” and then reassembled elsewhere (a credit reporting database, for example) to then serve as virtual “data doubles,” and also as sites of comparison by way of, for example, credit scores or urinalysis drug testing, where one’s biological sample is collected and tested for drug use, or when “lie detectors align and compare assorted flows of respiration, pulse and electricity.”<sup>43</sup>

I want to add to these understandings of surveillance the concept of racializing surveillance. Racializing surveillance is a technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a “power to define what is in or out of place.”<sup>44</sup> Being mindful here of David Theo Goldberg’s caution that the term “racialization,” if applied, should be done with a certain precision and not merely called upon to uncritically signal “race-inflected social situations,” my use of the term “racializing surveillance” signals those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries, borders, and bodies along racial lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized by such surveillance.<sup>45</sup> To say that racializing surveillance is a technology of social control is not to

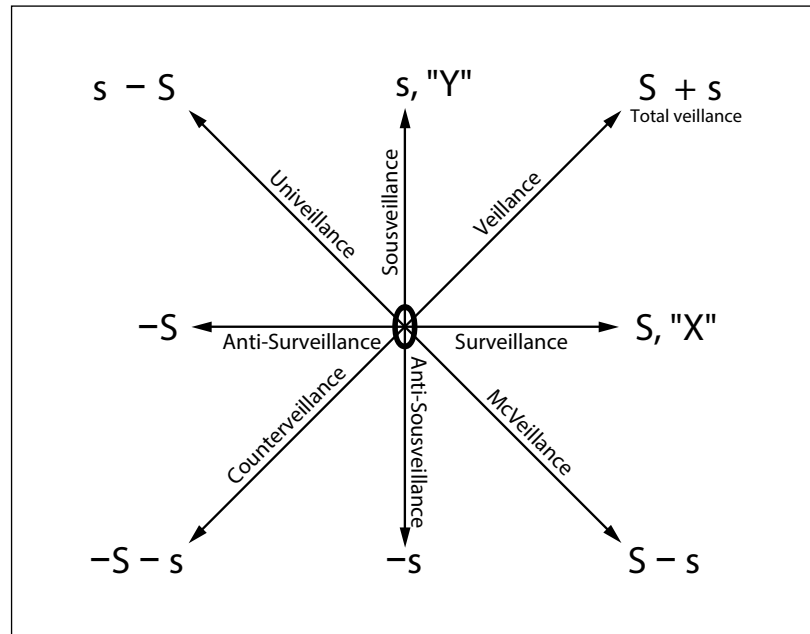
take this form of surveillance as involving a fixed set of practices that maintain a racial order of things. Instead, it suggests that how things get ordered racially by way of surveillance depends on space and time and is subject to change, but most often upholds negating strategies that first accompanied European colonial expansion and transatlantic slavery that sought to structure social relations and institutions in ways that privilege whiteness. Racializing surveillance is not static or only applied to particular human groupings, but it does rely on certain techniques in order to reify boundaries along racial lines, and, in so doing, it reifies race. Race here is understood as operating in an interlocking manner with class, gender, sexuality, and other markers of identity and their various intersections.

John Fiske shows the operation of racializing surveillance in his discussion of video surveillance and the hypermediation of blackness where he argues that “although surveillance is penetrating deeply throughout our society, its penetration is differential.”<sup>46</sup> Fiske argues that although Michel Foucault and George Orwell both conceptualized surveillance as integral to modernity, surveillance “has been racialized in a manner that they did not foresee: today’s seeing eye is white.”<sup>47</sup> Fiske gives the example that “street behaviors of white men (standing still and talking, using a cellular phone, passing an unseen object from one to another) may be coded as normal and thus granted no attention, whereas the same activity performed by Black men will be coded as lying on or beyond the boundary of the normal, and thus subject to disciplinary action.”<sup>48</sup> Where public spaces are shaped for and by whiteness, some acts in public are abnormalized by way of racializing surveillance and then coded for disciplinary measures that are punitive in their effects. Racializing surveillance is also a part of the digital sphere with material consequences within and outside of it. For example, what Lyon calls “digital discrimination” signals this differential application of surveillance technologies, where “flows of personal data—abstracted information—are sifted and channeled in the process of risk assessment, to privilege some and disadvantage others, to accept some as legitimately present and to reject others.”<sup>49</sup> In this way, data that is abstracted from, or produced about, individuals and groups is then profiled, circulated, and traded within and between databases. Such data is often marked by gender, nation, region, race, socioeconomic status, and other categories where the life chances of many, as Lyon notes, are “more circumscribed by the categories into which they fall. For some, those categories are particularly prejudicial. They already restrict them from consumer choices because of credit

ratings, or, more insidiously, relegate them to second-class status because of their color or ethnic background. Now, there is an added category to fear: the terrorist. It's an old story in high-tech guise."<sup>50</sup>

To conceptualize racializing surveillance requires that I also unpack the term "surveillance." Surveillance is understood here as meaning "oversight," with the French prefix *sur-* meaning "from above" and the root word *-veillance* deriving from the French verb *veiller* and taken to mean observing or watching. The root word *-veillance* is differently applied and invoked, for example, with the terms "überveillance" (often defined as electronic surveillance by way of radio-frequency identification or other devices embedded in the living body), "redditveillance" (the crowdsourcing of surveillance through publicly accessible CCTV feeds, photographs uploaded to online image sharing platforms such as Flickr, and online discussion forums, such as Reddit and 4chan), and "dataveillance," to name a few.<sup>51</sup> Lyon has outlined the "potency of dataveillance" in a surveillance society, which, he writes, is marked by "a range of personal data systems, connected by telecommunications networks, with a consistent identification scheme."<sup>52</sup> The prefix *data-* signals that such observing is done through data collection as a way of managing or governing a certain population, for example, through the use of bar-coded customer loyalty cards at point of sale for discounted purchases while also collecting aggregate data on loyalty cardholders, or vehicles equipped with transponders that signal their entry and exit on pay-per-use highways and roads, often replacing toll booths.

The *Guardian* newspaper named "surveillance" and "sousveillance" as the words that mattered in 2013 alongside "Bitcoin," "Obamacare," and "binge-watching."<sup>53</sup> For Steve Mann, who coined the term "sousveillance," both terms—sousveillance and surveillance—fall under the broad concept of *veillance*, a form of watching that is neutral. Mann situates surveillance as the "more studied, applied and well-known *veillance*" of the two, defining surveillance as "organizations observing people" where this observing and recording is done by an entity in a position of power relative to the person or persons being observed and recorded.<sup>54</sup> Such oversight could take the form of red-light cameras that photograph vehicles when drivers violate traffic laws, or the monitoring of sales clerks on shop floors with CCTV, as well as, for example, punch clocks that track factory workers' time on the floor to more ubiquitous forms of observation, productivity monitoring, and data collection, such as remote desktop viewing or electronic monitoring software that tracks employees' non-work-related Internet use. Mann



**FIGURE 1.2.** Steve Mann's Veillance Plane and the "8-point compass" model of its directionalities. From Steve Mann, "Veillance and Reciprocal Transparency." Reproduced with permission.

developed the term "sousveillance" as a way of naming an active inversion of the power relations that surveillance entails. Sousveillance, for Mann, is acts of "observing and recording by an entity not in a position of power or authority over the subject of the veillance," often done through the use of handheld or wearable cameras.<sup>55</sup> George Holliday's video recording of the beating of Rodney King by police officers of the Los Angeles Police Department on March 3, 1991, is an example of sousveillance, where Holliday's watching and recording of the police that night functioned as a form of citizen oversight.

Mann's Veillance Plane (figure 1.2) places surveillance on the x-axis (uppercase S) and sousveillance on the y-axis (lowercase s). An "8-point compass" model, the Veillance Plane sees sousveillance and surveillance as "orthogonal vectors" or perpendicular, where "the amount of sousveillance can be increased without necessarily decreasing the amount of surveillance."<sup>56</sup> Other directionalities on this plane include univeillance (e.g.,

when one party to a telephone conversation records said conversation, making this action more aligned with *sousveillance*, rather than an approach closer to surveillance where a “nonparticipant party” to a conversation does the recording) and *McVeillance*. *McVeillance* would include an establishment that sets up a policy that forbids patrons from using cameras and recording devices on its premises, while at the same time recording those very patrons through CCTV surveillance, for example. *McVeillance* is surveillance minus *sousveillance* (S – s). Mann describes the “*sousveillance* era” as occurring prior to the increase and normalization of surveillance cameras recording in public and private spaces. He argues that although “the king or emperor or sheriff had more power” in the *sousveillance* era, during this era “the observational component of that power was more approximately equal than it is today,” where people are often prevented from recording entities in positions of power, for example, when signs are posted in government offices and business establishments warning visitors and patrons that the use of recording devices on the premises is prohibited.<sup>57</sup> On the *sousveillance* era, Mann further explains, “Before approximately 50 years ago—and going back millions of years—we have what we call the ‘*sousveillance* era’ because the only *veillance* was *sousveillance* which was given by the body-borne camera formed by the eye, and the body-borne recording device comprised of the mind and brain.”<sup>58</sup>

I want to make a link here between Mann’s naming of the human eye as a “body-borne camera” and what Judith Butler terms the “racially saturated field of visibility” and what Maurice O. Wallace has called the “picture-taking racial gaze” that fixes and frames the black subject within a “rigid and limited grid of representational possibilities.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, these are ways of seeing and conceptualizing blackness through stereotypes, abnormalization, and other means that impose limitations, particularly so in spaces that are shaped for whiteness, as discussed above with reference to Fanon’s epidermalization and to Fiske on how some acts and even the mere presence of blackness gets coded as criminal. We can read a rigid framing in how Rodney King’s acts of self-defense during a traffic stop in Los Angeles as recorded by Holliday on March 3, 1991, were coded as aggressive and violent. When King raised his hand to protect himself from police baton blows, his actions were met with more police force. Within what Butler has called a “racially saturated field of visibility,” such police violence is not read as violence; rather, the racially saturated field of visibility fixed and framed

Rodney King and read his actions, as recorded by Holliday, as that danger from which whiteness must be protected.<sup>60</sup>

Although the observational component of the power of the sheriff might have been equal to that of the citizen in the sousveillance era, in the time of slavery that citizenry (the watchers) was deputized through white supremacy to apprehend any fugitive who escaped from bondage (the watched), making for a cumulative white gaze that functioned as a totalizing surveillance. Under these conditions of terror and the violent regulation of blackness by way of surveillance, the inequities between those who were watched over and those who did the watching are revealed. The violence of this cumulative gaze continues in the postslavery era.

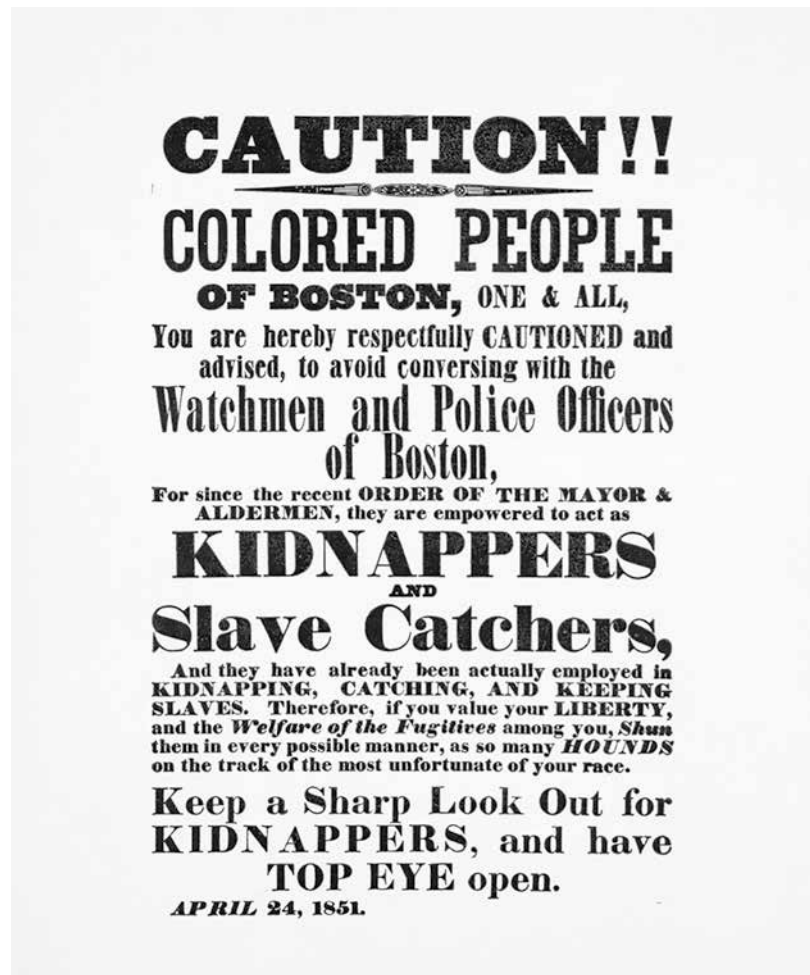
Extending Steve Mann's concept of sousveillance, which he describes as a way of "enhancing the ability of people to access and collect data about their surveillance and to neutralize surveillance,"<sup>61</sup> I use the term "dark sousveillance" as a way to situate the tactics employed to render one's self out of sight, and strategies used in the flight to freedom from slavery as necessarily ones of undersight. Using this model, but imagining Mann's Veilance Plane as operating in three dimensions, I plot dark sousveillance as an imaginative place from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance, a critique that takes form in antisurveillance, countersurveillance, and other freedom practices. Dark sousveillance, then, plots imaginaries that are oppositional and that are hopeful for another way of being. Dark sousveillance is a site of critique, as it speaks to black epistemologies of contending with antiblack surveillance, where the tools of social control in plantation surveillance or lantern laws in city spaces and beyond were appropriated, co-opted, repurposed, and challenged in order to facilitate survival and escape. This might sound like Negro spirituals that would sing of freedom and escape routes, or look like an 1851 handbill distributed by Theodore Parker, a white abolitionist from Massachusetts, that advised "colored people of Boston" to "keep a sharp lookout for kidnappers" who would act as slave catchers under fugitive slave laws that federalized antiblack surveillance (figure 1.3). In this way, acts that might fall under the rubric of dark sousveillance are not strictly enacted by those who fall under the category of blackness.

Dark sousveillance charts possibilities and coordinates modes of responding to, challenging, and confronting a surveillance that was almost all-encompassing. In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Fred-

erick Douglass carefully describes how surveillance functioned as a comprehensive and regulating practice on slave life: “at every gate through which we were to pass, we saw a watchman—at every ferry a guard—on every bridge a sentinel—and in every wood a patrol. We were hemmed in upon every side.”<sup>62</sup> This sweeping ordering did not, of course, preclude escapes and other forms of resistance, such as antisurveillance “pranks” at the expense of slave patrollers by stretching vines across roads and bridges to trip the patrollers riding on their horses, or counterveillance songs, for example, the folk tune “Run, Nigger, Run,” which warned of approaching slave patrols.<sup>63</sup> Recalling acts of antisurveillance and counterveillance, ex-slave Berry Smith of Forest, Mississippi, tells of “the pranks we used to play on them paterollers! Sometimes we tied ropes across the bridge and the paterollers’d hit it and go in the creek. Maybe we’d be fiddling and dancing on the bridge and they’d say, ‘Here come the paterollers!’ Then we’d put out.”<sup>64</sup> Such playful tricks were a means of self-defense. These oral histories of ex-slaves, slave narratives, and runaway notices, in revealing a sociology of slavery, escape, and freedom, recall the brutalities of slavery (instruments of punishment, plantation regulation, slave patrols) and detail how black performative practices and creative acts (fiddling, songs, and dancing) also functioned as sousveillance acts and were employed by people as a way to escape and resist enslavement, and in so being were freedom acts.

As a way of knowing, dark sousveillance speaks not only to observing those in authority (the slave patroller or the plantation overseer, for instance) but also to the use of a keen and experiential insight of plantation surveillance in order to resist it. Forging slave passes and freedom papers or passing as free are examples of this. Others include fugitive slave Ellen Craft escaping to Philadelphia in 1848 with her husband, William, by posing as a white man and as William’s owner; Henry “Box” Brown’s escape from slavery in 1849 by mailing himself to freedom in a crate “3 feet long and 2 wide”; Harriet Jacobs’s escape from slavery to a cramped garret above her grandmother’s home that she named as both her prison and her emancipatory “loophole of retreat”; slave spirituals as coded messages to coordinate escape along the Underground Railroad; Harriet “Moses” Tubman and her role in the 1863 Combahee River Raid that saw over seven hundred people escape enslavement in South Carolina; Sojourner Truth’s escape to freedom in 1826 when she “walked off, believing that to be alright.”<sup>65</sup> Dark sousveillance is also a reading praxis for examining surveillance that allows for a questioning of how certain surveillance technologies installed





**FIGURE 1.3.** "Caution! Colored People of Boston," handbill (1851). Library of Congress, Printed Ephemera Collection; Portfolio 60, Folder 22. 30.5 x 25 cm.

during slavery to monitor and track blackness as property (for example, branding, the one-drop rule, quantitative plantation records that listed enslaved people alongside livestock and crops, slave passes, slave patrols, and runaway notices) anticipate the contemporary surveillance of racialized subjects, and it also provides a way to frame how the contemporary surveillance of the racial body might be contended with.

### The Chapters

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If, for Foucault, “the disciplinary gaze of the Panopticon is the archetypical power of modernity,” as Lyon has suggested in the introduction to *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*,<sup>66</sup> then it is my contention that the slave ship too must be understood as an operation of the power of modernity, and as part of the violent regulation of blackness. Chapter 1, “Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return,” considers the Panopticon (1786) and the plan of the slave ship *Brooks* (1789) for what these two schematic plans disclose about surveillance, race, and the production of knowledge. My intent in this chapter is not to reify the Panopticon as the definitive model of modern surveillance, but rather I want to complicate it through a reading of the slave ship. Both of these diagrams were published in and around the same time period, and they continue to provoke, in different ways, questions for both surveillance studies and for theorizing the black diaspora. Taking up David Murakami Wood’s call for a “critical reinterpretation” of panopticism, what I am suggesting here is that one of the ways that this reinterpretation can be done is through a reading of the slave ship.<sup>67</sup> Panopticism, for Murakami Wood, is understood as “the social trajectory represented by the figure of the Panopticon.”<sup>68</sup> Panopticism, then, is the Panopticon as a social practice. I interrogate the Panopticon and the plan of the slave ship *Brooks* to ask: What kinds of subjects were these two spaces meant to produce? How is social control exercised? What acts of subversion and resistance do these structures allow for? Also in this chapter, I explore the operation of disciplinary and sovereign forms of power over black life under slavery by looking at plantation management and running away.

In Jeremy Bentham’s plan for the Panopticon, small lamps worked to “extend to the night the security of the day.”<sup>69</sup> I examine this idea of the security of the day and surveillance by lamps at night in Chapter 2, “Ev-

everybody's Got a Little Light under the Sun: The Making of the *Book of Negroes*." In this chapter I discuss what I call "lantern laws," which were ordinances "For Regulating Negroes and Slaves in the Night Time" in New York City that compelled black, mixed-race, and indigenous slaves to carry small lamps, if in the streets after dark and unescorted by a white person. With this citywide mandate, "No Negro, Mulatto or Indian slave could" be in the streets unaccompanied "an hour after sunset" without "a lanthorn and lighted candle in it, so as the light thereof may be plainly seen" without penalty.<sup>70</sup> Here technologies of seeing that are racializing in their application and effects, from a candle flame to the white gaze, were employed in an attempt to identify who was in place with permission and who was out of place with censure. The title of this chapter is taken, or sampled, from the lyrics of funk band Parliament's song "Flash Light" (1977). I do this to hint at and imagine what it might mean in our present moment to be mandated to carry a handheld flashlight in the streets after dark, illuminating blackness. This chapter also looks to prior histories of surveillance, identification documents, and black mobilities through a reading of the archive of the *Book of Negroes*. Working with treaties, letters and other government documents, maps, memoirs, and fugitive slave advertisements as primary source data, I use this archive to examine the arbitration that took place at Fraunces Tavern in New York City between fugitive slaves who sought to be included in the *Book of Negroes* and those who claimed them as escaped property. The *Book of Negroes* is an eighteenth-century ledger that lists three thousand self-emancipating former slaves who embarked mainly on British ships, like *Danger* and *Generous Friends*, during the British evacuation of New York in 1783 after the American Revolution. The *Book of Negroes*, I argue, is the first government-issued document for state-regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly linked corporeal markers to the right to travel. This linking of gender (often recorded in the ledger as "fine wench," "ordinary fellow," "snug little wench"), race ("healthy Negress," "worn out, half Indian," "fine girl,  $\frac{3}{4}$  white"), labor ("brickmaker," "carpenter by trade," "formerly slave to"), disabilities ("lame of the left arm," "stone blind," "blind & lame"), and other identifying marks, adjectives, and characterizations ("3 scars in her face," "cut in his right eye, Guinea born," "remarkably stout and lusty," "an idiot") points to the ways that biometric information, understood simply as "bio" (of the body) and "metric" (pertaining to measurement), has long been deployed as a technology in the surveillance of black mobilities and of black stabi-

ties and containment. This chapter argues that biometric information technology—as a measure of the black body—has a long history in the technologies of slavery that sought to govern black people on the move, notably those technologies concerned with escape.

Chapter 3, “B®anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness,” asks broader questions about early applications of biometric surveillance and its role in African American racial formation in particular, and in the black diaspora in general. I begin with a discussion of an 1863 *carte de visite* featuring “Wilson Chinn, a Branded Slave from Louisiana” as a way to locate my analysis of branding within plantation surveillance and punishment practices. To more clearly draw the links between contemporary biometric information technology and transatlantic slavery, I trace its archive, namely the diary of Thomas Thistlewood (an English planter and slave owner) that tells of plantation conditions in eighteenth-century Jamaica and the life of an enslaved woman named Coobah, other written accounts, runaway notices, and cartes de visite. I begin with a discussion of branding during transatlantic slavery as a marking, making, and marketing of blackness as commodity. Branding was a measure of slavery, an act of making the body legible as property that was put to work in the production of the slave as object that could be bought, sold, and traded. I argue here that the history of branding in transatlantic slavery anticipates the “social sorting” outcomes that Lyon’s work alerts us to regarding some contemporary surveillance practices, including passports, identification documents, or credit bureau databases.<sup>71</sup> Through Frantz Fanon’s concept of epidermalization—that being the imposition of race on the body—I trace and provide a genealogy of modern, digital epidermalization by focusing on branding and the role of prototypical whiteness in the development of contemporary biometric information technology. I consider the way that what Paul Gilroy terms “epidermal thinking” operates in the discourses surrounding research and development (R&D) of contemporary biometric information technologies and their applications: the fingerprint data template technology and retina scans where the human body, or parts and pieces of it, are digitized for automation, identification, and verification purposes or, in keeping with what Haggerty and Ericson argue as the markings of the surveillant assemblages, “reduce flesh to pure information.”<sup>72</sup> Epidermal thinking marks the epistemologies concerning sight at the site of the racial body.<sup>73</sup> I look at some R&D reports concerning race and gender within the biometrics industry, including one particular report that

uses images of actor Will Smith as the prototypical black male and actor Tom Cruise as the prototypical white male. This chapter also examines the branding of blackness in contemporary capitalism by looking at National Football League quarterback Michael Vick's postincarceration rebranding, artist Hank Willis Thomas's *B®anded* series, and blockbuster films starring actor Will Smith that feature biometric information technology. I argue in this chapter that the filmic representation of biometrics is one of the ways that the viewing public gains a popular biometric consciousness and comes to understand these surveillance technologies. I also explore the contemporary circulation of branding artifacts for sale online and take up visual artists Mendi + Keith Obadike's *Blackness for Sale*, where Keith Obadike put his blackness up for sale on eBay.com as a way to question the current trade in slave memorabilia and branding blackness.

Chapter 4, "What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro?: Security Theater at the Airport," asks, broadly, what the experiences of black women in airports can tell us about the airport as a social formation. This chapter also examines art and artworks at and about the airport and popular culture representations of post-9/11 security practices at the airport to form a general theory of security theater. This is far from saying that security measures and security theater at the airport are a strictly post-9/11 formation. Between 1970 and 2000 there were 184 hijackings of U.S. commercial airline flights, while for foreign carriers during that period hijackings totaled 586.<sup>74</sup> Garrett Brock Trapnell hijacked one of those planes, Trans World Airlines Flight 2 from Los Angeles to New York on January 28, 1972, and during this hijacking he reportedly said: "I'm going to tell you exactly what I want. I want \$306,800 in cash waiting at Kennedy. I want the San Jose jail notified I want Angela Davis released."<sup>75</sup> Trapnell later claimed that his demand that Angela Davis be released was actually a ploy to garner the attention and support of the black nationalist movement. Trapnell's was one of twenty-six hijackings of U.S. air carriers in 1972, a peak in domestic aerial piracy that led to the introduction of new security measures by way of a Federal Aviation Administration Emergency Order on December 5, 1972.<sup>76</sup> This Emergency Order included preflight screenings of passengers and their carry-on baggage by way of magnetometers, or walk-through metal detectors, and the use of handheld metal detectors at many U.S. airports. This was not the first federal intervention into antihijacking efforts. On September 11, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced countermeasures to combat what he called "the menace of air piracy," including dispatching plainclothes armed

personnel, or sky marshals, onboard U.S. commercial flights and the expansion of the use of magnetometers at airports.<sup>77</sup> The rash of airplane hijackings in the early 1970s eventually led to the Anti-hijacking or Air Transportation Security Act of 1974, signed into law by Nixon on August 5, 1974, four days before his resignation from the office of the president. On February 22 of that same year, Samuel J. Byck attempted to hijack Delta Airlines Flight 523 out of Baltimore-Washington International Airport with the expressed intent to assassinate President Nixon by weaponizing the plane and crashing it into the White House. Byck killed two people during his failed attempt, including the plane's copilot. Byck died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a standoff with police. Delta Flight 523 never left the runway that day.

I recount this short history of hijackings and various countermeasures as a way to situate contemporary security measures in U.S. air travel as having a much earlier history than those measures taken and performances undergone after the tragic attacks by weaponized aircraft in New York City and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001. This history offers a counterframing to then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice's comment during a press briefing in 2002 when, in reference to the 9/11 hijackings, she stated, "I don't think anybody could have predicted . . . that they would try to use an airplane as a missile, a hijacked airplane as a missile."<sup>78</sup> At post-9/11 U.S. airports, passenger screening by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) fulfills the usual scripts of confession ("What is the purpose of your travel?" or "What do you do for a living?" and "Are you bringing any goods in with you?"). With increasing procedural delays due to antiliquid policies, pat downs, chat downs, opt outs, the application of trace detection technologies to check for residue of explosive making materials, and with Secondary Security Screening Selection for some, many travelers undergo a certain amount of ontological insecurity at the border, particularly at airports. While the airport is an institutional site where almost everybody is treated with suspicion at one time or another—by TSA agents, by airline workers, and by other travelers—some travelers may be marked as more suspicious than others. In Chapter 4, I introduce the concept of racial baggage in order to name the ways that race and racism weigh some people down at the airport. I also examine the discretionary power wielded by TSA agents and by airline workers by looking at cases of, mainly, black women who were subjected to invasive pat downs, hair searches, and other security theater measures. I do this as a way to question how black women are de-

ployed in narratives about airport security, for example, through representations in popular culture as uninterested, sassy, and ineffective TSA agents. This chapter suggests that we pay attention to the ways that black women's bodies come to represent, and also resist, security theater at the airport.

The epilogue brings together this book's key concerns around the question of what happens when blackness enters the frame, whether that be cameras that "can't see black people" or centering blackness when it comes to questioning the logics of surveillance.

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**Selected by Alejandro Cesarco**

**Material from  
Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, "Maria Eichhorn: A Film Lexicon of  
Sexual Practices 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015,"  
<https://galeriebarbaraweiss.de/artists/maria-eichhorn/>.**

**Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices**

1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015

16 mm films (color, silent, each approx. 2:40 minutes),  
film screening

Anal Coitus

Anilingus

Breast Licking

Clitoris

Cunnilingus

Ear

Ear Licking

Eyes

Feet

Fellatio

French Kissing

Japanese Bondage

Love Bite

Masturbation (Man)

Masturbation (Woman)

Milk Bath

Mouth

Needle Play

Vulva

Wax Play

The films will be screened upon request.

Maria Eichhorn  
*Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015*  
2016



Maria Eichhorn  
*Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices* 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015  
2016



Maria Eichhorn  
*Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015*  
2016



Maria Eichhorn  
*Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices* 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015  
2016

**Material from**

**Timothy S. Murphy, "The Other's Language: Jacques Derrida Interviews Ornette Coleman, 23 June 1997," *Blue Notes: Toward a New Jazz Discourse* 37, no. 2 (2004): 319–29.**

**THE OTHER'S LANGUAGE: JACQUES DERRIDA  
INTERVIEWS ORNETTE COLEMAN, 23 JUNE 1997**

TRANSLATED BY TIMOTHY S. MURPHY<sup>1</sup>

Translator's note: The meeting between saxophonist/composer Ornette Coleman and philosopher Jacques Derrida documented here took place in late June and early July 1997, before and during Coleman's three concerts at La Villette, a museum and performing arts complex north of Paris that houses, among other things, the world-renowned Paris Conservatory. Here Derrida interviews Coleman about his views on composition, improvisation, language and racism. Perhaps the most interesting point of the exchange is the convergence of their respective ideas about "languages of origin" and their experiences of racial prejudice. This interview was originally conducted in English several days before Coleman's concerts, but since original transcripts could not be located, I have translated it back into English from the published French text.

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**Jacques Derrida:** This year in New York you are presenting a program entitled *Civilization*<sup>2</sup>—what relationship does it have with music?

**Ornette Coleman:** I'm trying to express a concept according to which you can translate one thing into another. I think that sound has a much more democratic relationship to information, because you don't need the alphabet to understand

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<sup>1</sup>This interview originally appeared in French in the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* no.115 (20 août-2 septembre 1997): 37-40, 43. All notes have been added by the translator.

<sup>2</sup>"Ornette Coleman: Civilization" was a series of concerts Coleman gave in mid-July 1997 under the aegis of the Lincoln Center Festival '97. It included performances of his orchestral work *Skies of America*, trio performances with Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins, who were members of his original quartet, and a concluding performance by Prime Time, his electric group.



music. This year, in New York, I'm setting up a project with the New York Philharmonic and my first quartet—without Don Cherry—plus other groups. I'm trying to find the concept according to which sound is renewed every time it's expressed.

**JD:** But are you acting as a composer or as a musician?

**OC:** As a composer, people often say to me, "Are you going to play the pieces that you've already played, or new pieces?"

**JD:** You never answer those questions, do you?

**OC:** If you're playing music that you've already recorded, most musicians think that you're hiring them to keep that music alive. And most musicians don't have as much enthusiasm when they have to play the same things every time. So I prefer to write music that they've never played before.

**JD:** You want to surprise them.

**OC:** Yes, I want to stimulate them instead of asking them simply to accompany me in front of the public. But I find that it's very difficult to do, because the jazz musician is probably the only person for whom the composer is not a very interesting individual, in the sense that he prefers to destroy what the composer writes or says.

**JD:** When you say that sound is more "democratic," what do you make of that as a composer? You write music in a coded form all the same.

**OC:** In 1972 I wrote a symphony called *Skies of America* and that was a tragic event for me, because I didn't have such a good relationship with the music scene [*milieu de la musique*]: like when I was doing free jazz, most people thought that I just picked up my saxophone and played whatever was going through my head, without following any rule, but that wasn't true.

**JD:** You constantly protest against that accusation.

**OC:** Yes. People on the outside think that it's a form of extraordinary freedom, but I think that it's a limitation. So it's taken twenty years, but today I'm going to have a

piece played by New York's symphony orchestra and its conductor. The other day, as I was meeting with certain members of the Philharmonic, they told me, "You know, the person in charge of scores needs to see that." I was upset—it's like you wrote me a letter and someone had to read it to confirm that there was nothing in it that could irritate me. It was to be sure that the Philharmonic wouldn't be disturbed. Then they said, "The only thing we want to know is if there is a dot in that place, a word in another"; it had nothing to do with music or sound, just with symbols. In fact, the music that I've been writing for thirty years and that I call harmolodic is like we're manufacturing [*fabriquions*] our own words, with a precise idea of what we want these words to mean to people.

**JD:** But do all your partners share your conception of music?

**OC:** Normally I begin by composing something that I can have them analyze, I play it with them, then I give them the score. And at the next rehearsal [*répétition*] I ask them to show me what they've found and we can go on from there. I do this with my musicians and with my students. I truly believe that whoever tries to express himself in words, in poetry, in whatever form, can take my book of harmolodic and compose according to it, do it with the same passion and the same elements.

**JD:** In preparing these New York projects, you first write the music by yourself, and then ask the participants to read it, to agree, and even to transform the initial writing?

**OC:** For the Philharmonic I had to write out parts for each instrument, photocopy them, then go see the person in charge of scores. But with jazz groups, I compose and I give the parts to the musicians in rehearsal. What's really shocking in improvised music is that despite its name, most musicians use a "framework [*trame*]" as a basis for improvising. I've just recorded a CD with a European musician, Joachim Kühn, and the music I wrote to play with him, that we recorded in August 1996, has two characteristics: it's totally improvised, but at the same time it follows the laws and rules of European structure. And yet, when you hear it, it has a completely improvised feel [*air*]<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>See Coleman and Kühn.

**JD:** First the musician reads the framework, then brings his own touch to it.

**OC:** Yes, the idea is that two or three people can have a conversation with sounds, without trying to dominate it or lead it. What I mean is that you have to be . . . intelligent, I suppose that's the word. In improvised music I think the musicians are trying to reassemble an emotional or intellectual puzzle, in any case a puzzle in which the instruments give the tone. It's primarily the piano that has served at all times as the framework in music, but it's no longer indispensable and, in fact, the commercial aspect of music is very uncertain. Commercial music is not necessarily more accessible, but it is limited.

**JD:** When you begin to rehearse, is everything ready, written, or do you leave space for the unforeseen?

**OC:** Let's suppose that we're in the process of playing and you hear something that you think could be improved; you could tell me, "You should try this." For me, music has no leader.

**JD:** What do you think of the relationship between the precise event that constitutes the concert and pre-written music or improvised music? Do you think that pre-written music prevents the event from taking place?

**OC:** No. I don't know if it's true for language, but in jazz you can take a very old piece and do another version of it. What's exciting is the memory that you bring to the present. What you're talking about, the form that metamorphoses into other forms, I think it's something healthy, but very rare.

**JD:** Perhaps you will agree with me on the fact that the very concept of improvisation verges upon reading, since what we often understand by improvisation is the creation of something new, yet something which doesn't exclude the pre-written framework that makes it possible.

**OC:** That's true.

**JD:** I am not an "Ornette Coleman expert," but if I translate what you are doing into a domain that I know better, that of written language, the unique event that is

produced only one time is nevertheless repeated in its very structure. Thus there is a repetition, in the work, that is intrinsic to the initial creation—that which compromises or complicates the concept of improvisation. Repetition is already in improvisation: thus when people want to trap you between improvisation and the pre-written, they are wrong.

**OC:** Repetition is as natural as the fact that the earth rotates.

**JD:** Do you think that your music and the way people act can or must change things, for example, on the political level or in the sexual relation? Can or should your role as an artist and composer have an effect on the state of things?

**OC:** No, I don't believe so, but I think that many people have already experienced that before me, and if I start complaining, they'll say to me, "Why are you complaining? We haven't changed for this person that we admire more than you, so why should we change for you?" So basically I really don't think so. I was in the South when minorities were oppressed, and I identified with them through music. I was in Texas, I started to play the saxophone and make a living for my family by playing on the radio. One day, I walked into a place that was full of gambling and prostitution, people arguing, and I saw a woman get stabbed—then I thought that I had to get out of there. I told my mother that I didn't want to play this music anymore because I thought that I was only adding to all that suffering. She replied, "What's got hold of you, you want somebody to pay you for your soul?" I hadn't thought of that, and when she told me that, it was like I had been re-baptized.

**JD:** Your mother was very clear-headed.

**OC:** Yes, she was an intelligent woman. Ever since that day I've tried to find a way to avoid feeling guilty for doing something that other people don't do.

**JD:** Have you succeeded?

**OC:** I don't know, but bebop had emerged and I saw it as a way out. It's an instrumental music that isn't connected to a certain scene, that can exist in a more normal setting. Wherever I was playing the blues, there were plenty of people without jobs who did nothing but gamble their money. Then I took up bebop, which was hap-

pening above all in New York, and I told myself that I had to go there. I was just about 17 years old, I left home and headed for the South.

**JD:** Before Los Angeles?

**OC:** Yes. I had long hair like the Beatles, this was at the beginning of the Fifties. So I headed for the South, and just like the police, black people beat me up on top of everything, they didn't like me, I had too bizarre a look for them. They punched me in the face and demolished my sax. That was hard. Plus, I was with a group that played what we called "minstrel pipe-music," and I tried to do bebop, I was making progress and I got myself hired. I was in New Orleans, I was going to see a very religious family and I started to play in a "sanctified" church—when I was little, I played in church all the time. Ever since my mother said those words to me, I was looking for a music that I could play without feeling guilty for doing something. To this day I haven't yet found it.

**JD:** When you arrived in New York as a very young man, did you already have a premonition of what you were going to discover musically, harmolodic, or did that happen much later?

**OC:** No, because when I arrived in New York, I was more or less treated like someone from the South who didn't know music, who couldn't read or write, but I never tried to protest that. Then I decided that I was going to try to develop my own conception, without anybody's help. I rented the Town Hall on 21 December 1962, that cost me \$600, I hired a rhythm and blues group, a classical group and a trio. The evening of the concert there was a snowstorm, a newspaper strike, a doctors' strike and a subway strike, and the only people who came were those who had to leave their hotel and come to the city hall. I had asked someone to record my concert and he committed suicide, but someone else recorded it, founded his record company with it, and I never saw him again.<sup>4</sup> All that made me understand once again that I had done that for the same reason that I had told my mother that I didn't want to play down there anymore. Obviously, the state of things from the technological,

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<sup>4</sup>See Coleman, *Town Hall* 1962.

financial, social and criminal point of view was much worse than when I was in the South. I was knocking on doors that stayed closed.

**JD:** What has your son's impact on your work been? Does it have to do with the use of new technologies in your music?

**OC:** Since Denardo has been my manager, I've understood how simple technology is, and I've understood its meaning.

**JD:** Have you felt that the introduction of technology was a violent transformation of your project, or has it been easy? On the other hand, does your New York project on civilizations have something to do with what they call globalization?

**OC:** I think that there's something true in both, it's because of this that you can ask yourself if there were "primitive white men": technology only seems to represent the word "white," not total equality.

**JD:** You mistrust this concept of globalization, and I believe you are right.

**OC:** When you take music, the composers who were inventors in western, European culture are maybe a half-dozen. As for technology, the inventors I have most heard talk about it are Indians from Calcutta and Bombay. There are many Indian and Chinese scientists. Their inventions are like inversions of the ideas of European or American inventors, but the word "inventor" has taken on a sense of racial domination that's more important than invention—which is sad, because it's the equivalent of a sort of propaganda.

**JD:** How can you unsettle this "monarchy"? By allying your own creation with Indian or Chinese music, for example, in this New York project?

**OC:** What I mean is that the differences between man and woman or between races have a relation to the education and intelligence of survival. Being black and a descendent of slaves, I have no idea what my language of origin was.

**JD:** If we were here to talk about me, which is not the case, I would tell you that, in a different but analogous manner, it's the same thing for me. I was born into a family

of Algerian Jews who spoke French, but that was not really their language of origin. I wrote a little book on this subject, and in a certain way I am always in the process of speaking what I call the “monolingualism of the other.”<sup>5</sup> I have no contact of any sort with my language of origin, or rather that of my supposed ancestors.

**OC:** Do you ever ask yourself if the language that you speak now interferes with your actual thoughts? Can a language of origin influence your thoughts?

**JD:** It is an enigma for me. I cannot know it. I know that something speaks through me, a language that I don’t understand, that I sometimes translate more or less easily into my “language.” I am of course a French intellectual, I teach in French-speaking schools, but I have the impression that something is forcing me to do something for the French language . . .

**OC:** But you know, in my case, in the United States, they call the English that blacks speak “ebonics”: they can use an expression that means something else than in current English. The black community has always used a signifying language. When I arrived in California, it was the first time that I was in a place [*milieu*] where a white man wasn’t telling me that I couldn’t sit somewhere. Someone began to ask me loads of questions, and I just didn’t follow, so then I decided to go see a psychiatrist to see if I understood him. And he gave me a prescription for valium. I took that valium and threw it in the toilet. I didn’t always know where I was, so I went to a library and I checked out all the books possible and imaginable on the human brain, I read them all. They said that the brain was only a conversation. They didn’t say what about, but this made me understand that the fact of thinking and knowing doesn’t only depend on the place of origin. I understand more and more that what we call the human brain, in the sense of knowing and being, is not the same thing as the human brain that makes us what we are.

**JD:** This is always a conviction: we know ourselves by what we believe. Of course in your case, it’s tragic, but it’s universal, we know or believe we know what we are through the stories that are told to us. The fact is that we are exactly the same age, we were born the same year. When I was young, during the war, I never went to France before the age of 19, I lived in Algeria in that era, and in 1940 I was expelled

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<sup>5</sup>See Derrida.

from school because I was a Jew, as a result of the racial laws, and I didn't even know what had happened. I only understood very much later, through stories that told me who I was, so to speak. And even regarding your mother, we know who she is and that she is a certain way only by means of narration. I've tried to guess in what era you were in New York and Los Angeles, it was before civil rights were granted to blacks. The first time I went to the United States, in 1956, there were "Reserved for Whites" signs everywhere, and I remember how brutal that was. You experienced all that?

**OC:** Yes. In any case, what I like about Paris is the fact that you can't be a snob and a racist at the same time here, because that won't do. Paris is the only city I know where racism never exists in your presence, it's something you hear spoken of.

**JD:** That doesn't mean there is no racism, but one is obliged to conceal it to the extent possible. What is the strategy of your musical choice for Paris?

**OC:** For me, being an innovator doesn't mean being more intelligent, more rich, it's not a word, it's an action. Since it hasn't been done, there's no use talking about it.

**JD:** I understand that you prefer doing [*faire*] to speaking. But what do you *do* with words? What is the relation between the music you *make* [*faites*] and your own words or those that people try to impose on what you make? The problem of choosing the title, for example, how do you envision that?

**OC:** I had a niece who died in February of this year and I went to her funeral, and when I saw her in her coffin, someone had put a pair of glasses on her. I had wanted to call one of my pieces *She was sleeping, dead, and wearing glasses in her coffin*. And then I changed the idea and called it "Blind Date."

**JD:** That title imposed itself on you?

**OC:** I was trying to understand that someone had put glasses on a dead woman. . . . I had a little idea of what that meant, but it's very difficult to understand the feminine side of life when it has nothing to do with the masculine side.



**JD:** Do you think that your musical writing has something fundamental to do with your relation to women?

**OC:** Before becoming known as a musician, when I worked in a big department store, one day, during my lunch break, I came across a gallery where someone had painted a very rich white woman who had absolutely everything that you could desire in life, and she had the most solitary expression in the world. I had never been confronted with such solitude, and when I got back home, I wrote a piece that I called "Lonely Woman."<sup>6</sup>

**JD:** So the choice of a title was not a choice of words but a reference to this experience? I'm posing you these questions on language, on words, because to prepare myself for our encounter, I listened to your music and read what the specialists have written about you. And last night I read an article that was in fact a conference presentation given by one of my friends, Rodolphe Burger, a musician whose group is called Kat Onoma. It was constructed around your statements. In order to analyze the way in which you formulate your music, he began from your statements, of which the first was this: "For reasons that I'm not sure of, I am convinced that before becoming music, music was only a word." Do you recall having said that?

**OC:** No.

**JD:** How do you understand or interpret your own verbal statements? Are they something important to you?

**OC:** It interests me more to have a human relationship with you than a musical relationship. I want to see if I can express myself in words, in sounds that have to do with a human relationship. At the same time, I would like to be able to speak of the relationship between two talents, between two doings. For me, the human relationship is much more beautiful, because it allows you to gain the freedom that you desire, for yourself and for the other.

*(Recorded by Thierry Jousse and Geneviève Pereygne.)*

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<sup>6</sup>On Coleman, *Shape*, also available in the box set *Beauty is a Rare Thing*.

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# The Gospel of Wealth According to Marc Benioff

The Salesforce founder has donated a fortune to right capitalism's wrongs, and he thinks his fellow billionaires should too. Why can't we just be grateful?

Maybe every period seems dark from a certain angle; maybe the autumn of 2018 was extra murky. Mark Zuckerberg was answering for Facebook's latest security breach, CBS chief Les Moonves had recently resigned amid sexual misconduct allegations, Google CEO Sundar Pichai had been disputing the EU's record \$5 billion fine for antitrust violations. The righteousness of powerful businessmen had been looking extra iffy, but in San Francisco change was coming.

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A municipal election approached. Amid an unremarkable assortment of ballot initiatives was one that, on its face, also looked unremarkable. The Homelessness Gross Receipts Tax Ordinance, or [Proposition C](#), sought to stem the city's spiraling homelessness problem by raising taxes by an average of half a percent on big companies—tech ones, most prominently. Doing so would bring in up to an estimated \$300 million a year for various initiatives, from new beds in

versus evil: not just a means of addressing San Francisco's housing emergency but a shot across the bow of the booming industry that was partly responsible for it, and perhaps across capitalism-as-usual.

Enter Marc Benioff, founder and co-CEO of [Salesforce](#), the city's largest employer. Declaring that "our city is in a crisis," he threw his full support behind the measure that promised to take his company's money. He publicly outflanked the city's ostensibly liberal mayor, London Breed—who opposed it on grounds that the measure didn't allow for enough accountability—and pledged upward of \$2 million to the Prop. C campaign. But it was on Twitter that Benioff truly went to town. "As SF's largest employer we recognize we are part of the solution," he declared on October 9.



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[Jack Dorsey](#), cofounder and CEO of [Twitter](#) and founder and CEO of Square, surely still smarts [from what followed](#).

"I want to help fix the homeless problem in SF and California. I don't believe this (Prop C) is the best way to do it," Dorsey replied. "Mayor Breed was elected to fix this. I trust her."

Maybe Dorsey hadn't spent much time on Twitter. In 279 characters Benioff calmly eviscerated him.

"Hi Jack. Thanks for the feedback. Which homeless programs in our city are you supporting? Can you tell me what Twitter and Square & you are in for & at what financial levels? How much have you given to heading home our \$37M initiative to get every homeless child off the streets?"

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In *his* response, Dorsey claimed he was simply following his mayor's strategy for dealing with the crisis; indeed, people who work on homelessness issues have told me the question was hardly open and shut. But this was no time for nuance. The spectacle of two billionaires virtue-squabbling lit up the internet, and the Twitter mob came for Dorsey, hoisting atop its shoulders a triumphant Benioff. Publications around the world heralded a rare instance of C-suite selflessness. One headline read, "Marc Benioff is 2018's Most Woke."

I'd been curious about the 55-year-old software entrepreneur for some time. In addition to his Prop. C efforts, Benioff had spent the previous year running a powerful company (the bulk of Salesforce's revenue comes from its cloud-based customer relationship management software); he'd overseen annual revenue growth of more than 25 percent; and he'd written his fourth book, [Trailblazer](#). For San Franciscans, the 61-story Salesforce Tower visually dominates the city, as does Benioff's name—there it is on buildings, in headlines, and now on the masthead of *Time* magazine, the world's biggest newsweekly, which he purchased in 2018 with his wife, Lynne. But these are the kinds of adrenalized and quasi-random achievements we expect of our tech billionaires. What piqued my curiosity about Benioff was his upending of the genre altogether.

On the surface were superficial departures. Where the modern tech-billionaire template reflects a certain nerdy abstemiousness—slender Paleo physique, biohacked sleep program, the whiff of a cryo appointment earlier that day—Benioff, 6'5", playful and feisty, calls to mind a big old bear. (Metallica's Lars Ulrich told me he longs for a milk crate when his large friend comes in for a hug.) Chief among Benioff's distinguishing characteristics, though, is his incessant public munificence, emphasis on incessant, emphasis on public.

Scarcely a month goes by without another grant, another ribbon-cutting, another broadside against complacent CEOs. He and Lynne gave \$250 million to build UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals in San Francisco and Oakland. Between 2017 and 2019, Salesforce and the Salesforce Foundation gave away about \$130 million, and the Benioffs personally donated nearly \$200 million in roughly the same time period. Via large individual and company donations, a philanthropy-centric business model, and a general irrepressibility on social issues, Benioff has set his sights over the years on homelessness, oceans, public schools, local hospitals, LGBTQ+ rights, the gender pay gap, and the country's gun crisis. *Forbes* referred to him as "San Francisco's Giant of Generosity." To *The Silicon Review* he's "the intrepid tech visionary who pioneered a groundbreaking philanthropic model." *Pando* went so far as to call him "a people's billionaire."

Integral to Benioff's reputation for goodness is the insistent *badness* regularly displayed by his ultrarich brethren. Benioff does not offer the Russians a handy platform for derailing our democracy or erode civil discourse 280 characters at a time. He doesn't use his wealth to undermine public education or fund climate change denial. He does not accuse British rescue divers of pedophilia. At a moment when his plutocrat peers seem increasingly hell-bent on mucking everything up, Benioff has carved out a different brand altogether: the good billionaire.

The particulars of the brand can be dissected, but the point is a *feeling*, a man-sized dollop of hope that powerful interests might start working *for* us rather than against. On November 6, 2018, San Francisco residents passed Prop. C. But in a sense the biggest victor was the magnanimous billionaire behind it.

Anyway, that's one way of telling it.

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**As Bay Area childhoods go**, Marc Russell Benioff's was solitary and geeky. He was shy, favoring the company of his golden retriever or, better yet, circuit boards. A streak of defiance ran through him. Once, in kindergarten, his teacher asked him to draw a circle. He looked her in the eye and drew a straight line.

In 1966, when Benioff was 2, his father, the son of an immigrant from Kyiv, took the helm at a local dress shop chain. The job ruled him. Most nights he'd be at the kitchen table until 11, going over the books. On Sundays, Marc would climb into his father's 1970 Buick station wagon. His "most formative business classroom wasn't a classroom at all," he writes in *Trailblazer*. It was delivering bolts of wool, poplin, and polyester in that hot Buick. Among the lessons he absorbed: work ethic, integrity, *I hate retail*.

Electronics beckoned. At 12 he relocated to the family basement, where he could geek out unimpeded. At 14 he bought his first computer, a TRS-80, and wrote a program called How to Juggle, which he sold to a computer magazine for \$75.

At 15 he founded Liberty Software, which made games for the Atari 800. Soon he was bringing in \$1,500 a month, which he used later to enroll at USC.

At college, Benioff rushed Tau Kappa Epsilon and did the normal frat boy thing of buying two Macintosh computers and hooking them together. The plan was to start writing code—all he needed was the company's developer software to arrive in the mail. When months passed with no sign of it, he phoned Guy Kawasaki, Apple's head of developer relations. It would be the first of many conversations. “Why don't you spend the summer of 1984 at Apple?” Kawasaki eventually asked the insistent kid on the other end of the line. A summer at Apple led to a job answering the sales line at Oracle soon after graduation.

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With apologies to Benioff completists, I'm about to fast-forward through some of his most noteworthy career turns. His time as the youngest vice president in Oracle's history. His complex relationship with Larry Ellison. His Ferrari, reportedly a more expensive version of Ellison's. I'm even skimming over the pivotal moment when he came up with his software-as-service idea and his father cautioned against leaving a stable job, but he did it anyway, and the company that started in a rented apartment on card tables and folding chairs now has a market cap dwarfing the GDP of many countries.

More interesting to me is the sabbatical he took before starting Salesforce, after more than a decade at Oracle. For five months he swam with dolphins in Hawaii and traveled throughout India, where he had “an incredible awakening.” He met with the humanitarian leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, as well as the Dalai Lama, who “talked about finding one's calling and the importance of community service.” But most profound, he says, were the words of the Hindu guru Mata Amritanandamayi, known as the hugging saint or Amma.

“It was she who introduced me to the idea, and possibility, of giving back to the world *while* pursuing my career ambitions,” Benioff wrote. “I realized that I didn't have to make a choice between doing business and doing good.”

This was the birth of both a generous mindset and a savvy personal narrative. Over the course of four books, countless speeches, and 25,000 tweets, Benioff has created a public persona that marries audacious business acumen with ambiguously spiritual beneficence, all inextricable from Salesforce. Over the years, he would proselytize Salesforce's 1-1-1 model, in which the company donates 1 percent of its revenue, 1 percent of its product, and 1 percent of its employees' time to the community. He would install meditation rooms on every floor of Salesforce Tower. He would be periodically subject to epiphanies of rectitude, like “I am not gonna have any more meetings that aren't at least a third women.” And in the nation's most influential publication, *The New York Times*, he would call on “my fellow business leaders and billionaires” to create a “more fair, equal and sustainable capitalism that actually works for everyone.”

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San Francisco's mayor proclaimed May 22, 2018, as Salesforce Tower Day to mark the completion of the city's tallest building. Benioff used his office's opening ceremonies to address the city's less fortunate:

“Kids in schools across the Bay Area, families walking down the sidewalk, families and children in shelters, sleeping in cars—they’re all looking up at this tower. I want to say to them, ‘When you look up and see this tower, I want you to know you are not alone. We are thinking of you, and I hope you see this tower as a beacon, a symbol of hope.’ ”

But times change, even for the affluent, and just two years later those words have a different ring.

**By happenstance I’ve worked** for two billionaires in my life. From those experiences I concluded that one of civilization’s great challenges stems from *millionaire* rhyming with *billionaire*. In holding them in the same linguistic corner of our minds, we conflate them, yet they’re so mathematically distinct as to be unrelated. A millionaire can, with some dedicated carelessness, lose those millions. Billionaires can be as profligate and eccentric as they wish, can acquire, without making a dent, all the homes and jets and islands and causes and thoroughbreds and Van Goghs and submarines and weird Beatles memorabilia they please. Unless they’re engaging in fraud or making extremely large and risky investments, they’re simply no match for the mathematical and economic forces—the compounding of interest, the long-term imperatives of markets—that make money beget more money. They can do pretty much whatever they want in this life, and therein lies the distinction. A millionaire enjoys a profoundly lucky economic condition. A billionaire is an existential state.

This helps explain the cosmic reverence draped over so many billionaires, their most banal notions about innovation and vision repackaged as inspirational memes, their insights on markets and customers spun into best sellers. Their extravagances are so over the top as to inspire legend more often than revolution. Benioff has rented out the entire San Francisco Giants stadium for a corporate event, and he once got David Bowie to perform at a Salesforce Foundation soiree at Carnegie Hall. He owns an estate in Hawaii and multiple homes in the Bay Area. When a hotel room shortage threatened to leave out in the cold some of the 160,000 attendees of the 2015 Dreamforce conference—“four days of innovation, fun, and giving back”—the company brought in a cruise ship.

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He is regularly invited to spread the gospel of Benioff, as he did in April at NationSwell Summit West, a conference designed to “feature creative, cutting-edge solutions and the problem-solvers behind them.” From the back of a small hall, I watched him deliver a rollicking stream of thoughts on his family roots, negativity, writing down intentions, his friend Stevie Wonder, and radical trust. (“Can you even hold fear in your mind if you truly have radical trust?”) But the heart of his remarks, delivered to this room full of business, tech, VC, nonprofit, and philanthropy types, was clear: From immigration to plastic in the ocean, enlightened leaders have no shortage of opportunities to make a better world. This led him to recall his role in Prop. C.

**| A millionaire enjoys a profoundly lucky economic condition. A billionaire is an existential state.**

“What I was not expecting was a huge surge against me by many, many, many business leaders, who are friends of mine, close friends of mine, who are completely opposed to paying any kind of taxes ... We’re in a world where we have to look at taxes as a key part of the solution,” he said. Mentioning corporate tax rates, individual tax rates, and city tax rates, he added that “we’ve got to look at that as part of the solution.”



The room broke out in applause. Just 16 months earlier, in 2017, Congress had passed President Trump's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the largest tax overhaul in more than three decades. The law lowered the top marginal tax rate for individuals from 39.6 percent to 37 percent and reduced corporate rates from 35 percent to 21 percent. It was a love letter to the very wealthiest, written hastily behind closed doors. Those new cuts, atop years of tax avoidance, cuts to estate taxes, and rising payroll taxes, meant that, for the first time ever recorded, the 400 richest Americans are now paying a lower overall tax rate than almost anyone else, according to a study by two UC Berkeley economists.

Benioff possesses an acute awareness of this reality. He has called for increasing taxes “on high-income individuals like myself” to “generate the trillions of dollars that we desperately need to improve education and health care and fight climate change.”

But it's worth noting a few asterisks in his call to arms. For one, Prop. C taxes certain sectors differently than others, making it more burdensome to, say, a fintech company like Square, which would have to pay twice as much tax as Salesforce, despite bringing in a fraction of its revenue. But more important is the part Benioff never mentions: the zero dollars his company paid in federal income tax that year, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

“This is a company that had \$7.8 billion in gross profit in 2018 and didn't pay a dime in federal income tax,” Frank Clemente, executive director of Americans for Tax Fairness, told me, before running through the assorted mechanisms used by the country's corporations to avoid contributions to the federal treasury: patents held by foreign subsidiaries. The so-called stock options loophole, which allows companies to lower their taxable income by paying executives in stock options. Offshore accounts. (As of 2017, Salesforce had 14 tax haven subsidiaries, in Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Singapore, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Ireland, according to a report from the advocacy group US PIRG and ITEP.)

To put it in further perspective, the tax burden Salesforce stood to face under Prop. C amounted to roughly \$10 million a year—a fraction of what a multibillion-dollar company's federal income tax would be without those loopholes.

Benioff was whisked away after the NationSwell event; asking him questions was proving difficult. It wasn't that Benioff owed me anything. He's a private citizen. But at the same time, he's *not* a private citizen. Without running for office, he's attained a phenomenal level of influence; the *San Francisco Business Times* called him “the most influential man in San Francisco.” If a local elected official had as much power and sway as Benioff, they'd feel some responsibility to answer to the press.

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So I went back to watching him from afar and talking to those who know him. His friends and even Mayor Breed described his genuine love for his city and fellow citizens; I also heard accounts of an oversize ego, a superficial wokeness rooted in vanity or optics. But parsing the personality of a billionaire seemed to be missing the broader significance of his existence. How he wielded those billions seemed more to the point.

Benioff can't make laws. But as a billionaire and corporate titan, he can influence them. According to public records, Salesforce increased its lobbying expenditures in 2017 and lobbied directly on the Trump tax bill. Was it one of the many companies that had pushed for a lower corporate tax rate, despite Benioff's public appeals for more taxes? The records shed no light. Salesforce wouldn't comment on specifics, and the members of Congress and lobbyists I contacted couldn't or wouldn't help.

It was starting to look as if I might never know what happened that year in Washington.

ILLUSTRATION: JOHANNA GOODMAN

**Andrew Carnegie was around** Benioff's age when he published *The Gospel of Wealth*, and in so doing all but invented modern philanthropy. Describing the moral necessity of distributing “the millionaire's hoard” in one's lifetime, the steel magnate advocated a “true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth.” Carnegie's money—and that of other philanthropists he inspired—created remarkable institutions, from public libraries to Carnegie Mellon University. But this is also true: The temporary unequal distribution of wealth persists.

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This partly explains the critique of philanthropy that's gathered steam in recent years. In a 2013 *New York Times* op-ed, Peter Buffett, son of Warren, described the “conscience laundering” that's rampant in that world—giving that “just keeps the existing structure of inequality in place. The rich sleep better at night, while others get just enough to keep the pot from boiling over.” More recently, in his influential book *Winners Take All*, Anand Giridharadas zeroed in on the righteous do-gooderism of tech elites, whose beneficence merely papers over deeper ills—the “lube of corporate profiteering,” as he has put it.

Skepticism swirled even during Carnegie's time. Was he selfless or a heartless union crusher? Was such accumulation of wealth natural, as he argued, or the contrivance of unfair laws and regulations? By the end of the Gilded Age, philanthropy had assumed an explicitly legitimizing purpose, according to Ben Soskis, a historian and research associate at the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy. “The pitchforks were directly invoked at the time,” Soskis said. “It was understood that if you want to be able to maintain this kind of wealth, you have to give back.”

From here, Soskis says, the ideas behind what we now call philanthro-capitalism gradually took root: The people who make the most money are also the best equipped to address the world's problems. The belief has proven remarkably resilient, given its regular brushes with reality. The passage of the 16th Amendment and the creation of a progressive federal income tax in 1913 arguably did far more for national welfare than all of philanthropy combined. The big, consequential crises—the Great Depression, the millions of people without health insurance that led to Medicare, the 2008 financial crisis—have been marked by a sobering recognition of the limits of voluntary giving and an understanding of the unique power of the state. Meanwhile, though philanthropists traffic in the idea that they're engaging root causes, a focus on actual structural reform is rare. As Soskis put it, philanthropy “has stayed far away, for the most part, from the systems of economic distribution that it gets its money from.”

At the same time, the tax obligations for the country's wealthiest that could address the larger issues have been steadily diminished. Under Ronald Reagan, the top marginal tax rates were slashed from 70 percent to 50 percent. And the top rates have fallen further over time. As the richest accumulated more wealth, as unions lost power and wages stagnated, the nation's wealth disparity has only grown. Today the country's three richest billionaires hold the same wealth as more than half the nation's population. As the collective wealth of the world's poorest 3.8 billion people fell by 11

percent in 2018, billionaire fortunes increased by 12 percent, according to Oxfam. Consider Benioff: Between 2017 and 2018, his net worth rose by \$2.47 million *a day*, according to *Business Insider*. Meanwhile, recent Federal Reserve data revealed that tens of millions of Americans would be unable to cover a \$400 emergency expense.

The 1 percent have entered a new period of interrogation. That inspiring tale of success: At whose expense did it come? These philanthropic gestures: Are they distracting from, and delaying a reckoning with, deeper problems they themselves exacerbate? Towering accumulations of capital start to seem less like symbols of hope than monuments to dysfunction. In Benioff's case, a penchant for good deeds coincides with a shifting public conversation about good itself—a waning tolerance for symptomatic fixes, a growing appetite for structural change. A simple but persistent question hovers around even a generous, well-intentioned billionaire, in some ways hovers more, *because* of those intentions. Is extreme wealth part of the solution or part of the problem? As Rob Reich, codirector of Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and author of *Just Giving*, told me, major philanthropy “is an exercise of power by the wealthy that deserves our scrutiny, not our automatic gratitude.”

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If this scrutiny results in less munificence from Benioff—if he takes his philanthropy ball and goes home—that would be a great shame. As nonprofits and foundations shoulder more and more of the civic burden, their reliance on charitable giving only grows. Nor can government solve all problems; a vibrant and varied civic sector has been indispensable to the country from the beginning. Still, throwing money at symptoms of inequality without addressing its underlying causes presumably seems foolhardy to big-picture, see-around-the-corner guys like Benioff. “I’m somebody who can see things that other people can’t see,” he has said. Indeed, his company’s success rests on its ability to sell a whole system, rather than bite-size solutions. If anyone can see structural problems—defects in the operating system itself—it should be him.

In a sense, Benioff has painted himself into a corner of good intentions, one avoided by the many CEOs who don't purport to care in the first place. To speak so much about disrupting the status quo and improving the rapidly deteriorating world—and to increase one's profile in so doing—is, eventually, to court a response: *OK, let's see then.*

**The grounds of San Francisco's** Presidio Middle School were swarming when I arrived on a hot September afternoon to witness Benioff's latest good deed: TV crews, the mayors and superintendents from two cities, and roughly 1,000 amped-up middle schoolers well into a daylong Salesforce-themed fair, complete with Salesforce employees, Salesforce mascots, a Salesforce virtual reality experience, and Salesforce T-shirts for everyone. Benioff's philosophy on discreet, low-key giving can best be described as: *nah*.

The occasion was the announcement of an \$18.2 million grant from Salesforce to the San Francisco and Oakland Unified School Districts and two education nonprofits. At 1 o'clock, inside a large white tent erected on the school blacktop, Benioff approached the lectern, a phalanx of mayors and other VIPs behind him. Massive in a stylish navy suit, hair swept back as though by sheer existential momentum, he was a picture of swaggering largesse.

To the assembled kids he issued a warning: They were about to get seriously bored.

“It's going to get worse before it gets better,” he said with a sly grin.

But in truth it was only ever good. His is a frisky charisma that simultaneously commands attention and diffuses it, and when your defenses are weakened, he hits you with some unimpeachable compassion for whatever global problem he's currently addressing. At the middle school, he told a story of simple civic duty.

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“This is my neighborhood,” he declared, for indeed he lives nearby. That was how he'd come to walk through the school's front door a few years ago and ask the principal how he could help.

Soon Benioff was meeting with faculty and students, asking what needed fixing. Before long there were new computers arriving in classrooms and plans in place for an overhaul of their joyless schoolyard. Gesturing out at the beautifully remade blacktop, Benioff took a moment to crow.

“Did you like the prison yard you had before?” he asked the kids.

The speech culminated in an account of Salesforce's sustained commitment to public education in the Bay Area. “We've now given more than \$67 million to these schools, so congratulations to you,” he said, turning to the superintendents behind him. Those donations have led to computer science education at all grade levels, a dramatic rise in the number of students in AP computer science classes, and improved technology in schools, says Chris Armentrout, an official with the San Francisco school district. He even attributed the money to helping improve math scores.

### **Benioff “will do enormous good and he'll also show its limits.”**

Afterward, I followed Benioff and his entourage into the school for a private event. Inside the library, with its inspirational posters and droning box fans, sat three dozen Bay Area middle school principals. On the agenda was a check-in about a component of Salesforce's public school grant, called the Principal's Innovation Fund, in which every middle school principal in the two districts is awarded \$100,000 to do with as they see fit. For the next hour Benioff listened as each principal thanked him and explained how the money would hire another teacher or facilitate extra planning time.

By far, though, the biggest issue for some of the principals was teacher retention, a challenge made virtually unsolvable by the Bay Area's astronomical housing costs. Increasingly, San Francisco schools see members of their staffs spending two or three hours a day commuting from less expensive exurbs, as rents continue to skyrocket. The high cost of housing in the Bay Area is a complex issue, more complicated than well-paid tech workers pricing everyone else out—but that's part of it, which made the irony hard to miss. The man presenting this enormous gift was also partly responsible for its need.

Beyond that, though, an even deeper truth seemed to be surfacing. Here was a classic use case for the vision of Benioff and other wealthy philanthropists, one in which the private sector steps up to address problems traditionally the province of government. But this was the thing: It wasn't enough. As immense as Salesforce's grant was, as profoundly *welcome* as it was, it was also no match for the deepest challenges faced by two major urban school districts. Clarifying itself there in the library was the simple arithmetic of private versus public, the inescapable difference in scale between

what even the most generous corporation or individual can accomplish and what tax-collecting governments can.

The meeting went on, Benioff listening patiently until each educator had weighed in. He was at last bringing things to a close when a thought appeared to occur to him. He cocked his head. How would everyone feel, he wondered, if he doubled the amount in the principal's grant this year?

In the days that followed, I replayed the moment several times. If any of the principals felt a little queasy—if they deeply appreciated the grant but less so the *Apprentice*-like theatrics that it came with, or the spectacle of public educators relying on the whims of a wealthy individual—they didn't let on. Nobody stood and said, *This isn't how the system should work*, because that just doesn't happen. The room erupted in gasps and whoops, and Benioff beamed. “You'll be leaving the room with a double,” he said.

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**Benioff is a great salesman** and his grasp of optics and spin is unparalleled. He was at Davos last January shortly after Giridharadas tweeted a crack about the surfeit of hollow corporate sanctimony there—phrases like *win-win*, *do well by doing good*, and *conscious capitalism*. Rather than pick up his sword, Benioff, who frequently invokes those very ideas, simply co-opted the critique.

“Anand, there are many companies & CEOs committed to systemic change—yes We need a lot more than to awaken! You are helping—Your message & book are so powerful we need you to be part of Davos discussion.”

Several people I spoke with—in the nonprofit world, in the tech world, in politics—would only criticize Benioff when my recorder was off. Giridharadas, who is now an editor at large for *Time*, hired by Benioff himself, declined to be interviewed. (His most recent cover story: “[Party's Over: The Fall of America's Ruling Class](#).”) When critics do come at him directly, Benioff has proven adept at deflecting them. In the summer of 2018, as border detentions were being widely condemned, more than 650 Salesforce employees signed a letter asking that the company drop its contract with Customs and Border Patrol, which used its software for its operations. When that didn't work, protesters showed up with a 14-foot cage outside San Francisco's Moscone Center in September, where the company was hosting its massive Dreamforce conference. Eventually Tony Prophet, the company's chief equality officer, agreed to meet with some of the activists. Salesforce insisted the conversation be off the record, but someone who attended told me two facts: Prophet had worn a T-shirt emblazoned with the word *Feminist*, and the company's CBP contract remained.

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A few months later, Salesforce created a position ostensibly to handle this very sort of issue. In January, Paula Goldman became the company's first chief ethical and humane use officer. Six months later we spoke by phone, touching on the

various causes Salesforce had championed in recent years: sustainability, gun control, LGBTQ+ rights.

“I will say universally we are a company that does the right thing,” she said.

But as I began drilling into particulars, the conversation swerved. At one point Goldman referred to equality being a core value for the company and quoted Benioff’s frequently stated commitment to “the equality of every human being.” I asked what, exactly, “equality” meant in the Salesforce parlance. She laughed. “I think it’s a self-explanatory statement,” she replied.

I tried a different approach. “Do you feel like it’s possible to have a company as large as Salesforce is, in a city like San Francisco, without exacerbating inequality?”

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“I’m not sure how to respond to that question,” Goldman said. “It feels like a little bit of a leading question.”

I conceded that it was, but to no avail. Finally, I asked about the CBP contract, assuming it had been around long enough for a coherent answer to have formed.

“As you can imagine, I think a lot about that,” she replied. “We have a whole set of principles and processes in place to work through a number of questions around how customers use our products and what gets raised.”

But the contract?

“I’d say we’re working on it.”

**After months of observing Benioff** from a distance, I was granted a half-hour interview with him. It happened after the Presidio Middle School festivities, in an empty office on the first floor of the building. Like many seasoned public speakers, Benioff’s one-on-one persona felt like a quieter version of his stage presence. He told me a much-repeated Salesforce origin story, involving a group of Marines installing a hundred computers in a Washington, DC, middle school. This gave way to a general leadership word salad, best practices and integrated approaches and operationalizing value. Business and government “should be two dance partners,” he told me, more connected than they are currently. When I mentioned rumors of a future political career, he said—convincingly—that it didn’t appeal. When I asked whether he held too much influence as a private citizen, he demurred, then somehow pivoted to the subject of charter schools. But then he found his way back to the need for compassionate capitalism, which brought him to Prop. C and his frequently stated interest in paying more taxes. I’d been waiting nearly a year for this.

Was it true that Salesforce paid nothing in federal income tax, as ITEP had reported? I asked.

He shifted a little in his seat.

“I don’t know exactly what our tax rate is,” he replied, “but it probably wasn’t what we could be paying. We can afford more, which is why we just said we should be taxed higher—”

“But I’m saying zero. What they’re reporting is that there was *none* paid.”

“We’ll find out. I don’t know,” he replied, and one of his people jumped in, too, assuring me they’d “call our tax people.” Benioff continued: “I’ll tell you, I’ll give you our tax returns, but my point is that we’re not paying enough.”

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“OK,” I said. “But Salesforce lobbied for the Trump tax cuts, right? The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017?”

“No, not to my knowledge.”

“Did they lobby *against* it?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know if we lobbied against it, but I think ... I don’t know. My recollection is that that all happened so fast, which was it all went down in a period of about six months that I don’t think anybody was, I certainly was never solicited to—”

A staff member cut in, then brought things back around to Prop. C, reminding me that in that case he’d supported the idea of higher taxes. I asked what he thought of Elizabeth Warren’s proposed wealth tax for individuals. Given Benioff’s reported net worth of \$6.9 billion, he’d pay \$373 million in the first year. (“Good news—you’ll still be extraordinarily rich!” notes the calculator page on Warren’s website.)

“I think that those types of taxes are good,” he said slowly. “I think it’s fine, but I think that it should be looked at on the historical levels of what worked in that and what has not worked.”

I asked if that was a yes or a no.

“I don’t want to be on the side of saying that I fully support her,” he said.

Throughout this whole portion of the exchange, the staff member sitting across from him had begun tapping on her phone. There now came a knock at the door. Another staffer entered and informed Benioff of an important doctor’s appointment.

We chatted another few minutes—after the uncomfortable tax conversation, I nudged us back to his outlook for the country’s future. It was a softball and he swung as such, saying what he’d like is for us to be “more united and less divided.” Briefly we discussed his role at *Time*, but then the doctor’s appointment could be put off no longer.

I spent much of the weeks before and after that interview trying to find out what Salesforce’s lobbyists had argued behind closed doors about the tax bill. Despite many calls around Capitol Hill, I found nothing. Finally, the company agreed to put me in touch with Niki Christoff, senior vice president for strategy and government relations.

Our conversation lasted two minutes. She told me that Salesforce had indeed lobbied on the tax bill, but only for two relatively minor items. Regarding the corporate tax cuts, the company had decided not to take a position. Salesforce walked Benioff’s talk, in other words.

I would’ve dropped the matter after that, had my phone not rung sometime later. It seemed my inquiries had found their way to someone with direct knowledge of Salesforce’s lobbying efforts, and in exchange for not being identified in this piece, this person agreed to talk.

Salesforce had ramped up its lobbying efforts. The tax bill included a number of provisions, some of which would

remove tax benefits that corporations had enjoyed. This source told me that the company was interested in how the lower tax rate would work in conjunction with other aspects of the bill. Like other big companies, Salesforce wanted to make sure it wasn't going to pay *more* after tax reform. Salesforce expressed a keen interest in the durability of the lower rate, as did many companies. The bill was complex but Salesforce's ultimate goal, the source said, was straightforward: the best deal possible. (WIRED reached out to Salesforce for comment; the company was emphatic that it had not lobbied for lower tax rates.)

I hung up and, not for the first time, struggled to know how to think about Salesforce and the man behind it. Whatever else is true, Marc Benioff does more good in a day than most of us will muster in our lifetimes. I found myself flashing on a conversation I'd had with Ben Soskis, the philanthropy historian. As he sees it, Benioff's contradictions and even his existence make him "a clarifying agent" for our times.

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His benevolence and its limitations go hand in hand when "the maldistribution itself is the problem," Soskis said. Regarding his philanthropy and other good deeds, he added, "You don't have to dismiss it as unimportant to also insist that it's inadequate ... He will do enormous good *and* he'll also show its limits."

After our interview, Benioff and I walked out of the school together, down the front steps. Palpably, he was done with our interaction. It was nearly dusk. We shook hands and then he climbed into the passenger seat of a Bentley SUV, which was either gold or champagne, I couldn't tell.

*Collage and spot photo sources: Getty Images*

*Updated 12-11-19, 5:45PM ET: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated Benioff rode in a Rolls-Royce SUV. It was a Bentley.*

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**CHRIS COLIN** (@chriscolin3000) wrote about [tech's relationship](#) to San Francisco's Tenderloin district in issue 25.02. He's a contributing writer to California Sunday, and his work has appeared in The New York Times, Outside, and Pop-Up Magazine.

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**Selected by Simon Denny**

**Material from**

**Nora Khan, “Fred Turner: Silicon Valley Thinks Politics Doesn’t Exist,”  
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# Fred Turner: Silicon Valley Thinks Politics Doesn't Exist

July 31, 2018

Technology isn't handed down to us by the gods. At 032c, we inspect the components of our digital reality, fully expecting to see ourselves reflected back. In this interview, excerpted from Rhizome's **Seven on Seven conference** publication, *What's to be Done?*, editor Nora Khan spoke to media theorist Fred Turner about the tech industry's frontier puritanism, the myth of "neutrality," and the idealist art on Facebook's Menlo Park campus.

Fred Turner is widely considered one of the foremost intellectuals and experts on counterculture's influence on the birth of the tech industry. He is the Harry and Normal Chandler Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at Stanford University. He has written three books: *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), and *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (Anchor/Doubleday, 1996; 2nd ed., University of Minnesota

Press, 2001). He is also a former journalist, writing for a range of publications from the Boston Globe Sunday Magazine to Nature.

Nora Khan: You've written at length on the New Communalists, their rejection of politics, their attempts to build a pure new world on the edge of society. This ethic was translated into tools, infrastructure, and material for the technological world we are in today.

But, as you've argued so well, that rejection of politics, embedded in tools, has given us a series of disasters. To me, it seems the most insidious effect is when this claim suggests more advanced technologies are apolitical, amoral, or neutral. It seems particularly absurd when you start talking about machine vision, predictive policing and their algorithmic phenology, databases sorting people by their employability, or psychographic maps.

I often hear tech activists and critics decry technology companies' claims that their tools and platforms are neutral. I also do the same. But where does this idea of technology as neutral, come from? Is it similar to how business leaders claim the market is amoral?

**Fred Turner: Well, I'll speculate, and I hope it'll be useful speculation. There are a couple of sources. One is chronologically proximate, and one is probably a little bit more distant. The proximate one remains professional engineering culture and its educational system. Engineering education is a system in which explicitly political questions are generally relegated to other fields entirely: political science, sociology, history, English, and on down the line.**

The practice of engineering is too often taught as if it were simply the design of functions, the design of things to do things. It's sort of an explicit ethical choice, inside all parts of the field, to leave politics aside. (Although I think that's changing.)

This means you'll get people who tell you, "*It's not my business whether the bridge is good or bad. The bridge has to work. The bridge has to hold up.*" That's the goal. That whole tool orientation is a pragmatic, self-serving vision inside professional engineering training. It's been there a long time.

There's a deeper thing, that goes way, way back to the early modern period. It's about where the seat of the government is. In the era of kings and queens, government resided in the body of the monarch. Technology was implement through which the monarch got the job done, but it was only an implement. The power to rule was in the blood of the monarch.

Kings and queens would demonstrate their organic power by building automata and staging amazing mechanical expositions in their courts and gardens. Chandra Mukerji of UC San Diego has written a beautiful book on the Gardens of Versailles and how they were, essentially, models of royal power. But they became models of royal power when Louis XVI *demonstrated* technology. The power itself resided inside him. The political was the king, the inheritance, the social role around the king, the court. It was people. As we look through time, I think that idea of politics being people gradually morphed and became attached to the idea that politics could live in writing. Politics is what we say and do. Tools are, by definition, things that help us say and do that, but power is, itself, something deployed by living beings, in person eons ago and later through letters and printed proclamations.

Today, thanks to Marx and especially Foucault, we think about power and technology differently. It's Foucault who teaches us about governmentality. More recently, most everyone in the academy on the social science side has had some encounter with the study of science and technology, particularly, actor-network theory in which it's always a social actor.

There has been a whole lot of work bringing things back into the social world, and that's just work that's been done since Foucault, Bruno Latour, and all the different folks that they've worked with in the United States and Europe. The question of why technology is considered neutral is only possible because we've had that last two generations of scholarship.

## The next thing you know, you're deep in an Orwellian swamp.

NK: And it gets more tricky when such effort is invested into maintaining an image of the tool as neutral. Many of the engineers and narrative designers who are sitting in these rooms are perfectly aware that you are persuading someone to feel and think. The design of technology hides its political imperatives by *presenting* as neutral.

It seems the most accessible and powerful example of this is narrative and conversational design, mediated through bot and virtual assistants and interfaces. You have poets and playwrights who are brought on to write bots, creating soft and pliable brand personalities. Add to that psychologists, cognitive linguistics scholars, and of course, captologists, trained in the study of persuasive design – hey, a department based at Stanford! – channeling a carefully targeted design through interfaces.

FT: Here's where you can see that wonderful migration of the material engineering position, a position born out of mechanical engineering, with physical engineering migrating into social engineering sort of unconsciously. It makes the migration by moving from thing, to text.

So, when an architect or a builder builds the building that constrains the behavior of the people in it, everybody's happy; that's the point. Building objects that constrain behavior in benevolent ways is what engineers do. It seems that way, I think, to many folks who imagine and think of themselves as engineers. (There's a whole other question about whether programmers are, in fact, engineers.)

But if you take it seriously, that these are too, engineers, then the notion of moving from a physical architecture to a *nudge* architecture\* isn't such a big leap. The notion is that the option of benevolent influence through infrastructure, or team design, seems a pretty reasonable choice.

But of course, it isn't, right? Because text and interfaces – interfaces being symbolic structures rather than material ones, although they have a material base – they work differently. They have different kinds of effects. They get inside us in different ways. If I have a material wall in a building and I just walk into it, it says, "Oops. Now it's soft; can't go that way." "All right, no problem." Nothing sort of inside me has really changed.

But a nudge infrastructure that changes my desire such that I desire a red Popsicle, not a green Popsicle – that's different. Once it starts to change so that I desire a baby made with brown hair, because we need more babies with brown hair, what happens then? You can walk down that line very quickly.

The next thing you know, you're deep in an Orwellian swamp. Engineers barely think about that swamp, because building architectures for benevolent influence is what they do.



NK: Relational AI is another swamp, building a mind that is mirroring our consumer desires back to us. It's becoming more difficult to see this design, these tiny incremental micro-adjustments to interfaces and infrastructure. So how can the average person understand and track this process, especially when a company's design thinking is proprietary, locked away in a black box? How is the average person to begin to demand ethical design or legible design? Other than, say, mining the brains of tech workers who abscond to activism, and tell us what's going on inside.

**FT: Oh my gosh. That's the \$60,000 question. You probably know Tristan Harris?\***  
That's one of the questions he's trying to answer and I'm going to put my money on him. I don't have an answer to that question, but I do have some comforting historical context to offer.

**We are building these kind of mirror systems, these mirror minds, that reflect our desires, and then act on them. I think what's different about them compared to historical examples isn't the mirroring part, so much as the mode of interaction.**

Everything that you just said about the AI, with the exception of how we interact with them, could've been said about the Sears Roebuck catalog in 1890. The Sears catalog was a desire analogy, a desire mirror that was carefully tweaked. The products were carefully removed and inserted to produce desires in people on the prairie and to give them means of satisfying those desires.

It also gave them the means of interacting with Sears as a company. What's changed since then is the speed at which the interaction between the user and designer occurred, as it does now in virtually real time. The catalog had to be mailed out and read, and purchases had to be made. The speed was months and years. But people were as disturbed at the end of the 19th and in the early 20th centuries by the arrival of new kinds of media in those periods as we are about AI. Many of the fears that we have are very similar, the mirroring one being a leading one.

NK: On our survey, we asked a question about [Openwater, a consumer wearables startup](#) that's trying to develop a ski cap to "read your mind," using data about oxygenated blood flow to the brain to read desires, thoughts. This is a claim made by the founder, formerly of Facebook and Google (an expert engineer around holograms, high-pixelated screens), on stage at conferences. She calls this move toward mind reading *inevitable*, a statement made with total confidence, and very little irony or pause.

What is at play in some of the more possibly ethically dubious inventions in Silicon Valley? Is it a drive to own all human "territory," inside the body and out? I also think of the archetype of the White Hat Hacker, the lone genius with access to code that no one understands, who knows what is best for society. The unknown may seem terrifying, he says, but you'll soon see.

**FT: I think that's absolutely what's at play. I was struck in the late '90s and early aughts as some of these early systems were being built, but how many of my friends would say, "Oh, you worry too much. The good hackers will protect us. People will crack open those systems. We've all cracked open other things." And that's tremendously naïve. It's part of a deep prejudice in American thought. Americans tend to think in terms of individuals. They tend to not think in terms of institutions.**

One place that it happens is in how we read what we can do with technology. We think, "Sure, big systems may come along, but individual rebels always triumph." That's part of our deep cultural narrative. "And it'll happen here, too." It's a way in which that same cultural narrative gets taken up by engineers – and you've just given me a fabulous example of that happening on stage – where these folks imagine themselves as the archetypal American frontierspeople. The nature of the frontier is to be conquered is irrelevant; it's the conquering that matters. The actual westward push of Europeans stomped all over native peoples. Now, you see people like the founder you just described, quite happily, marching across our brain space as though it was just the latest in open, organic American fields to be conquered. We're the natives in this story and that's terrifying.

NK: The brain is just more material to examine and absorb. People are raw material. Code to be unlocked.

**FT: Exactly. The brain is just another material. There's a lot of deep American mythology at play. That declaration about wanting to read your mind: it is a classic case. One of the things I'm most interested in these days is the ways that technologists are thinking like the early American Puritans, who were my first intellectual love.**

## My idea of utopia is actually a hospital.

NK: There's a lot in your "Don't Be Evil" interview for *LOGIC* that I really enjoy, particularly your moments of reflection at Burning Man. You traced a line from this desert excess back to a more Puritan, deeply American idea of the restart.

There's a religious zeal in wanting to restart society from zero. I visualize this in terms of the simulation. If you can build a world from scratch, you can also build a person without history or politics.

This *seems* optimistic until you realize that what some designers are hoping to get rid of are the more "troublesome" aspects, like race or gender or history. They are modular add-on

features that can be removed. That is an ideology. It now drives social engineering and corporate-driven city planning and design. San Francisco is a good example.

**FT:** There's long been a lot of traffic between urban designers and game designers, even before things got digital. I find that fascinating.

You are saying something that I want to pick up on, because I think it's really important: this idea of building a person or a place without a history. I think that's a deeply American idea, because we leave the known. We're supposed to be the country that left Europe. We're supposed to be the country that left the known.

Why did we leave the known? Well, so we could become the unknown, the people without history, the people without a past. When you leave history behind, the realm that you enter is not the realm of nothingness. It's the realm of divine oversight, at least in American culture.

When the Pilgrims came to Massachusetts, they left the old world behind so as to be more visible to God. The landscape of New England would be an open stage and they would, under the eye of God, discover whether they were, in fact, the elect: chosen to go to Heaven after they died.

No technologists today would say they're a Puritan, but that's a pattern that we still see. We see people sort of leaving behind the known world of everyday life, bodies, and all the messiness that we have with bodies of race and politics, all the troubles that we have in society, to enter a kind of ethereal realm of engineering achievement, in which they will be rewarded as the Puritans were once rewarded, if they were elect, by wealth.

The Puritans believed that if God loved you enough to plan to take you to heaven in the end, he wasn't going to leave you to suffer on this Earth before you came to him. Instead he would tend to make you wealthy. Puritans came to see that as a great reward. Puritans, and broad Protestant logic, deems that God rewards those whom he loves on Earth as in Heaven.

You can see that in the West a lot now. Folks who leave behind the social world of politics and are rewarded with money are, in fact, living out a deep, New England Puritan dream.

NK: The city on a hill. The early settlers on it, looking down at the wilderness, mapping civilization. This idea of having a God's eye view of society maps a bit onto building of the simulation or the model. Being a worldbuilder means you can position yourself as neutral, as the origin, which is an amoral, evasive point which you can never really capture. It vanishes.

But there *are* a remarkable amount of coders and programmers thinking in terms of ethical design who want to help us visualize a world *with* history and politics. Do you think ethical design could help us do that? Is that an imperative that is useful now?

**FT:** I think everything helps. I think that what we like to call ethical design – well, you have to think very hard about whose ethics are built into the system, and how people have agency around that. This is an old lesson in science and technology studies, that if you build a road that only accommodates cars, then only people with cars will be able to ride on it. You may value independence, and you may see that as an ethical choice, but it may be that some people don't even have access to that ethical framework because of the kinds of lives they lead on the material plane. And then, you're stuck.

I've always found it very hard to think about any system, any planned, top-down system as, by definition, benevolent. The best systems and institutions are constantly focused on negotiation, on *structured* negotiation. So, the best institutions are places that have a constant system of check and balances.

My idea of utopia is actually a hospital. [Laughs] A hospital is a place where people get together, work very hard over very long periods of time in defined roles, checking and rechecking each other's work, and they work toward a benevolent goal of saving lives. If you were to build a society built along similar lines, hopefully not one where everybody wears scrubs and white jackets, that starts to be a better place. So, the building is architected, so the systems are architected, but the negotiation is constant. That's what I'd like to see.

NK: That's lovely. I think of how Kiyoshi Izumi redesigned psychiatric wards in Canada after dropping acid. The caged-in architecture, the lack of privacy, of clocks, the barred, high windows like a prison; Izumi felt how distressing and inhumane it was. The ideal mental hospital valued privacy; patients had sound proof rooms with unbarred windows. Sources of perceptual distortions, like silhouettes, terrifying to someone with mental illness. Patients had less distress in this communal space driven by a different set of ethics, one more compassionate.

FT: I want to riff on that for a second. If we go back to that question of these neutral worlds, if you act like a God and build a world that doesn't take account of differences, but rather tries to neutralize them in a single process, or a single code system, or under a single ethical rubric, what you end up doing is erasing precisely the kinds of differences that need to be negotiated.

So, it may look like a benevolent system to you. In fact, a form of a truly benevolent system is one that, I think, allows people to negotiate the distribution of resources across differences. That's a very difficult problem politically. That's what politics are for. You can help with those negotiations. If you can help people work with those who are different from themselves, you're better off.

NK: And this seems even more difficult to accomplish when diversity and identity politics are embedded in corporate marketing. I'd like to talk about your new piece on the aesthetics of Facebook, on the play at diversity and identity politics without ethical follow-through. There's a perverse contrast between [the poster at their Menlo Park headquarters](#) asking visitors to "Take Care of Muslim/Black/Women and Femmes/Queer Latinx ..." and so on, when there are no unions in sight. I'm guessing the hiring process would suggest some realities that are not quite aligned.

What is the danger in this flattening, this validation of diversity as a cover for violation? The image of counterculture, progress, transformation – these are very seductive images to imagine oneself embodying. How are people to stay alert to the difference between iconography and action?

FT: We've done it differently in different eras. There was a lot of work to help people resist propaganda in the '30s and '40s. There were whole institutions formed to do that. There was a lot of work to help people resist the rise of commercialism in the '20s.

But something has changed since then: Individualism and attention to identity are sources of elite power right now. Facebook's mission is entirely consonant with identity politics. It precisely helped people break apart identities and become even more factional in identity. They give clear terms for this expression, they just market those expressions back. In those kinds of differences are exactly the kinds of market segments that matter to them, the segments that Facebook wants to monetize.

The focus on identity is one of the keys, I think, to being an elite American these days. That's part of where you see the backlash in the South of Trumpism. When we focus on identity, we focus on different modes, what you're describing, rightly, of market segmentation.

What we lose track of is just raw poverty. Modes of separating that are geographically-based, modes of separating that are age-based, modes of separating that have absolutely nothing to do with our race, our gender, or our ability to express our identity diversity. Those are all important issues. I don't mean to knock those at all, but to the extent that elite Americans focus on identity diversity and look to that as a way to make solutions to the problems they're seeing – they're going to get stuck.



The way that we fix a Facebook is not by learning to read its representations more effectively. It's by using the democratic institutions that we have. We have to recognize that it's a company, not a system of conversation, but a for-profit firm, and then subject that for-profit firm to precisely the kinds of regulation from the state, elected by the people, that we apply to car companies, to architects, all the other industrial forces in our lives.

We have to recognize that Facebook isn't special. Weirdly, to do that, we have to start recognizing that identity itself is not special and above the political fray. We need to do our politics through institutions. We need to return to that old, boring style of recognizing differences and negotiating across across them.

NK: It's the core setup of neoliberalism. You find many First-Generation immigrants who are leftists or socialists have great, serious critique of neoliberal identity politics. This position isn't the same as not valuing the expression of identity; it's a critique of how the expression of identity alone syncs so well with the financial imperative of platforms.

I don't see identity politics addressing the real material issues of our time, like how racial capitalism intersects with city planning. I see perfectly expressed identities in fiefdoms, without any politics on which we can agree, or a space in between in which we can gather together to effect material change.

**FT: Yes. That's exactly right. Facebook's power blew me away. The poster that bothered me the most in Facebook was a poster of Dolores Huerta, who was an organizer of the farm workers. She's still alive. You'll know that she was one of America's greatest union organizers in the 20th century. And Facebook is a company that has relentlessly resisted unionization.**

Some of its contract workers are unionized, but that's it. So, you have to wonder, why is a company not just tolerating, but promoting the image of Dolores Huerta around its place? Part of the answer, on the part of the designers, is trying to help workers appreciate that there's a diverse world out there, and they need to be in touch with it. Fair enough.

But I think that a poster of Dolores Huerta only works inside Facebook if nobody remembers what it was that made her Dolores Huerta. So long as you can turn her into an image, particularly, a Latina female image inside of a firm with a dearth of Latina females, you sort of check that expressive political box, then carefully uncheck the institutional box of unionization or making institutional change, that would actually distribute resources to the communities she represents.

NK: It's unbelievable. As long as her image means *nothing in particular*, then it means just as much as any other image.

So then, this support for full expression overlaps very neatly with support for "unfettered creativity" and experimentation, so, art. Who wants to get in the way of people living their passions? Art's status as an unarguable public good, makes it a powerful space for pushing ideology.

**FT: Oh, very definitely.**

NK: Without tipping into institutional critique, how does this ideology of creativity, at all costs, change the kind of risky, experimental, challenging art that can be made?

**FT: Let me address the issue of creativity. Certainly, inside Facebook, one of the reasons that they have art everywhere is, I think, to remind programmers and engineers to think of themselves as creative people. Ever since the Romantics, the creative individual has been an American icon.**

But the kind of creativity that's never gotten any attention is working class creativity. Do you know how creative you have to be to be a single mother with a below-poverty-level income, intermittent access to food stamps and food, some job or no job, and be able to make a living, and make a family stay together?

That's the kind of creativity, the kind of MacGyvering, that engineers just never think about. It's not even on our radar with regard to creativity. We talk about the ideology of creativity, and what we're talking about is an elite theme, an elite hope that we engineers, we who architect this new surveillance reality are, in fact, the descendants of Walt Whitman, the descendants of the artists in the 19th century, descendants of American romantics. That's just hooey.

In the meantime, as we pursue that vision, we very carefully *elide* all the modes of creative action and interaction that sustain people who don't have the resources that we have.

Notice the language I'm using. I'm very carefully not using identity-based markers for those people because what matters is their economic standing or their regional location, the fact that they may be the children of woodsmen, who can't move

anymore because the logging industry is dead. These are folks who are living lives below the poverty line, in sort of post-industrial spaces that don't look like Silicon Valley, and there's some of them living in Silicon Valley. The whole rhetoric of creativity explicitly ignores them. It says to be creative is to build media goods that generate a profit and to have fun doing it. Bah! [Laughs]

I absolutely think that art and tech can go together and can help produce art that will, in time, will eventually be seen as being as beautiful, as valuable, as the Michelangelo paintings were seen by the Church.

NK: It is totally destructive to critical thinking. Creativity is for making media goods; criticism is in this way threatened by the ethic of technology and engineering, which demands we produce sense, or consumable, working ideological products. But successful art might be, sometimes, *useless*, or critical of labor. Actual dissent, not just an aesthetic of dissent.

How do you see "Silicon Values," as critic Mike Pepi writes, shaping our relationship to art? He describes how art is deployed as a vital tool through which to push technological business models.

FT: Let's step back and ask, what is tech, in regard to art? One answer is that the tech industry can be the sponsor of art. In that sense, it's a lot like the Catholic church. When you ask me about artists at Facebook or artists at large companies or artists working with technologists, I think about the many generations of artists who worked with the Catholic Church from the early Middle Ages on.

Now, the Church is a complex institution. It has been the home of the Inquisition and its leaders have ignored and even hidden acts of child abuse around the globe. Yet the Vatican is also the place where Michelangelo paints the Sistine Chapel. The beauty of the Sistine Chapel, or of Michelangelo's paintings, are not reduced by their appearing under the sponsorship of the Church. The best art, I think, can outlive the circumstances of its creation.

I think we also sometimes imagine that art is immune to the forces that drive every other thing that we do. It's immune to commerce. It's immune to greed. It's immune to failure. It's immune to ugliness. It's immune to collective pressures. It's always the product of an individual mind. The hope that we could have an art that would be outside the industrial world which is so clearly driven by tech, is a little naïve.

That said, I've seen art inside Facebook that has dazzled my sensorium. Truly. I've seen art using and leveraging devices created by people in Silicon Valley at places like the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and marveled at the beauty and the way that it makes me rethink what the natural world might be.

So, I absolutely think that art and tech can go together and can help produce art that will, in time, will eventually be seen as being as beautiful, as valuable, as the Michelangelo paintings were seen by the Church, or as landscapes sponsored by hideous patrons eons ago might be seen as beautiful today. I don't think the sins of the sponsors necessarily ruin the experience of the art.

NK: And then there's the second kind of art doing the support work, the oblique shilling.

FT: Yes. Art doing the work of tech legitimation. I hear, a lot of times, that we need to get artists and technologists together in some space, because the technologists will be able to show the artists their tools, and the artists will be able to adopt the tools to come up with creative new uses. The technologists will, in turn, be able to monetize those uses in terms of new products. This does, in fact, sometimes happen.

In the artist-technologist collaborations that I've looked at from the '50s and '60s, the work that went on was primarily ideological. Collaboration helped everybody imagine that they were creative, that they were making something valuable. It made it possible for engineers who were building our media and communication systems, the Bell Labs sound system, or the engineers working at NASA on rocket engines that would send things into space, or people working in Silicon Valley on Polaris missiles, to imagine themselves as the same kind of exquisitely sensitive and culturally elite person that, say, a John Cage was, or Robert Rauschenberg was.

By the same token, Rauschenberg and Cage and others who collaborated with technologists in that period, were able to get new ideas, get money, and borrow some of the legitimacy of the engineers, who were winning the Cold War at the time. I think we see that now. I think we can see artists borrowing legitimacy of technologists, and then taking their money. We can see technologists borrowing the legitimacy of artists, and taking their ideas.

I think it's a mutually beneficial relationship so far.



NK: At present, the Whole Earth Catalog, chaos magic, and mysticism, of the kind expounded on in Erik Davis's *Techgnosis*, are seeing a strong resurgence within tech. It seems to me there's a feeling that it *is* possible to go back to the original idea, that computers and platform can yet still mediums for liberation, rather than platforms for control.

So. What would a Whole Earth Catalog for our time look like, if we learned from past failures?

FT: Yeah. Hm. Oh, boy. Well, if you ask some of the people associated with the actual Whole Earth Catalog, which I've done, they will tell you it would look like Google. It would be a global system for an individual to search out the things that individual needed to build a life on their own terms. I think that's fine.

But I think that definition misses the key part of the Catalog, which is the way that it didn't actually sell goods. It printed recommendations for goods.

The recommendation letters came from people living on communes at a time when the only way know what communes were out there in the world, was to get on the telephone, or use snail mail letters. The Catalog become one of the first representations of the commune world. It was a map. Embedded in all those products was a map of all the different communes that were using and recommending them.

So, the thing that I would like to see, that I don't think Google is, is a map, a kind of map of an alternative kind of society, a better kind of society. I don't think the Whole Earth Catalogs mapped a better society, but they tried. Can we see a map of alternative communities, communities that are taking things in different directions, not just, *can we search using digital tools for tools that help us lead our life the way we want to?* I mean, that just sounds like the L.L. Bean catalog on steroids. Can we identify communities that are taking us in directions we want to, map their interconnections, and find some way for ourselves to search our way into new kind of community, and new kinds of institutions? I think that's what I would like to see.

We have inherited from the Whole Earth Catalog a language of *individuals, tools, and communities*, which we've translated, I think, in tech speak, into *individuals, communities, and networks*.

There's something I've always held against the Catalog, and that's its individualism. The opening sentence, you remember, in the front of the book, is "We are as gods, and we might as well get good at it." The sentiment, *We are as gods*, in the Catalog, meant that they were able to take the products of industrial society, and put them to work for individual purposes in what Stewart Brand called "a realm of intimate, personal power."

To the extent that we imagine the politics take place in the intimate realm of personal power we're going to get lost. We're going to keep building interfaces that allow for expression, that allow for the extension of intimate personal power, and we're going to precisely not do the work, the boring, tedious, structural work of building and sustaining institutions that allow for the negotiation of resource exchange across groups that may not like each other's expressions *at all*.

So we have inherited from the Whole Earth Catalog a language of *individuals, tools, and communities*, which we've translated, I think, in tech speak, into *individuals, communities, and networks*. I would like to see a language of *institutions, resources, and negotiation* take its place.

NK: Beautiful. I'm going to go walk around in the woods and think about that.

FT: There's another thing hiding in here, under the Catalog, an idea that the counterculture and neoliberalism share: if you just free people up and build a market structure, things take care of themselves. What this idea ignores is the persistence of subsidies, of regulation, of shared state resources, of things as basic as roads and bridges. If you don't tend to that subsidy, you can't have any of the other freedoms

So, that's what we need. We need to be alert to sharing and sustaining our public resources.

NK: Artist Caroline Woolard speaks of this as a defiance of the academy's teachings. This generation, she says in a recent [Brooklyn Rail interview](#), is one of artists that makes cultural organizing, community arts, and advocacy a central part of artistic practice. To rebuild that degraded civic spirit, artists can't be disengaged.

FT: Well, I think a lot about Eastern Europe during the Communist era and how artists dealt with that. Some artist became critical. Some artists became politically active. Other artists just wrote beautiful stories.

I do think there's a role for disengaged art in a moment when otherwise our lives need to be engaged. I think there's something to be said for laying aside objects of beauty for when times are better. I've spent the morning today at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin looking at early Renaissance paintings, filled with violence, but also stunningly beautiful.

Alongside these kind of political paintings, were all these little portraits that the artists did, just people's faces from eons ago, totally disconnected from the politics of the time. They were just interested in the subjects' physiognomy: their hair, their skin, their noses. Those faces come down to us as emblems of the kinds of connections we can make with each other across time that aren't political in any direct, immediate, historically specific sense, but are the most deeply political in that they offer us a vision of seeing each other with love. That's something that the arts can do almost uniquely, but they can only do it, in a weird way, when artists stand a little to the side of the political fray.

*\*Ed. - Nudge or choice architecture is a development of behavioral science, in which consumers are 'nudged' to make socially desirable choices, like eating better or recycling.*

*\*\*Ed. - Harris is a former Google Design ethicist and founder of non-profit Time Well Spent, aiming for development of ethical design standards in tech.*

*This interview is excerpted from What's to be done?, a limited-edition zine marking the 10th edition of [Rhizome's Seven on Seven](#). The publication was edited by Rhizome's special projects editor Nora Khan, and designed by W+K's Richard Turley, Justin Flood, and Frank DeRose. To purchase a copy, please email [info@rhizome.org](mailto:info@rhizome.org).*



Interview **NORA KHAN**  
Images **FACEBOOK**

**Selected by Simon Denny**

**Material from  
Katharina Knoll, Moritz Schularick, and Thomas Steger, “No Price Like  
Home: Global House Prices, 1870–2012,” in *American Economic Review*,  
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## No Price Like Home: Global House Prices, 1870–2012<sup>†</sup>

By KATHARINA KNOLL, MORITZ SCHULARICK, AND THOMAS STEGER\*

*How have house prices evolved over the long run? This paper presents annual house prices for 14 advanced economies since 1870. We show that real house prices stayed constant from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, but rose strongly and with substantial cross-country variation in the second half of the twentieth century. Land prices, not replacement costs, are the key to understanding the trajectory of house prices. Rising land prices explain about 80 percent of the global house price boom that has taken place since World War II. Our findings have implications for the evolution of wealth-to-income ratios, the growth effects of agglomeration, and the price elasticity of housing supply. (JEL C43, N10, N90, R31)*

For Dorothy there was no place like home. But despite her ardent desire to get back to Kansas, Dorothy probably had no idea how much her beloved home cost. She was not aware that the price of a standard Kansas house in the late nineteenth century was around \$2,400 (Wickens 1937) and could not have known whether relocating the house to Munchkin Country would have increased its value or not. For economists, there is no price like home, at least not since the global financial crisis: fluctuations in house prices, their impact on the balance sheets of consumers and banks, as well as the deleveraging pressures triggered by house price busts have been a major focus of macroeconomic research in recent years (Jordà, Schularick, and Taylor 2015; Mian and Sufi 2014; Shiller 2009). In the context of business cycles, the nexus between monetary policy and the housing market has become a rapidly expanding research field (Adam and Woodford 2013; Goodhart and Hofmann 2008; Del Negro and Otrok 2007; Leamer 2007). Houses are typically the largest component of household wealth, the key collateral for bank lending and

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play a central role for long-run trends in wealth-to-income ratios and the size of the financial sector (Jordà, Schularick, and Taylor 2016; Piketty and Zucman 2014). Yet despite their importance to the macroeconomy, surprisingly little is known about long-run trends in house prices. Our paper fills this void.

Based on extensive historical research, we present house price indices for 14 advanced economies since 1870. A considerable part of this paper is devoted to the presentation and discussion of new stylized facts that we unearthed from more than 60 different primary and secondary sources. Houses are heterogeneous assets and when combining data from a variety of sources great care is needed to construct long-run indices that account for quality improvements, shifts in the composition of the type of houses and their location. Controlling for quality changes and shifts in the overall quality-mix of transacted houses is arguably the main challenge for the construction of house price indices over extended periods. We go into considerable detail to corroborate the plausibility and test the robustness of the trends we identify using additional historical sources. However, researchers using our data should be aware of these caveats. In addition to house price data, we have also assembled corresponding long-run data for construction costs and farmland prices.

Using the new dataset, we are able to show that since the nineteenth century real house prices in advanced economies have taken a particular trajectory that, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been documented. From the last quarter of the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, house prices in most industrial economies were largely constant in real (CPI-deflated) terms. By the 1960s they were, on average, not much higher than they were on the eve of World War I. They have been on a long and pronounced ascent since then, giving rise to a hockey-stick pattern of house prices in the long run.

While house prices have increased in all countries over the past 140 years, we also find considerable cross-country heterogeneity. Australia has seen the strongest, Germany the weakest, increase in real house prices since 1870. House prices have broken out of their historical range in almost all countries in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, cross-country differences also extend to the timing of the surge of house prices. In most countries it occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, in some countries the trajectory began to change shortly after World War II, and in others only after 1990. Japan is the only country in which house prices fell significantly over the past two decades.

We then study the driving forces of this hockey-stick pattern of house prices. Houses are bundles of the structure and the underlying land. An accounting decomposition of house price dynamics into replacement costs of the structure and land prices demonstrates that rising land prices hold the key to understanding the upward trend in global house prices. While construction costs have flat-lined in the past decades, sharp increases in residential land prices have driven up housing values. Our decomposition shows that more than 80 percent of the increase in house prices between 1950 and 2012 can be attributed to land prices. The results of this decomposition exercise are sensitive to assumptions about the land share in the value of housing. As a baseline, we assume a land share of 50 percent, but even for land shares as low as 25 percent, the land component still accounts for more than 70 percent of the house price increase. The pronounced increase in residential land prices in recent decades contrasts starkly with the period from the late nineteenth to the

mid-twentieth century. During this period, residential land prices remained, by and large, constant despite substantial population and income growth. We are not the first to note the upward trend in land prices in the second half of the twentieth century (Glaeser and Ward 2009; Case 2007; Davis and Heathcote 2007; Gyourko, Mayer, and Sinai 2013). But to our knowledge, it has not been shown that this is a broad based, cross-country phenomenon that marks a break with the previous era.

This finding challenges the view that in the long run the price elasticity of housing supply is high as additional land for construction may not be readily available at constant cost (Shiller 2009, 2007; Grebler, Blank, and Winnick 1956). Through agglomeration spillovers, rising land prices may also have positive effects on economic growth (Davis, Fisher, and Whited 2014). Moreover, our findings have important implications for much-debated trends in national wealth and its distribution (Piketty and Zucman 2014). Bonnet et al. (2014) have stressed that the late twentieth century surge in wealth-to-income ratios in Western economies is largely due to increasing housing wealth. Our paper traces the surge in housing wealth in the second half of the twentieth century back to land price appreciation. This price channel is conceptually different from the capital accumulation channel stressed by Piketty (2014) as an explanation for rising wealth-to-income ratios. Higher land prices can push up wealth-to-income ratios even if the capital-to-income ratio stays constant. The critical importance of land prices for the trajectory of wealth-to-income ratios evokes Ricardo's famous principle of scarcity: Ricardo (1817) argued that, over the long run, economic growth profits landlords disproportionately, as the owners of the fixed factor. Since land is unequally distributed across the population, Ricardo reasoned that market economies would produce rising inequality (Piketty 2014).

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section I describes the data sources and the challenges involved in constructing long-run house price indices. Section II distills new stylized facts from the long-run data: real house prices have risen in advanced economies, albeit with considerable cross-country heterogeneity, and virtually all of the increase occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. These observations are robust to a number of additional checks relating to quality adjustments and sample composition. In Section III, we use a parsimonious model of the housing market to decompose changes in house prices into changes in replacement costs and land prices. We show that land price dynamics are key to understanding the observed long-run house price dynamics. In Section IV, we discuss the economic implications of our results. The final section concludes and outlines avenues for further research.

## I. Data

This paper presents a novel dataset that covers residential house price indices for 14 advanced economies over the years 1870 to 2012. It is the first systematic attempt to construct house price series for advanced economies since the nineteenth century on a consistent basis from historical materials. Using more than 60 different sources, we combine existing data and unpublished material. The dataset reaches back to the early 1920s (Canada), the early 1910s (Japan), the early 1900s (Finland and Switzerland), the 1890s (the United Kingdom and the United States), and the 1870s (Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden).

Building such a comprehensive dataset required locating and compiling data from a wide range of scattered primary sources, as detailed below and in the online Appendix.

### *A. House Price Indices*

An ideal house price index captures the appreciation of the price of a standard, unchanged house. Yet, houses are heterogeneous assets whose characteristics change over time. Houses are also sold infrequently, making it difficult to observe their pricing over time. Four main challenges are involved in constructing consistent long-run house price indices. These relate to differences in the geographic coverage, the type and vintage of the house, the source of pricing, and the method used to adjust for quality and composition changes.

First, house price indices may either be national or cover several cities or regions (Silver 2014). Whereas rural indices may underestimate house price appreciation, urban indices may be upwardly biased. Second, house prices can either refer to new or existing homes, or a mix of both. Price indices that cover only newly constructed properties may underestimate overall property price appreciation if new construction tends to be located in areas where supply is more elastic (Case and Wachter 2005). Third, prices can come from sale prices in the market, listing prices or appraised values. Fourth, if the quality of houses improves over time, a simple mean or median of observed prices can be upwardly biased (Case and Shiller 1987; Bailey, Muth, and Nourse 1963). In online Appendix A.1, we discuss different approaches to construct house price indices and the extent to which they deal with quality and composition changes over time in greater detail.

### *B. Historical House Price Data*

Most countries' statistical offices or central banks began to collect data on house prices in the 1970s. Extending these back to the nineteenth century involved compromises between the ideal and the available data. We typically had to link different types of indices. As a general rule, we chose constant quality indices where available and opted for longitudinal consistency as well as historical plausibility.

A central challenge for the construction of long-run price indices relates to quality changes. While homes today typically feature central heating and hot running water, a standard house in 1870 did not even have electric lighting. We aimed for the broadest possible geographical coverage and, whenever possible, kept the type of house covered constant over time. We normally chose data for the price of existing houses instead of new ones.

We are confident that the indices give a reliable picture of price developments in the 14 housing markets covered in this study. Yet we had to make a number of compromises. Some series rely on appraisals, others on list or transaction prices. Despite our efforts to ensure the broadest geographical coverage possible, in a few cases—such as the Netherlands prior to 1970 or the index for France before 1936—the country-index is based on a narrow geographical coverage. For certain periods, no constant quality indices were available, and we relied on mean or median sales prices. We discuss potential biases arising from these compromises in greater detail below and argue that they do not systematically distort the aggregate trends we uncover.

To construct long-run house price indices for a broad cross-country sample, we partly relied on the work of economic and financial historians. Examples include the index for Amsterdam (Eichholtz 1997) and the city indices for Norway (Eitrheim and Erlandsen 2004). In other cases we took advantage of previously unused sources to construct new series. Some historical data come from dispersed publications of national or regional statistical offices, such as the Helsinki Statistical Yearbook, the publications of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, and the Bank of Japan Statistics Department (1966).

We also drew upon unpublished data from tax authorities such as the UK Land Registry or national real estate associations such as the Canadian Real Estate Association (1981). In addition, we collected long-run indices for the price of residential land, the price of agricultural land, and construction costs to proxy for replacement costs.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the house price series, their geographic coverage, the type of dwelling covered, and the method used for price calculation. The paper comes with an extensive online data Appendix that specifies the sources we consulted and discusses the construction of the individual country indices in greater detail. Figure 1 plots the historical house prices country by country.

## II. Aggregate Trends

How have house prices evolved over the long run? In this section, we describe the global run-up in house prices in the twentieth century and its specific path over time. We show that real house prices in advanced economies have on average risen threefold since 1900 and that the overwhelming share of this increase occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. The long-run trajectory of global house prices displays a hockey-stick pattern: real house prices remained broadly stable from the late nineteenth century to World War II. They trended upward in the post-war decades and have seen a particularly steep incline since the late 1980s.

### A. A Global House Price Index

The arithmetic mean and the median of the 14 house price series are displayed in panel A of Figure 2. One recognizes that CPI-adjusted house prices stayed within a relatively tight range from the late nineteenth to the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In subsequent decades, house prices have broken out of their long-run range and embarked on a steep incline, resulting in a hockey-stick pattern of long-run real house prices. This specific path of global house prices is robust to different weightings and across regional subsamples and a constant-coverage sample.

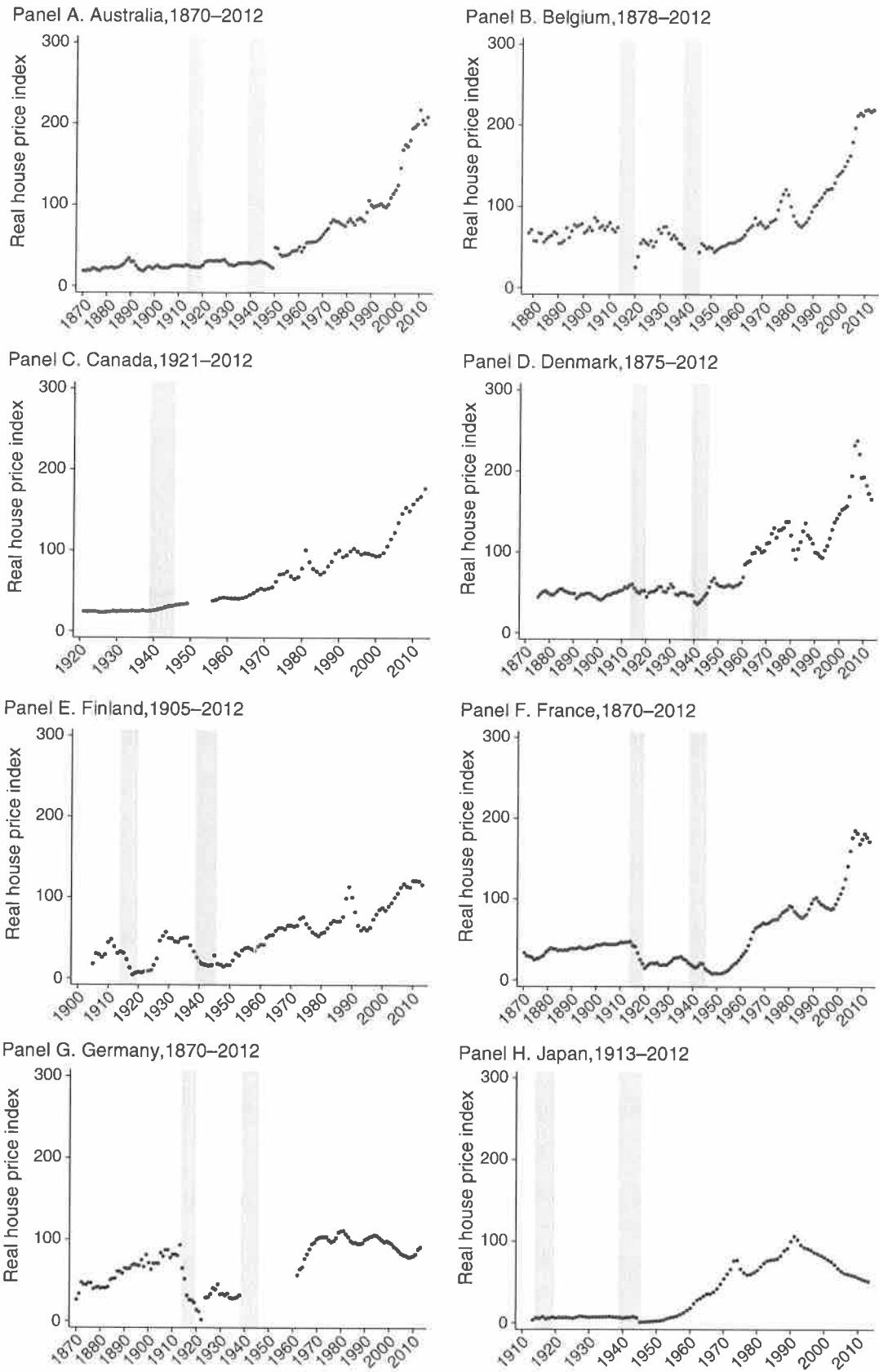
The relation between house prices and GDP per capita over the past 140 years exhibits a similar hockey-stick pattern. Panel B of Figure 2 shows that house prices remained, by and large, stable before World War I despite rising per capita incomes.

<sup>1</sup> For the sources and compilation of these time series, see online Appendix B. All auxiliary macroeconomic and financial variables come from Jordà, Schularick, and Taylor (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Real house prices by construction reflect ex post returns. We also calculated real house price indices using average inflation in the preceding five years to proxy for adaptive inflation expectations (see Figure 14 in online Appendix A.5).

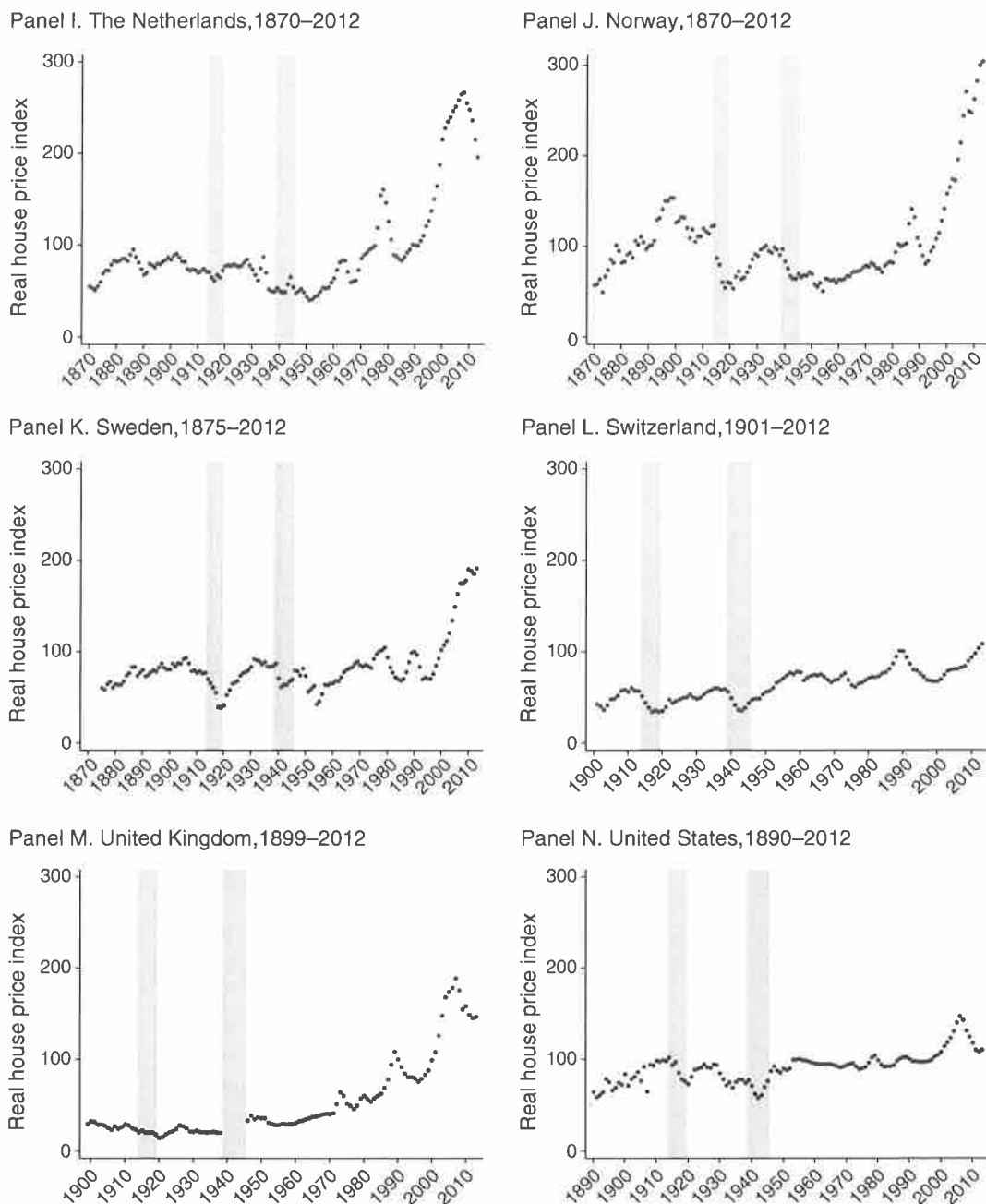
TABLE 1—OVERVIEW OF HOUSE PRICE INDICES

Country	Years	Coverage	Property vintage and type	Method
Australia	1870–1899	Urban	Existing dwellings	Median price
	1900–2002	Urban	Existing dwellings	Median price
	2003–2012	Urban	New & existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
Belgium	1878–1950	Urban	Existing dwellings	Median price
	1951–1985	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1986–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
Canada	1921–1949	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Replacement values (including land)
	1956–1974	Nationwide	New & existing dwellings	Average price
	1975–2012	Urban	Existing dwellings	Average price
Denmark	1875–1937	Rural	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1938–1970	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1971–2012	Nationwide	New & existing dwellings	SPAR
Finland	1905–1946	Urban	Land only	Average price
	1947–1969	Urban	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1970–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment, hedonic
France	1870–1935	Urban	Existing dwellings	Repeat sales
	1936–1995	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Repeat sales
	1996–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
Germany	1870–1902	Urban	All existing real estate	Average price
	1903–1922	Urban	All existing real estate	Average price
	1923–1938	Urban	All existing real estate	Average price
	1962–1969	Nationwide	Land only	Average price
	1970–2012	Urban	New & existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
Japan	1913–1930	Urban	Land only	Average prices
	1930–1935	Rural	Land only	Average price
	1936–1955	Urban	Land only	Average price
	1955–2012	Urban	Land only	Average price
Netherlands	1870–1969	Urban	All existing real estate	Repeat sales
	1970–1996	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Repeat sales
	1997–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	SPAR
Norway	1870–2003	Urban	Existing dwellings	Hedonic, repeat sales
	2004–2012	Urban	Existing dwellings	Hedonic
Sweden	1875–1956	Urban	New and existing dwellings	SPAR
	1957–2012	Urban	New and existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment, SPAR
Switzerland	1900–1929	Urban	All existing real estate	Average price
	1930–1969	Urban	Existing dwellings	Hedonic
	1970–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
United Kingdom	1899–1929	Urban	All existing real estate	Average price
	1930–1938	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Hypothetical average price
	1946–1952	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1953–1965	Nationwide	New dwellings	Average price
	1966–1968	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Average price
	1969–2012	Nationwide	Existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
United States	1890–1928	Urban	New dwellings	Repeat sales
	1929–1940	Urban	Existing dwellings	Hedonic
	1941–1952	Urban	Existing dwellings	Median price
	1953–1974	Nationwide	New & existing dwellings	Mix-adjustment
	1975–2012	Nationwide	New & existing dwellings	Repeat sales



(Continued)

FIGURE 1. HISTORICAL HOUSE PRICES, 14 COUNTRIES

FIGURE 1. HISTORICAL HOUSE PRICES, 14 COUNTRIES (*Continued*)

In the final decades of the twentieth century, house price growth outpaced income growth by a substantial margin.

Table 4 in online Appendix A.5 puts numbers on these phenomena. It shows average annual growth rates of house prices for all countries and for two subperiods. House price growth was about 1.5 percent in nominal and below 1 percent in real terms before World War II. After World War II, the average nominal annual rate of growth climbed to above 6 percent and to 2 percent adjusted for inflation.

The path of global house prices displayed in Figure 2 is based on an unweighted average of 14 country indices in our sample. Figure 3 and Table 4 in online

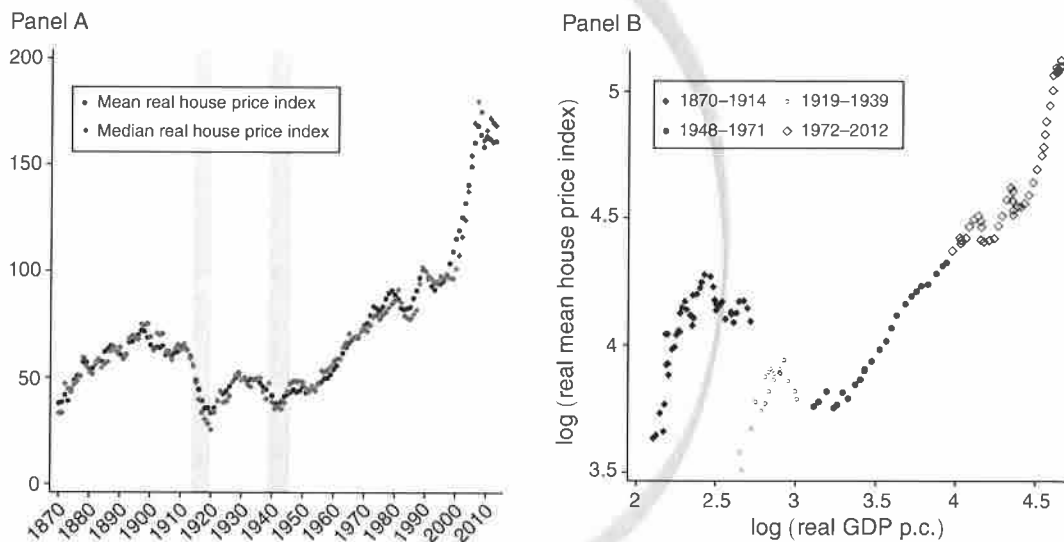


FIGURE 2. AGGREGATE TRENDS

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading.

Appendix A.5 demonstrate that there is considerable heterogeneity in the cross-country trends. In the long-run, real house prices merely increased by 40 basis points per year in Germany, but by about 2 percent on average in Australia, Belgium, Canada, and Finland. US house prices have increased at an annual rate of a little less than 1 percent since the 1890s; both the United Kingdom and France have seen somewhat higher house price growth of 1 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively. Figure 3 also shows that Japan has been an important outlier. It is the only country in which house prices significantly fell during the past two decades. It is therefore important to look at both the mean and the median.

The cross-country heterogeneity also extends to the timing of the surge of real house prices in the second half of the twentieth century. We identified structural breaks in the real house price series for individual countries using the methodology of Bai and Perron (2003). The structural break tests show that virtually all upward breaks occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, but the exact year when the heel of the hockey stick is reached differs from country to country (see Table 3 in online Appendix A.2). In 8 out of 14 countries, the structural break most likely took place in the 1960s and 1970s. In the United States and Switzerland, structural breaks in the series are dated in the 1950s, and in the 1990s or early 2000s in the cases of Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bai and Perron (2003) provide a test for the null hypothesis that the mean of a time series is the same over all time intervals versus one (or more) changes in the mean. In online Appendix Table 3, we flexibly allow for a maximum of three breaks. For some countries, the test signals more than one structural break, typically in the immediate post-World War II decades as well as in the 1990s or early 2000s.



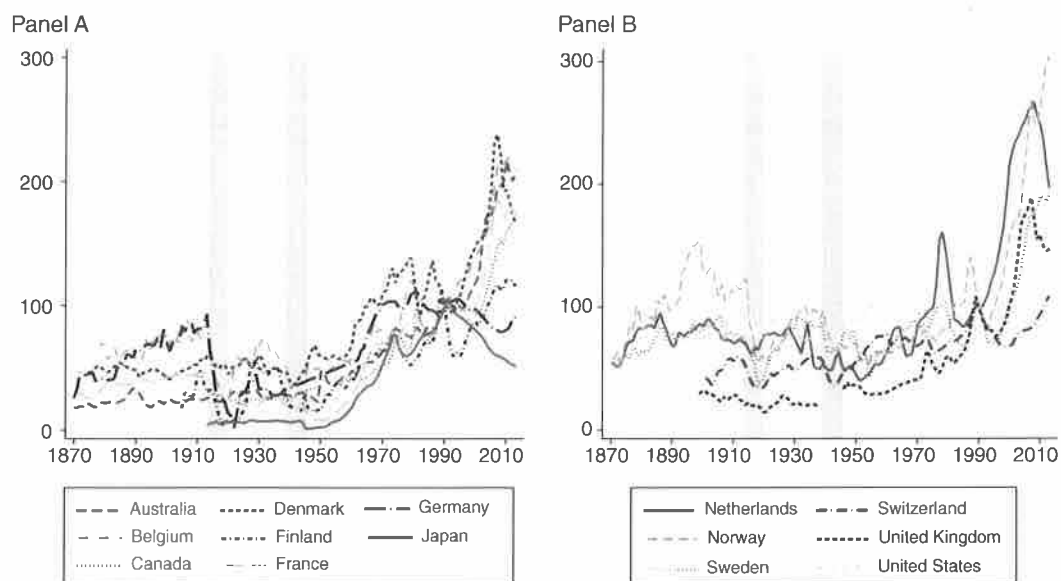


FIGURE 3. HETEROGENEITY

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading.

### B. Robustness Checks

Now that we have explored the long-run path of global house prices, we subject it to additional robustness and consistency checks. We address four issues: first, we demonstrate the robustness of these aggregate trends across different subsamples; second, we discuss if the aggregate trends could be distorted by a potential mis-measurement of quality improvements in the housing stock; third, the aggregate price developments could be an artifact of a compositional shift of the underlying indices from predominantly (cheap) rural to (expensive) urban areas over time; fourth, we ask if the strong rise in house prices was mainly driven by urban areas.

*Subsamples.*—It is conceivable that small and land-poor European countries have a disproportionate influence on the aggregate trends outlined above. We calculated population and GDP weighted indices (online Appendix Figure 9).<sup>4</sup> It turns out that house price appreciation was somewhat stronger in the small European countries than it was in the large economies in our sample, i.e., the United States, Japan, and Germany. Yet over the past 140 years, the overall trajectory is comparable. Data coverage starts at different dates for different countries. Online Appendix Figure 11 presents average trends for fixed country groups. Again, the aggregate trends discussed above are largely unaffected.

Finally, as our sample is Europe-heavy, the trends—in particular the stagnation of real house prices in the first half of the twentieth century—may be driven by the shocks of the two world wars and the destruction they brought to the European housing stock. However, trends are similar in countries that experienced major war

<sup>4</sup>We also tested if border changes systematically influence the picture (see online Appendix Figure 10). Online Appendix Figure 10 also includes a GDP per capita weighted index.

destruction on their own territory and countries that did not (i.e., Australia, Canada, Denmark, and the United States).

*Quality Improvements.*—A key challenge for the construction of long-run house price indices relates to changes in the quality of the housing stock. First, the quality of homes has risen continuously over the past 140 years. Indices that do not control for quality improvements will overstate the price increase over time.<sup>5</sup> The pre-World War II data warrant particular attention. The reason is that the most significant improvements in housing quality—such as running water and electricity—entered the standard home in the first half of the twentieth century and some of our indices in this period are based on mean or median prices.<sup>6</sup> This could induce an upward bias to our house price series *before* World War II. The strong increase of house prices *after* World War II would be largely unaffected as most data for this period are adjusted for quality improvements. In other words, the reliance on mean or median prices prior to World War II likely accentuates the aggregate trends discussed above.

Second, the composition of the housing stock may change in response to secular trends such as urbanization or the business cycle. While business cycle effects are unlikely to matter much for the long-run trends discussed above, the supply of (comparably cheap) low quality houses in cities could have increased with urbanization. If more low quality houses were transacted, mean or median price indices could understate the price increase that occurred before World War II. Narrative accounts and historical housing statistics offer some support for the idea that the rapid growth of cities initially went hand in hand with deteriorating average urban housing conditions (Porter 1998; Bernhardt 1997; Wischermann 1983; Kelly 1978).<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, there is very little information on trends in the overall quality-mix of transacted houses limiting our ability to quantify the effects with greater precision.

As an indicative test, we can compare house price trends for countries for which we have reliable quality adjusted price information with country indices for which the constant quality assumption is more doubtful. Figure 4 shows that the overall trajectories look similar.

All things considered, some uncertainty remains as to which of these two opposing effects dominates in the pre-World War II period. On the one hand, there could be a potential overstatement of price increases because of rapid quality improvements, but on the other hand, price increases could also be understated because of a deteriorating quality-mix. Researchers using our dataset in the future should

<sup>5</sup>The speed of the quality improvement varies over time and across countries. Davis and Heathcote (2007) estimate for the United States that quality gains amounted to less than 1 percent per year between 1930 and 2000. For Australia, Abelson and Chung (2005) calculate that spending on alterations and additions added about 1 percent per year to the market value of detached housing between 1979–1980 and 2002–2003. Stapledon (2007) arrives at similar conclusions. For the United Kingdom, Feinstein and Pollard (1988) argue that housing standards rose about 0.22 percent per year between 1875 and 1913.

<sup>6</sup>By 1940, for example, about 70 percent of US homes already had running water, 79 percent electric lighting, and 42 percent central heating (Brunsman and Lowery 1943).

<sup>7</sup>This could potentially affect our data for Australia, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom as these indices are not adjusted for quality changes and exclusively based on data for urban areas.

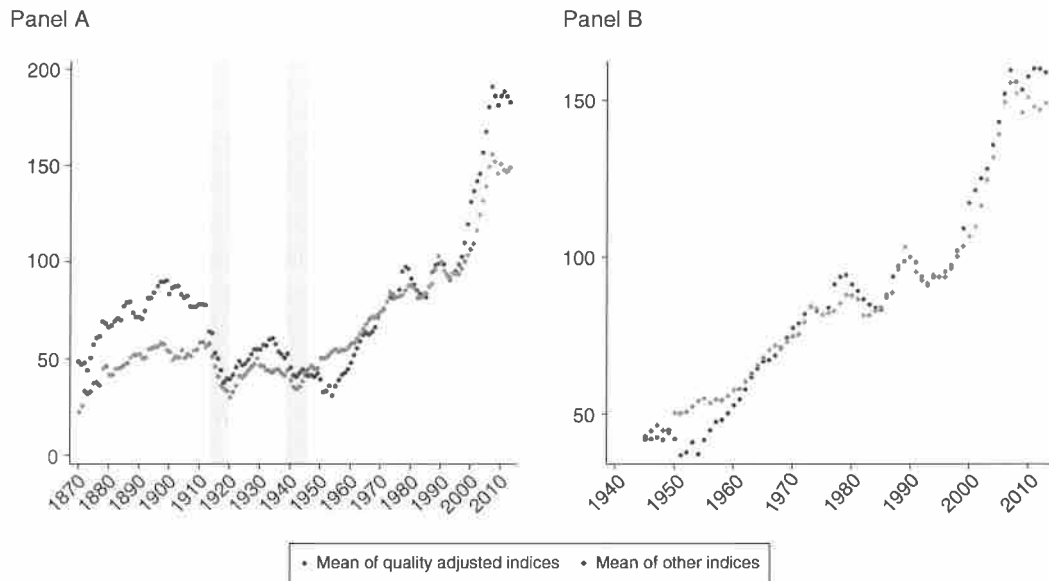


FIGURE 4. QUALITY ADJUSTMENTS

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading. The mean of quality adjusted indices includes the following countries: France, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden (panel A); France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland (panel B).

take into account that accurate measurement of quality-adjustments remains a challenge.

*Composition Shifts.*—The world is considerably more urban today than it was in 1900. About 30 percent of Americans lived in cities in 1900. In 2010, the corresponding number was 80 percent. In Germany, 60 percent of the population lived in urban areas in 1910 and 74.5 percent in 2010 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2015; US Bureau of the Census 1975). The United Kingdom is the only exception as the country was already highly urbanized at the beginning of the twentieth century.

If the statistical coverage of house price data shifted from (cheap) rural to (expensive) urban prices over time, this could mechanically push up the average prices that we observe, even if rural and urban prices remain constant over time. Panel A of Figure 5 plots the share of purely urban house price observations for the entire sample. It turns out that the share of urban prices is declining over time, mainly because many of the early house price observations rely on city data only. The indices broaden out over time and cover more and more nonurban prices. Compositional shifts are not responsible for the patterns that we observe.

*Urban and Rural Price Dynamics.*—It remains, however, a possibility that the strong rise in house prices since the 1960s was predominantly an urban phenomenon, driven by a growing attractiveness of cities. Urban economists have long pointed to the economic advantage of living in cities, explaining high demand for urban land (Glaeser, Gottlieb, and Tobio 2012; Glaeser, Kolko, and Saiz 2001). It is

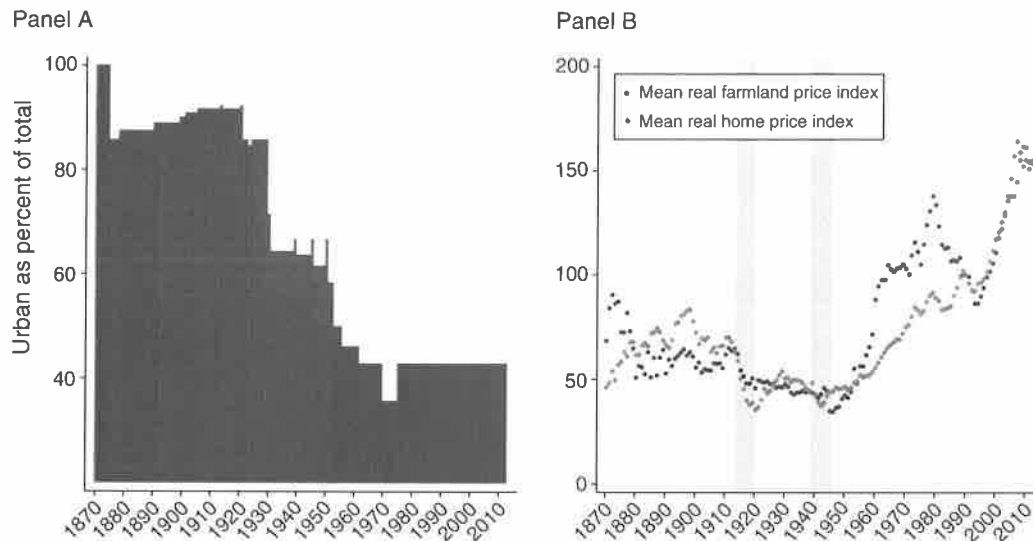


FIGURE 5. COMPOSITION EFFECTS

Notes: Panel B: Index, 1990 = 100. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading.

essential, therefore, to separately examine the evidence we have on price trends in rural vis-à-vis urban areas.

As a first check, we went back to the historical sources and collected data for the price of farmland. Farmland prices can serve as a rough proxy for nonurban prices if the price of rural land used for farming and the price of land used for rural housing move together in the long run. To compare average farmland prices (as a proxy for rural housing) with average house prices we further need to assume that, in the long run, construction costs move together in cities and rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Panel B of Figure 5 plots mean farmland prices for 11 countries against the average house price index for the same eleven-country sample.<sup>9</sup> Real farmland prices have more than doubled since 1900. This implies that the long-run growth in farmland prices was only slightly below the average growth rate of house prices (by about 0.3 percentage points per year). Clearly, farmland is cheaper than building land per area unit, but the long-run trajectories appear similar.

Figure 6 plots the development of urban and rural house prices for a subsample of five countries for the post-1970 period: Finland, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>10</sup> Figure 6 shows that both rural and urban house prices trended strongly upward in recent decades. While the increase in house prices has been most pronounced in cities, it is not exclusively an urban phenomenon.

<sup>8</sup>This assumes that land use regulation does not drive a wedge between the price of land used for farming and for residential purposes.

<sup>9</sup>Data on farmland prices are available for Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. See online Appendix B for sources and description.

<sup>10</sup>We divided regions in these five countries into urban and rural ones based on population shares. Regions with a share of urban population above the country-specific median are labeled predominantly urban.

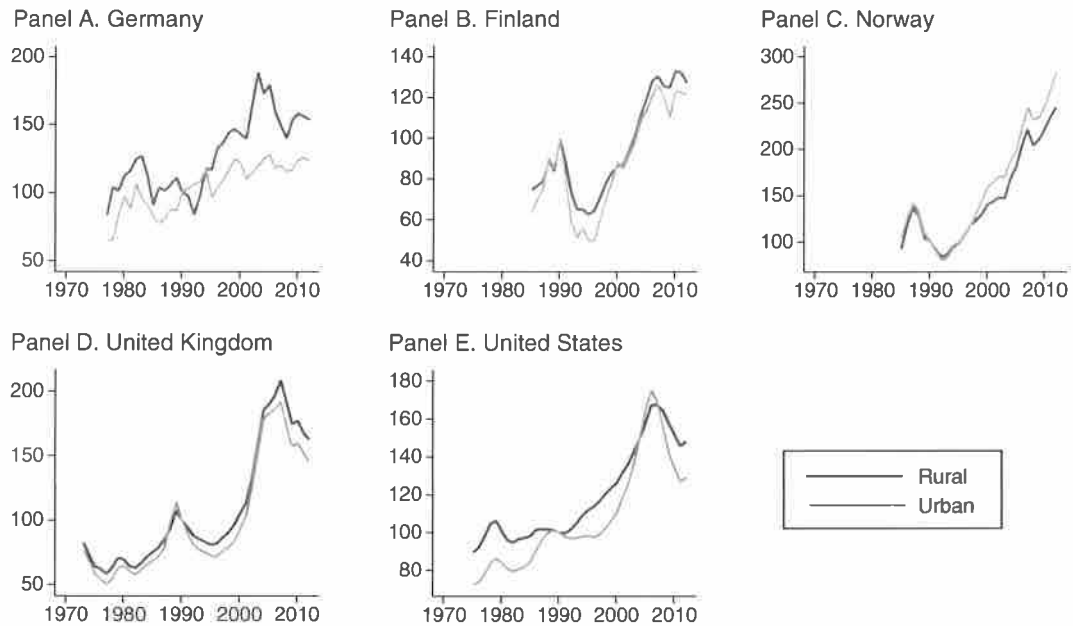


FIGURE 6. URBAN AND RURAL HOUSE PRICES SINCE THE 1970S, FIVE COUNTRIES

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100. Data for Germany 1977–2012, Finland 1985–2012, Norway 1985–2010, United Kingdom 1973–1999, United States 1975–2000.

### III. Decomposing Long-Run House Prices

What accounts for the surge of house prices in the second half of the twentieth century? As a house is a bundle of the structure and the underlying land, a decomposition of house prices into the replacement value and the value of the underlying land allows us to identify the driving forces of house price changes. If the price of a house rises faster than the cost of building a structure of similar size and quality, the underlying land gains in value. In this section, we introduce long-run data on construction costs (as a proxy for the trend in replacement costs) that we compiled from a wide range of historical sources, discussed in online Appendix B. Using a stylized model of the housing market, we then study the role of construction costs and land prices as drivers of the increase in house prices over the past 140 years.

Consider a housing sector with a large number of identical firms (real estate developers) who produce houses under perfect competition. The production of houses requires combining land  $Z_t$  and residential structures  $X_t$  according to a Cobb-Douglas technology  $F(Z_t, X_t) = (Z_t)^\alpha (X_t)^{1-\alpha}$ , where  $0 < \alpha < 1$  denotes a constant technology parameter (Hornstein 2009a, b; Davis and Heathcote 2005). Profit maximization implies that the house price  $p_t^H$  equals the equilibrium unit costs such that  $p_t^H = B(p_t^Z)^\alpha (p_t^X)^{1-\alpha}$ , where  $p_t^Z$  denotes the price of land at time  $t$ ,  $p_t^X$  the price of (quality-adjusted) residential structures as captured by construction costs, and  $B := (\alpha)^{-\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{-(1-\alpha)}$ , respectively.<sup>11</sup> The preceding equation describes

<sup>11</sup> Diewert (2013) uses a hedonic regression approach relying on micro data to decompose house prices into the price of land and the price of structures. Similar to Hornstein (2009a, b) and Davis and Heathcote (2005), Diewert (2013) applies a supply side analysis of house prices.

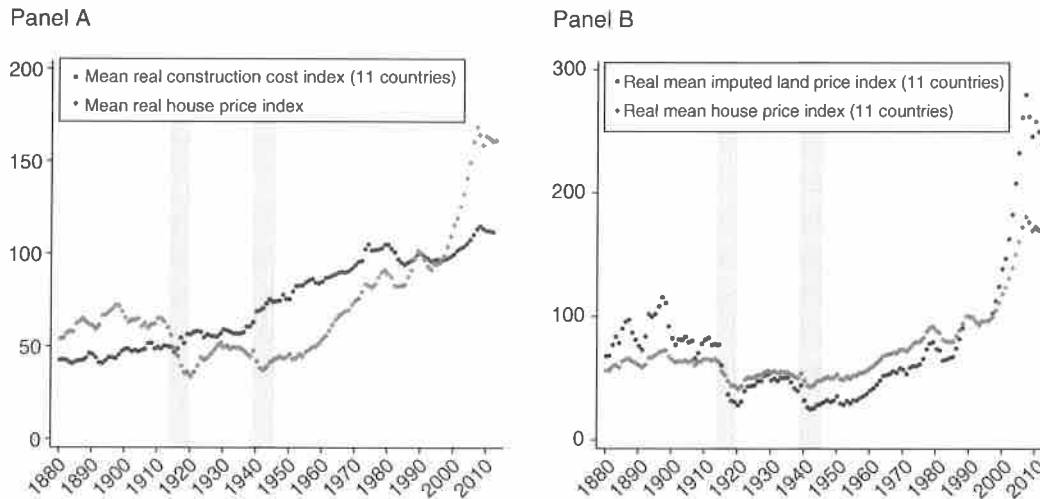


FIGURE 7. DECOMPOSITION: LAND PRICES AND CONSTRUCTION COSTS

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading.

how the house price depends on the price of land and on construction costs. The implied growth rate of house prices reads

$$(1) \quad \frac{p_{t+1}^H}{p_t^H} = \left( \frac{p_{t+1}^Z}{p_t^Z} \right)^\alpha \left( \frac{p_{t+1}^X}{p_t^X} \right)^{1-\alpha},$$

and the imputed land price can be traced out by employing

$$(2) \quad \frac{p_{t+1}^Z}{p_t^Z} = \left( \frac{p_{t+1}^H}{p_t^H} \right)^{\frac{1}{\alpha}} \left( \frac{p_{t+1}^X}{p_t^X} \right)^{\frac{\alpha-1}{\alpha}}.$$

With information on house prices and construction costs, equation (2) can be applied to impute the price of residential land. The decomposition therefore allows us to identify the relative importance of construction costs and land prices as drivers of long-run house prices.<sup>12</sup>

### A. Construction Costs

Panel A of Figure 7 displays a cross-country construction cost index side by side with the global house price index.<sup>13</sup> It shows that construction costs, by and large, moved sideways until World War II. Before World War II, costs were likely

<sup>12</sup>Other factors, such as sales taxes or building permit fees, may also affect equilibrium house prices. The imputed land price series based on equation (2) implicitly assume that the relative importance of these factors does not change over time. We illustrate this point in online Appendix A.4.

<sup>13</sup>Figure 7 starts in 1880 as we only have data for construction costs for two countries for the 1870s. Figure 15 in online Appendix A.5 plots historical construction costs for each country. Online Appendix B.1 describes the data sources and discusses the methodological challenges involved in constructing long-run construction cost series.

held down by technological advances such as the invention of the steel frame. Construction costs rose somewhat in the interwar period, but increased substantially between the 1950s and the 1970s in many countries, including the United States, Germany, and Japan. Among other factors, this may reflect solid wage gains (relative to labor productivity) in the construction sector.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, what is equally clear from the graph is that since the 1970s, construction cost growth has leveled off. During the past four decades, construction costs in advanced economies have remained broadly stable, while house prices surged. *Prima facie*, changes in replacement costs of the structure do not seem to offer an explanation for the strong increase in house prices in the second half of the twentieth century.

### B. Land Prices

Historical prices for residential land are scarce. We were able to locate price information for residential land for six economies, predominantly for the post-World War II era: Australia, Belgium, Japan, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the United States—for the latter we dispose of a derived land price index from Davis and Heathcote (2007). The land price series are displayed in Figure 16 in online Appendix A.5 and show a substantial increase of residential land prices in the last decades of the twentieth century. But a sample of six countries appears too small to make general inferences.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture and corroborate the trends evident in the primary residential land price series, we use equation (2) to impute long-run land prices combining information on construction cost and the price of houses. For this decomposition, we need to specify  $\alpha$ , the share of land in the total value of housing. Table 2 suggests that a reasonable assumption for  $\alpha$  is a value of about 0.5, but there is some variation both across time and countries. Figure 12 in online Appendix A.4 demonstrates that our results are robust to changing  $\alpha$  within reasonable limits.<sup>15</sup>

The average land price that we back out from this decomposition is shown in panel B of Figure 7 together with global house prices. Real residential land prices appear to have remained constant before World War I and fell substantially in the interwar period. It took until the 1970s before real residential land prices in advanced economies had, on average, recovered their pre-1913 level. Since 1980, residential land prices have approximately doubled.<sup>16</sup>

As a plausibility check, we compare imputed land prices with observed land prices for a subsample of four countries for which we have independently collected residential land prices.<sup>17</sup> Country by country comparisons of imputed and observed

<sup>14</sup>We calculated real unit labor cost indices for the construction sector based on national accounts data for Canada, France, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States (see online Appendix B.1 for details). In the 8 countries for which data are available, average real unit labor costs rose by 13 percent between 1950 and 1970 compared to an increase in average real construction costs of 15.2 percent.

<sup>15</sup>For the decomposition, we exclude Finland, Germany, and Japan since the house price indices for these countries in part rely on residential land prices.

<sup>16</sup>Figure 13 in online Appendix A.4 presents the robustness of Figure 7 with respect to the underlying production technology. The Cobb-Douglas price index rests on the assumption of an elasticity of substitution between land and construction services in housing production equal to unity. We also consider the case of an elasticity of substitution equal to zero (Leontief technology) in the online Appendix.

<sup>17</sup>Since our aim is to compare empirical and imputed data, we are forced to exclude the residential land price series for the United States (online Appendix Figure 16), which itself was imputed in a similar exercise by Davis

TABLE 2—SHARE OF LAND IN TOTAL HOUSING VALUE

	Australia	Canada	France	Germany	Japan	Netherlands	United Kingdom	United States
1880			0.25	0.13				
1890					0.40			
1900	0.54			0.18	0.40			0.21
1913–1914	0.43		0.30	0.20	0.43			0.20
1920								0.20
1930	0.40		0.30	0.17	0.52		0.23	0.20
1940				0.17	0.46		0.19	0.20
1950	0.49		0.32	0.17	0.65	0.15	0.17	0.13
1960	0.40		0.30	0.17	0.85		0.12	0.13
1970		0.48	0.30	0.25	0.86		0.15	0.19
1980	0.40	0.52	0.41		0.81		0.11	0.27
1990	0.62	0.47	0.42	0.36	0.90			0.40
2000	0.63	0.49	0.39	0.32	0.81	0.57		0.36
2010	0.71	0.53	0.59	0.37	0.77	0.53	0.54	0.38

Note: Dates are approximate.

Source: See online Appendix B.

land price data are shown in Figure 8. The imputed land price index tracks the empirically observed price data closely and displays virtually identical trends, most importantly a sharp run-up of land prices in the past three decades.

### C. Accounting for the Global House Price Boom

How important is the land price increase relative to construction costs when it comes to explaining the surge in mean house prices during the second half of the twentieth century? With data for construction costs and land prices at hand, it is straightforward to determine the contributions of land prices and construction costs to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century global house price boom. Noting equation (1), the growth in global house prices between 1950 and 2012 may be expressed as follows:

$$(3) \quad \frac{P_{2012}^H}{P_{1950}^H} = \left( \frac{P_{2012}^Z}{P_{1950}^Z} \right)^\alpha \left( \frac{P_{2012}^X}{P_{1950}^X} \right)^{1-\alpha},$$

where  $p_t^Z$  denotes the imputed mean land price in period  $t$ . During 1950 to 2012, house prices grew by a factor of  $\frac{P_{2012}^H}{P_{1950}^H} = 3.3$ , land prices increased by a factor of  $\frac{P_{2012}^Z}{P_{1950}^Z} = 7.5$ , while construction costs exhibited factor growth of  $\frac{P_{2012}^X}{P_{1950}^X} = 1.5$ . The share of house price growth that can be attributed to land price growth may therefore

and Heathcote (2007). We also exclude Japan as the Japanese house price index captures the price change of urban residential land plots (see online Appendix B). For Switzerland, we rely on an alternative house price series covering house prices in Zurich so as to be able to compare imputed and empirical land prices in Zurich (for details see online Appendix B.13).



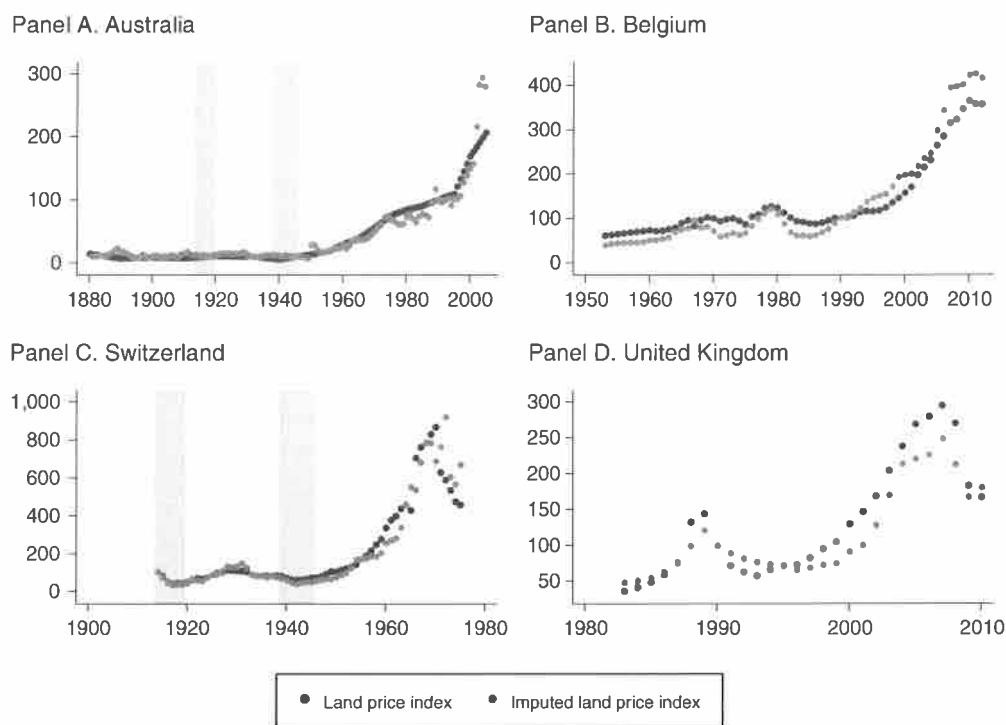


FIGURE 8. IMPUTED LAND PRICES: INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

Notes: Index, 1990 = 100 for Australia, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Index, 1914 = 100 for Switzerland. The years of the two world wars are shown with shading.

be expressed as  $0.5 \frac{\ln(7.5)}{\ln(3.3)}$ .<sup>18</sup> The overall result is striking: 84 percent of the rise in house prices during 1950 to 2012 can be attributed to rising land prices. The remaining 16 percent can be attributed to the rise in real construction costs, reflecting lower productivity growth in the construction sector as compared to the rest of the economy. Clearly, these results are sensitive to the choice of  $\alpha$ , the share of land in housing value. Using a lower bound estimate for  $\alpha$  of 0.25 and an upper bound estimate of 0.75 gives us a range of 76 to 92 percent of the house price increase between 1950 and 2012 that is accounted for by increasing land prices.

At a country-by-country level we find that the contribution of land prices in explaining house price growth ranges from 73 percent (United Kingdom) to 96 percent (Finland), while the median is 86 percent. The contribution of land prices to national house price growth is 77 percent for Denmark, 81 percent for Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden, 83 percent for Switzerland, 89 percent for the United States, 90 percent for Australia, 92 percent for Norway, 93 percent for France, and 95 percent for Canada.

<sup>18</sup>Taking logs on both sides of equation (3) and normalizing house price growth by dividing by  $\ln\left(\frac{P_{2012}^H}{P_{1950}^H}\right)$ , one gets  $\alpha \frac{\ln\left(\frac{P_{2012}^L}{P_{1950}^L}\right)}{\ln\left(\frac{P_{2012}^H}{P_{1950}^H}\right)} + (1 - \alpha) \frac{\ln\left(\frac{P_{2012}^X}{P_{1950}^X}\right)}{\ln\left(\frac{P_{2012}^H}{P_{1950}^H}\right)} = 1$ .

#### IV. Implications

Our historical journey into long-run house price trends has yielded two important new insights. First, house prices in advanced economies stayed largely constant until the mid-twentieth century and have risen strongly in the last decades of the twentieth century. Second, the late twentieth century surge in house prices was due to sharply rising land prices. About 80 percent of the increase in real house prices in advanced economies in the second half of the twentieth century can be explained by higher land values. In this section, we discuss a number of important implications of these findings.

The existing literature offers two opposing views on the long-term evolution of land prices. The classical position emphasizes that land becomes increasingly scarce as the economy grows and land prices rise as a consequence (Walras 1881; Ricardo 1817). The opposing view is that land is still in ample supply so that house price increases trigger a supply response which brings prices down again (Shiller 2009, 2007; Grebler, Blank, and Winnick 1956). Davis, Ortalo-Magné, and Rupert (2007) as well as Davis and Heathcote (2007) have already taken issue with the data underlying this view and show that US land prices have been on a steady upward trajectory since World War II. Our data add an international dimension to this debate by showing that the cross-country evidence is hard to reconcile with the assumption of constant land prices. The findings indicate the significance of the classical view on the evolution of land prices, at least for the time period after World War II. If both land prices and the cost share of land in housing production are rising over time, the supply response to rising home values may not bring prices down again. Hence, the view that the long-run price elasticity of housing supply is high as new land for additional construction is available at constant prices must be scrutinized.<sup>19</sup>

A second important implication has to do with much-debated long-run trends in wealth-to-income ratios. Piketty (2014) argued that wealth-to-income ratios in advanced economies have followed a U-shaped curve over the past century and a half. At the end of the twentieth century, wealth-to-income ratios—and with them measures of wealth inequality—have returned to pre-World War I levels. Piketty (2014) further hypothesizes that capital-to-income ratios may continue to rise.<sup>20</sup> Bonnet et al. (2014) have stressed that most of the late twentieth century increase in wealth-to-income ratios in Western economies can be ascribed to rising housing wealth. They argue that wealth-to-income ratios, excluding housing wealth, have flat-lined or fallen in many countries. Rognlie (2015) established that the (net) capital income share remained largely constant in the economy and only increased in the housing sector.

<sup>19</sup>Since building additional houses takes time, the price elasticity of housing supply tends to be low in the short-run. By contrast, assuming that prices of production inputs (i.e., the price of land and construction costs) remain largely constant, the price elasticity should be significantly higher in the long-run. This may no longer be the case if land prices are rising.

<sup>20</sup>Assuming a saving rate  $s$  of 10 percent and real GDP growth  $g$  of 1.5 percent, Piketty (2014) argues, the capital-to-income ratio  $\frac{K}{Y} = \frac{s}{g}$  would rise to 600–700 percent. Provided that  $r$  does not adjust, this would result in a rising capital income share ( $\frac{rK}{Y}$ ) and, given that capital is unequally distributed, in rising income inequality. These propositions have been debated recently (Krusell and Smith 2015).

Our findings suggest that higher land prices likely played a critical role for the increase of housing wealth in the late twentieth century. To check if this proposition is borne out by the data, we went back to the historical national wealth data to trace the share of land in the total value of housing over the twentieth century. Collecting data for the land share in housing wealth, we mostly relied on the national wealth estimates by Goldsmith (Goldsmith 1985, 1962; Garland and Goldsmith 1959) for the pre-World War II period. For the postwar decades, we turned to published and unpublished data from national statistical offices such as the UK Office of National Statistics, Statistics Netherlands (CBS), and Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2013). The resulting trends are displayed in Table 2. The data show a substantial increase of the land component in total housing wealth. In the United States, the land share in the total value of housing roughly doubled over the course of the twentieth century, rising from 20 percent on the eve of World War I to close to 40 percent today. In line with the land and house price trends we described in this paper, most of the increase occurred over the past 40 years. Even stronger effects can be observed in European countries such as the Netherlands and France.

The implications for the debate about the drivers of rising wealth-to-income ratios are profound. National wealth consists of components that can be accumulated, such as capital goods ( $K$ ), and a land component ( $Z$ ) whose quantity is fixed. Total wealth ( $W$ ) may hence be expressed as  $W = K + p^Z Z$ .<sup>21</sup> If the land price rises faster than the economy grows, i.e., if  $\hat{p}^Z > g$  with  $\hat{p}^Z$  denoting the growth rate of  $p^Z$ , the wealth-to-income ratio increases even if  $\frac{K}{Y}$  remains constant. This price channel of rising land valuations therefore differs from the quantity channel of capital accumulation stressed by Piketty (2014). The data presented in Table 2 imply that the land price channel played a critical role for wealth dynamics over the past century.<sup>22</sup> Scholars interested in the driving forces of long-run trends in wealth and its distribution must direct their attention to the striking path of land prices in the modern era.

In addition to distributional effects, land prices may also impact economic growth directly. In a dynamic stochastic general equilibrium model of cities, Davis, Fisher, and Whited (2014) specifically point to the role of agglomeration effects. Rising land prices induce firms to economize on land which leads to rising density of production. While agglomeration increases congestion and lowers growth, rising density also fosters total factor productivity growth through technological spillovers. The empirical analysis in Davis, Fisher, and Whited (2014) suggests that in the United States' case, the annual increase in the land price by 1.0 percent between 1978 and 2009 has increased the growth rate of per capita consumption by about 10 percent. Recent research by Liu, Wang, and Zha (2013) further demonstrates real effects of land price changes at the business cycle frequency.

<sup>21</sup> The price of  $K$  is normalized to one. Standard theory implies that this price is either equal to unity (Solow model) or constant in the steady state (capital-adjustment-cost model).

<sup>22</sup> The importance of land prices for wealth brings Ricardo's famous principle of scarcity to mind. Ricardo (1817) reasoned that economic growth disproportionately benefits the owners of the fixed factor land. Writing in the nineteenth century, Ricardo was mainly concerned that population growth would push up the price of corn so that the land rent and the land price would continuously increase. In the twenty-first century, we may be more concerned with the price of residential land, but the underlying mechanism remains the same.

## V. Conclusion

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy's house is transported by a tornado to a strange new plot of land. The story neatly depicts the fact that a home consists of both the physical structure of the house and the underlying plot of land. A core insight of our study is that the price of land has played the central role for long-run trends in house prices. After a long period of stagnation from 1870 to the mid-twentieth century, real house prices rose strongly during the second half of the twentieth century. The decomposition of house prices into the replacement cost of the structure and land prices revealed that rising land prices have been the driving force for the observed trends. Explanations for the long-run trajectory of house prices must be mapped onto the underlying land price dynamics and the comparatively minor role of changes in the replacement value of the structure.

Research interest in housing markets has surged in the wake of the global financial crisis. Despite its importance for macroeconomics, the study of housing market dynamics has been hampered by the lack of comparable long-run and cross-country data from economic history. We expect that the data presented in this study will open new avenues for empirical and theoretical research on housing market dynamics and their interactions with the macroeconomy.

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**Selected by Marguerite Humeau**

**Material from  
Raymond C. Kelly, “The Early Coevolution of War and Society,”  
in *Warless Societies and the Origin of War* (Ann Arbor: University  
of Michigan Press, 2000), 154–55.**



Fig. 4. A section of Panel VIII at Cournac. (Reproduced from Giedion 1962, 464. Reprinted with the permission of the National Gallery of Art.)

prevailed. Although other interpretations are possible, the one presented here shows that these depictions are readily intelligible in terms of the framework developed in this study. The archaeological data fit the model.

The fifth cavity of the cave at Remigia, Castellón, Spain, dated to circa 5000 to 3000 B.P. (Anzar 1954:317), contains a painting that has come to be called the "execution group," reproduced in figure 5. This clearly depicts an episode of pincushioning, showing ten archers with their bows raised—in unison and in jubilation—while an unarmed victim of vengeance lies dead or dying, pierced with ten arrows. This same scene is reproduced at a number of different caves in Spain dating to

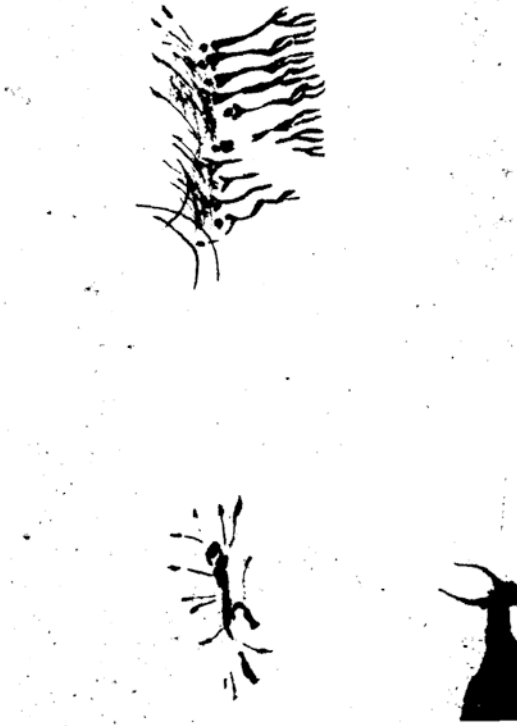


Fig. 5. The "Execution Group": A section of the fifth cavity at Remigia. (Redrawn from Sandars 1985:162.)

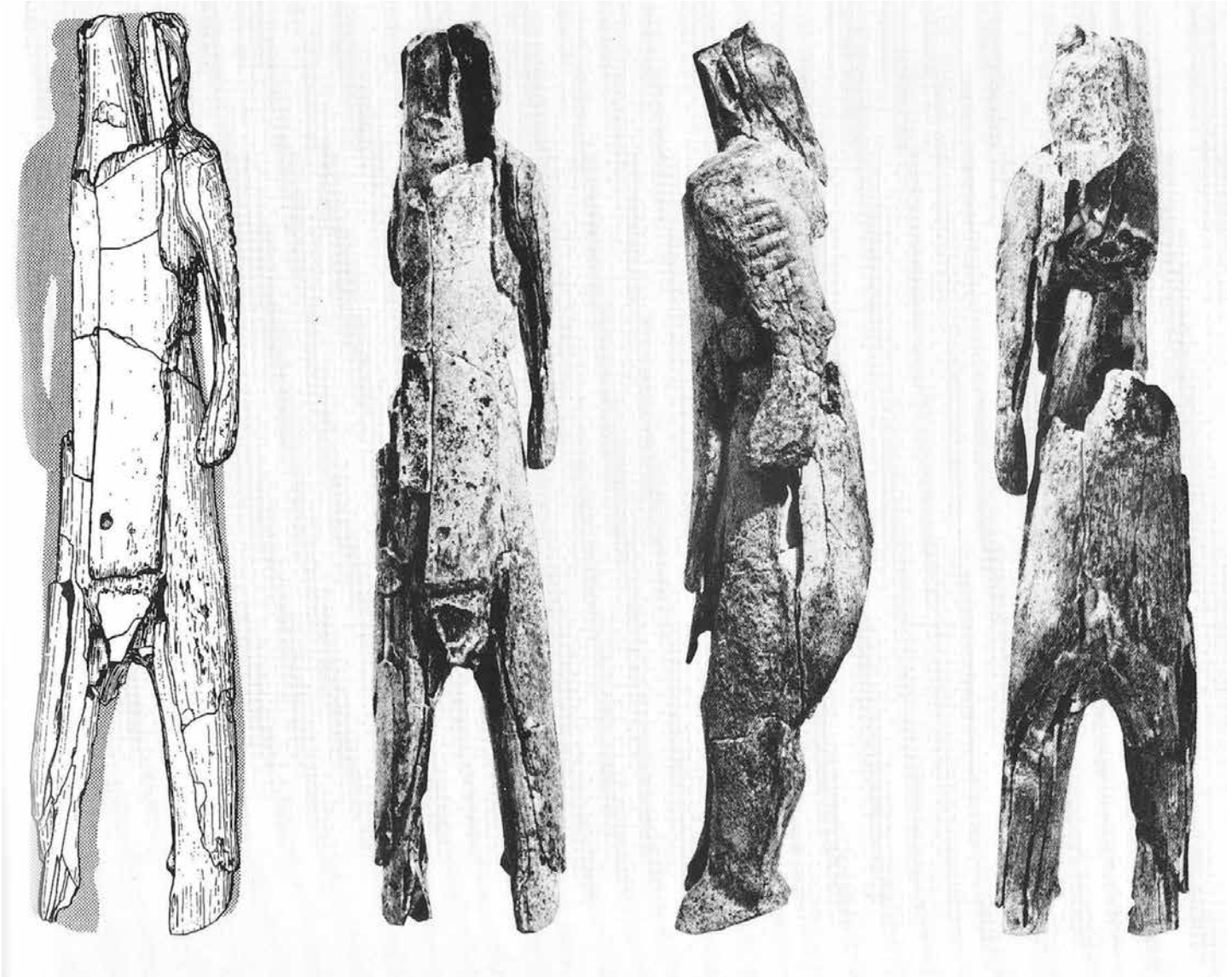
Mesolithic time period (Sandars 1985:164). Battle scenes involving two groups of archers are also depicted (161-63). However, the execution scene is particularly interesting because it so vividly portrays collective vengeance encoded in the practice of pincushioning. The reconstruction of what transpired between this scene and the reconstruction of what transpired between Cournac (circa 15,500 B.P.) and Castellón (circa 12,000 to 10,000 B.P.) is also noteworthy.

The archaeological record indicates that the Upper Paleolithic (circa 50,000 to 10,000 B.P.) was a period of general warlessness, with the exception of a few isolated pockets in which environmental conditions of a very limited distribution favored the origin of war. Jebel Sahaba (14,000 to 12,000 B.P.) represents the prime example. There is only one other Upper Paleolithic burial that provides evidence of pincushioning (defined by multiple projectile wounds) indicative of collective responsibility for vengeance. This is also from the Nile Valley, several hundred miles down-



**Selected by Marguerite Humeau**

**Material from  
Source unknown. Löwenmensch from Hohlenstein-Stadel at Lonetal,  
Germany.**



**Material from  
Source unknown. Sphinx on Ceramics.**

SPHINX ADD.5 - ADD.9

221



Sphinx add.5



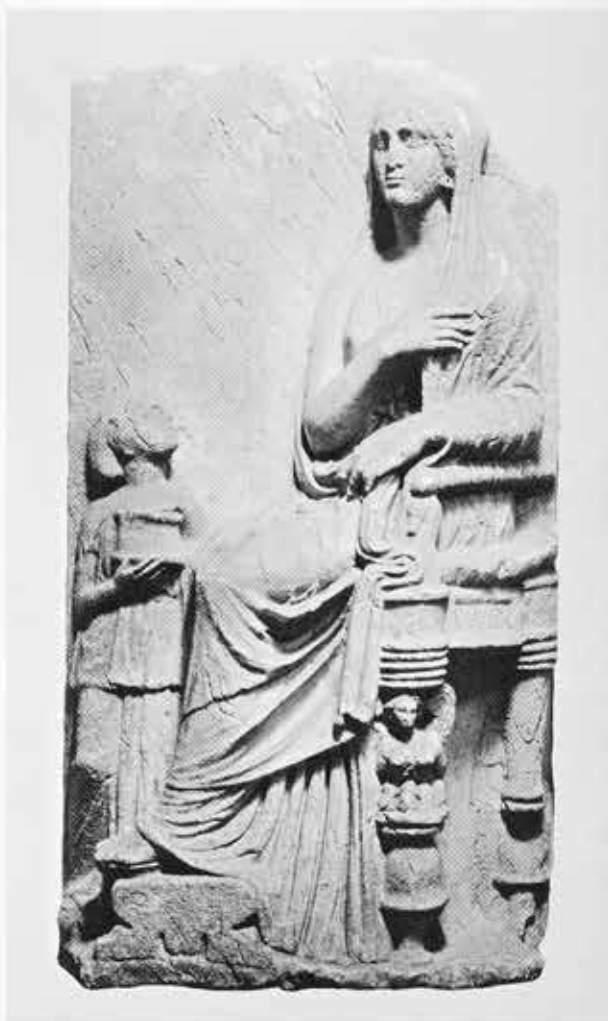
Sphinx add.7



Sphinx add.6



Sphinx add.8



Sphinx add.9



Sphinx add.10



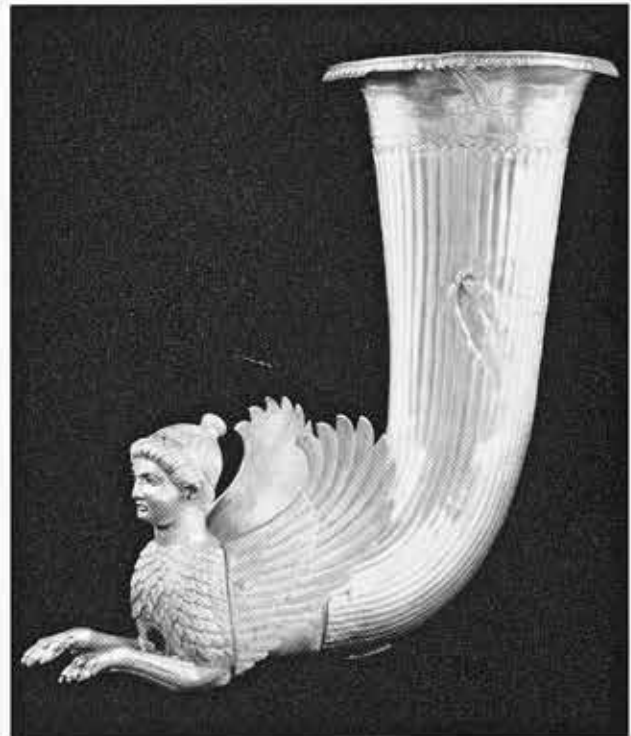
Sphinx add.11



Sphinx add.12



Sphinx add.13



Sphinx add.14



Sphinx add.15

**Selected by Marguerite Humeau**

**Material from**

**Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild, "Late Paleolithic Warfare in Nubia: The Evidence and Causes," *Adumatu: A Semi-Annual Archaeological Refereed Journal on the Arab World*, no. 10 (2004): 7–28.**

## Late Paleolithic Warfare in Nubia: The Evidence and Causes

Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild

*Abstract.* The earliest known evidence for organized, sustained warfare comes from a Late Paleolithic graveyard located about three km. north of the old town of Wadi Halfa in northern Sudan. Now deeply buried under Lake Nasser, the graveyard contained 58 burials, including men, women and children, of whom at least half died violently. A single radiocarbon measurement on a human bone places the graveyard at around 13,740 bp (uncalibrated). This paper explores the causes of this earliest known warfare, and concludes that there were two major factors involved: the unique Late Pleistocene environment of the Nile Valley and the adjacent desert, and the probable emergence of social groups larger than residential units that were competing for limited resources.

### Introduction

Conflict and fighting over food, mates or territory is perhaps normal human behavior. At least it occurs among many animals, and it should be expected among humans. Ethnographic studies confirm this, they record that conflict between social groups is found among almost all but a very few modern societies, and it occurs regardless of size of the group or level of organization (Otterbein 1989; Ross 1983). Those rare societies where conflict or warfare does not occur are usually isolated and lack nearby neighbors, and have very small populations (Keeley 1996: 25-39). It is also evident that there is a continuum in the degree and intensity of conflict with, at one extreme, the organized, repetitive conflict designed to eliminate or exterminate a competing group, and at the other end, those conflicts where a man or small group attacks a person or family for revenge or theft. To many, the latter is conflict, but not warfare, and might be called feuding, raiding or murder.

In the archaeological record, the evidence for conflict is extremely rare in pre-Mesolithic and pre-Neolithic contexts, al-

though violent death is indicated for several Upper Paleolithic burials in Western Europe, dated between 35,000 and 24,000 years ago. Some of these were individual skeletons with points embedded in the bones, while others were multiple graves suggesting a mass killing or evidence of epidemics (Keeley 1996: 37). The paucity of such finds have led some archaeologists to suggest that the first true warfare, defined as armed conflict between societies, began around 10,000 years ago, and was the result of competition for the limited land suitable for cultivation. According to this view, the first warfare occurred after the beginning of agriculture and settled villages were established (Kelly 2000: 1).

There is, however, persuasive evidence that vicious, prolonged and organized warfare was present much earlier in the Nile Valley, by around 15,000-15,500 years ago, and possibly as early as 22-24,000 years ago (based on calibrated radiocarbon age determinations). The evidence comes from two Late Paleolithic sites, one at Jebel Sahaba near Wadi Halfa in northern Sudan (Wendorf 1968a), the other at Wadi Kubbania near Aswan in southern Egypt (Wendorf et al. 1986). This Final Pleistocene warfare along

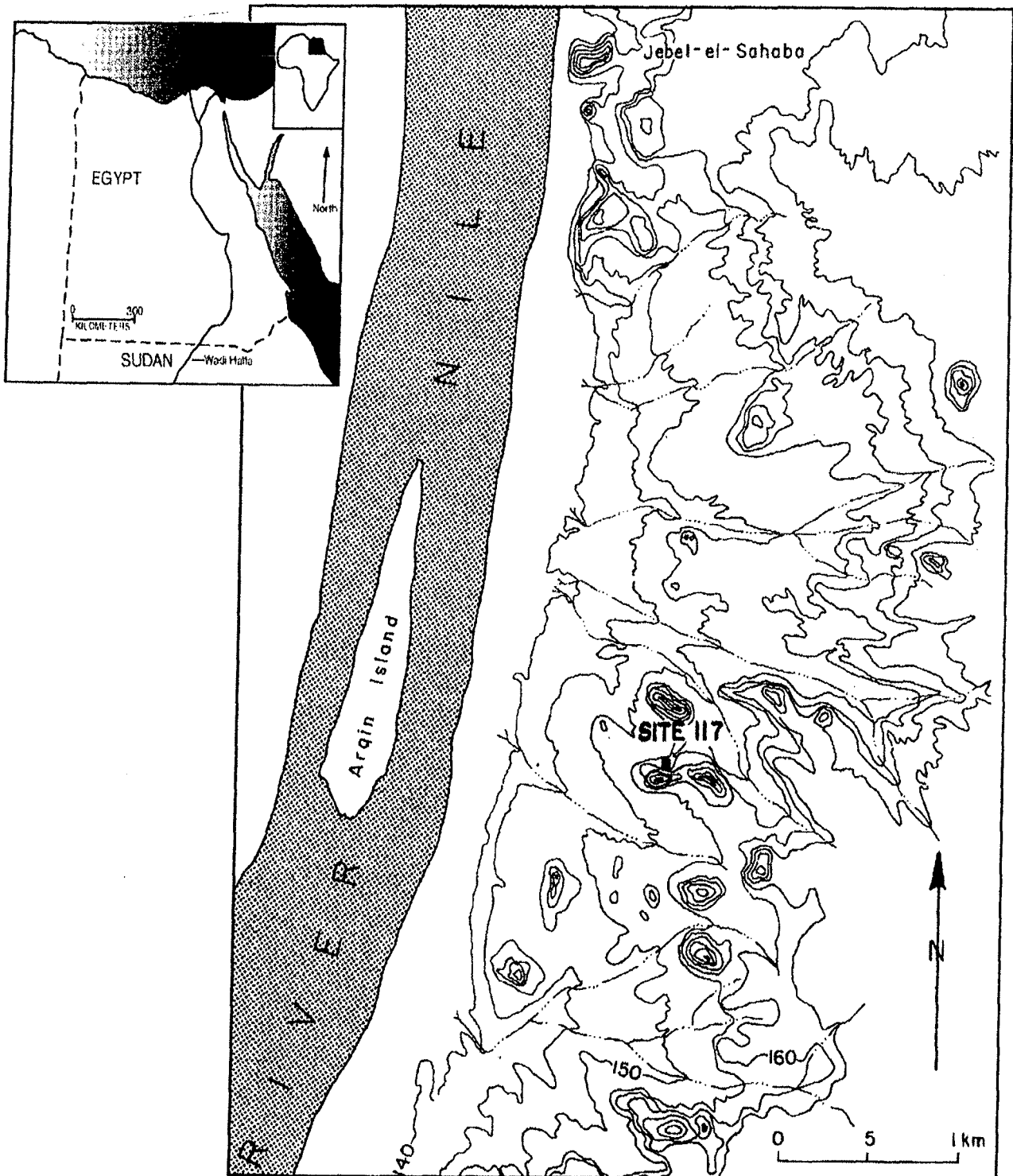


Fig. 1. Map of Egypt and Sudan showing locations of Site 117, a Late Paleolithic graveyard near Jebel Sahaba, Sudan (modified from Wendorf 1968a, p. 955).

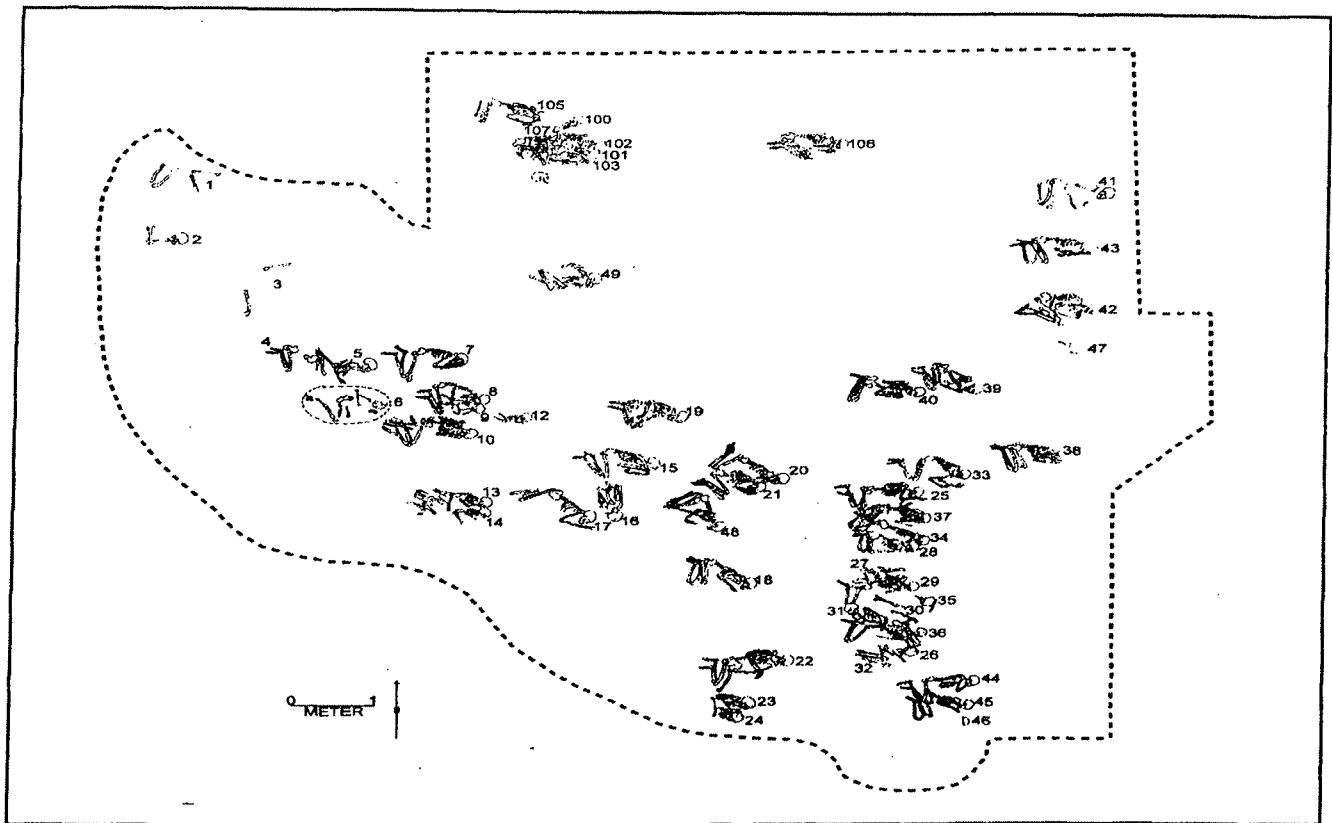


Fig. 2. Map of Jebel Sahaba graveyard showing locations and positions of excavated skeletons (modified from Wendorf 1868a, p. 956).

the Nile had nothing to do with settled villages or agriculture, but the factors that caused this warfare have not been well understood. When these two sites were first studied and published, our knowledge of both the archaeology and paleoenvironment of this area was at an early stage. This is no longer so, and there is now strong evidence to suggest that the combination of environmental and social phenomena coincided to become the major elements involved in the emergence of warfare during the Final Pleistocene in the Nile Valley.

### The Jebel Sahaba Graveyard

The Jebel Sahaba graveyard is perhaps the best evidence that warfare existed along the Nile during the Final Pleistocene. The grave-

yard was located in northern Sudan, about 3 km north of the now submerged town of Wadi Halfa, and about a km east of the Nile (Figs.1 and 2). Here, there is a small valley, open on the west, but bound on the north by a prominent hill known as Jebel Sahaba, and enclosed on the east and south by a series of smaller inselbergs. The graveyard, identified as Site 117, was located in and on the almost flat pediment at the foot of one of those small jebels.

When first seen, a few scraps of human bone and numerous thin sandstone slabs were visible on the surface. The graveyard was first noted in 1962, and a small test excavation at that time yielded the partial skeletons of three individuals, two adults and a small child (Burials C-1, C-2, and C-3). No further work was done until 1965, when most of the



Figure 3. View of excavations at Site 117, a late Paleolithic graveyard near Jebel Sahaba. Two group burials being cleared.



Figure 4. View of excavations at Site 117, a Late Paleolithic graveyard near Jebel Sahaba.

rest of the graveyard was cleared and 48 complete and partial skeletons were recovered (Figs. 3 and 4). The last study at the site was in 1966, when eight more burials were excavated, just before the rising water of Lake Nasser covered the area. The individual burials, the skeletal material, and the associated artifacts were described in detail in the published reports on the graveyard (Anderson 1968; Wendorf 1968a).

In their general morphology, the Jebel Sahaba skeletons are fully modern *Homo sapiens*. They closely resemble those of the so-called Cro-Magnon type in Europe and the Mechta variety from the Maghreb in northwest Africa (Figs. 5 and 6). All of these groups share robust skeletal frames, long crania, short faces with broad zygomatic arches, well developed supraorbital ridges, and low rectangular orbits (Fig. 7). The Sahaba mandibles, however, are distinctive in their large



size and their pronounced gonial eversion (Figs. 8 and 9), particularly in the males (Anderson 1968). Recent comparison of genetic landmarks on the dentition of the Sahaba material indicates that while they are superficially similar, they are very different from the Mechtoids of northwest Africa, and have a close resemblance to modern African Sub-Saharan populations (Irish and Turner 1990).

There is a complication concerning the number of burials excavated at Jebel Sahaba. One of the burials (No. 107), an old female, was complete except for the skull, but nearby was a skull without a body (No. 104). It is highly likely that the two go together, and they are combined as one burial in this discussion, resulting in a total of 58. The Sahaba burials include 11 infants and children, and 47 adults, of whom 20 are females, 20 are males, and 7 whose sex could not be deter-

mined. Eight are young adults (4 female, 3 male, and 1 unknown), 19 are "middle adults" (10 female, 8 male, 1 unknown), and eight are old adults (3 female, 5 male). The age of 12 of the adults is unknown (all fragmentary skeletons). The distribution by age and sex in this skeletal assemblage probably does not mirror the population from which it was drawn, because the age distribution seems skewed, with too few children, adolescents and young adults.

Located above the highest flood levels of the Late Pleistocene Nile, there was no strong stratigraphic evidence to indicate the age of the graveyard. There is, however, a single radiocarbon age determination of 13,740 bp + 600 years (Pta-116) on collagen extracted from Burial 43. The calibrated age would be between 15,000-15,500 BP. Another indication of a Final Pleistocene age for the burials

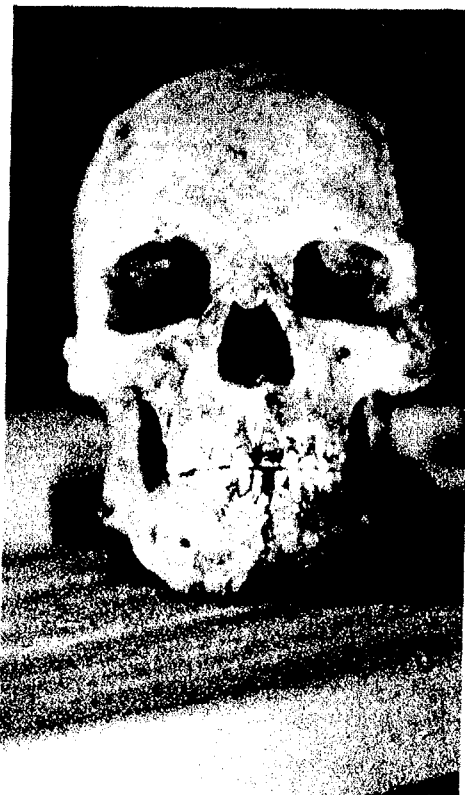


Figure 5. Front view of male skull from Site 117 near Jebel Sahaba.

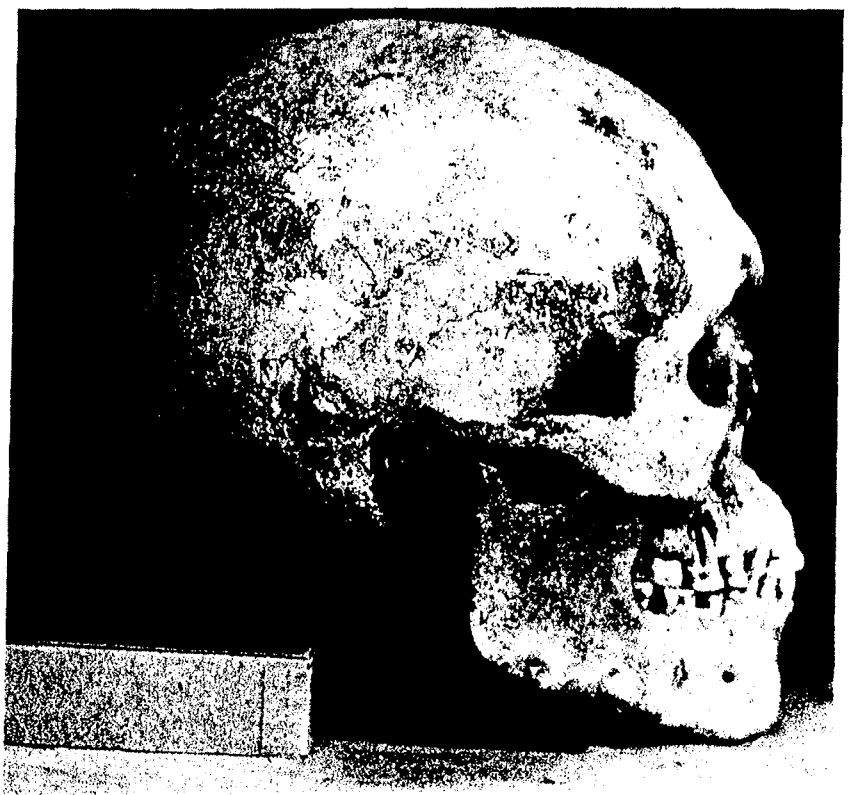


Figure 6. View of right side of male skull from Site 117 near Jebel Sahaba.



Fig. 7. Two mandibles from Site 117 near Jebel Sahaba. Left, female; right, male. Note pronounced gonial eversion on male.

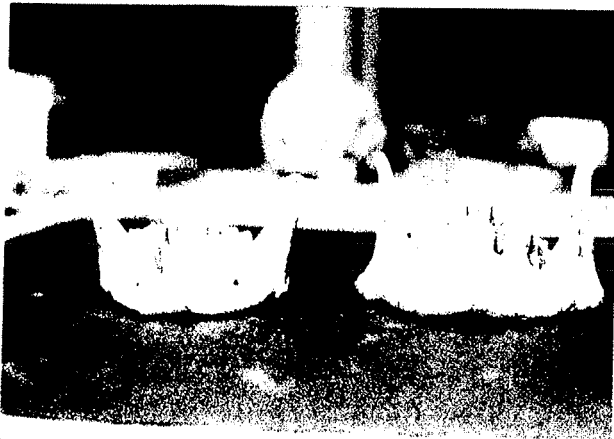


Figure 8. Two skulls from Jebel Sahaba graveyard (right, male; center, female) with recent Nubian skull (left).



Fig. 9. Site 117, Jebel Sahaba, Burial 17, adult male. Note pronounced mid-facial prognathism.

is the associated artifacts. These are closely similar to those recovered from sites assigned to an entity named Qadan, and known from many localities in the vicinity of the Second Cataract (Shiner 1968), and northward from there to Wadi Kubbaniya (Banks 1980). The Qadan is not well dated, but there are several associated radiocarbon dates ranging from 16,500 to 14,000 cal. BP, with most dates (and the stratigraphic evidence) suggesting that many of the Qadan occupations were near the more recent end of that range (Wendorf and Schild 1989: 814-816).

One of the most interesting features of the Sahaba graveyard is the evidence that many of the burials are individuals who died violently (Table 1). There were 116 flaked stone artifacts in direct association with 24 of the



Figure 10. Burials 20 (on left) and 21 at Jebel Sahaba graveyard. Points of pencils mark positions of associated artifacts.

Group	Total in Group	No. with Artifacts	% of Sex-Age Group
Children	11	4	36.4
Female, adult	20	9	45.0
Male, adult	20	10	50.0
Adult, sex unknown	7	1	14.3
Total	58	24	41.4

**Table 1. Jebel Sahaba Graveyard: Distribution of Artifacts by Age and Sex Groups (from Wendorf 1968: 993)**

burials and in probable association with two others (Figs 10 and 11). The associated artifacts also include six stone chips that were found embedded in the bones of five of the skeletons. In addition, 73 similar lithic artifacts were recovered from the fill around the skeletons. Many of these probably had been with the skeletons, but were not found until the screening of the back dirt. Although their direct association could not be confirmed, it is significant that there is no evidence of a nearby settlement from which these artifacts

could have been derived.

A variety of tool types are represented among the artifacts recovered with the skeletons. They include burins, notched pieces, truncated pieces, backed pieces, pieces with continuous retouch, scrapers, points, cores, and unidentified retouched fragments. Some of these may not have been weapons, as for example, the scrapers and cores. Also, some of the burins may be fortuitous. One "burin" was found embedded in the acetabulum and was definitely a weapon point. It might have



**Figure 11. Jebel Sahaba graveyard. Knife points to stone artifact between lumbar vertebra.**

Burial No	Est. Age	Associated Artifacts	Other Trauma
2	11 years	-----	-----
9	3-5 years	-----	-----
12	7 years	-----	-----
13	12 years	Two, one at base of skull	
14	7 years	Three, one at base of skull- one at back of mouth, one inside skull	cut marks on left femur
24	10 years	one, with cervical vetebra	
27	infant	-----	-----
47	6 years	Onem inside skull	-----
C-2	6 years	-----	-----
100	7 years	-----	-----
101	5 years	-----	-----

**Table 2. Jebel Sahaba Graveyard: Infants and Children**

been classified as a "truncated piece," since the burin spall may have been accidental. Most of the remaining artifacts, however, must be regarded as weapons, in spite of the variety of tool "classes" represented. Obviously, the system of descriptive classification employed has very little reality in terms of probable use.

None of these were "grave goods" in the sense of materials left with the deceased for use in after life, but were parts of projectiles and other weapons that, at least in most instances, were directly responsible for the death of the individual. Most (81 percent) of the artifacts were made on chert, with petrified wood and quartz distant second and third among the preferred raw materials. Almost half of the associated artifacts were unretouched flakes and chips, some of them naturally pointed, but most were only small pieces with sharp edges. In a normal assemblage all of these flakes and chips would be classified as debitage or debris, and none would be con-

sidered tools. Yet many of these pieces were recovered in positions where their use as parts of weapons is irrefutable. They were found embedded in several bones, inside skulls, and in many positions where any other explanation seems unreasonable.

Apparently, violence was a common event in Nubia at this time, or at least among this group. There appears to be no significant distinction between males, females and children (Table 1). There were eleven children in the group (infant to 12 years age; Table 2). Four of the children (36.4 percent) had artifacts directly associated, and of these three had pieces embedded between the skull and the cervical vertebra, "assassination style" (Burials 13, 14 and 24). The fourth (Burial 47) had a flake inside the skullcap. Two of the assassinated children were buried together, and both had additional associated pieces, including Burial 14, which had a piece at the back of the mouth, and a chip inside the skull. The same child also had cut

marks on the proximal end of the left femur (were the cut marks from sexual mutilation?). The frequency of violent death among the children was probably even higher, because among the seven remaining burials without associated artifacts, three (Burials 2, 27, and C-2) were poorly preserved clusters of bone scraps. If these three were omitted from the total, the frequency of violent death among children would rise to 50.0 percent.

Among the adult burials, several skeletons display clear evidence of vicious fighting. An example is a group of four individuals buried together (Burials 26, 27, 29, and 31), two old males (Fig. 12), an adult female, and an infant. They had a total of 30 associated lithic pieces, five with the female, and 8 and 17 with the two males. Only the



**Fig. 12.** Burial 29 at Jebel Sahaba graveyard placed on top of a group burial of from 4 to 8 individuals.

infant had no associated artifacts. The full intensity of the fighting is evident from the position data for the 17 artifacts associated with Burial 31: a) retouched microlithic point inside right chest cavity, adjacent to vertebra; b) retouched microlithic flake inside left orbit; c) unretouched microlithic flake in joint of right scapula and humerus; d) J-shaped geometric resting on left ilium; e) backed microlithic flake in right chest cavity; f) unretouched chip next to proximal end of left humerus; g) backed microlithic flake between left tibia and fibula; h) backed flake on right ilium; i) backed flake on right ilium; j) arch backed fragment (lunate?) on right ilium; k) unretouched chip on right side of thoracic vertebra; l) retouched flake on left side of thoracic vertebra; m) backed and truncated flake in lumbar vertebra just above pelvis, entered from front; n) unretouched flake in lower part of left rib cage, next to vertebra; o) fragment of backed flake against right side of thoracic vertebra; p) chip embedded in thoracic vertebra; and q) chip embedded in right pubic symphysis, entered from left side (Wendorf 1968a: 973-974). Clearly, they intended to kill him, but possibly not too quickly, and the pelvic area seems to have been a favorite target (Figs. 13-15).

The group of four noted above was not exceptional (Table 3). Burials 20 and 21 were a group of two middle age males with a total of 27 pieces either embedded or abutting against the bones. Burial 21, with 19 associated artifacts, was also repeatedly cut on both upper legs and upper left arm. Another pair, Burials 23 and 24, an adult female and a child, both had associated pieces, the child had a flake in the cervical vertebra, and the adult had three chips, one embedded in a lumbar vertebra, and two in the upper chest.

Burial No.	Est. Age	Sex	Associated Artifacts	Other trauma
6	Unkn.	M	-----	Cut marks on rt. femur
8	Old	F	-----	Healed parry fracures, left and right ulna
10	middle	M	-----	Recent healed parry fractures left ulna & radius
15	middle	?	-----	Cut marks, left femur
17	middle	M	One	-----
20	middle	M	Six	Healed fracture, right humerus
21	middle	M	Nineteen, two embedded in pelvis, left and rt. ilium	Cut marks, left and rt. femur, left humerus
23	middle	F	Three, one embedded in lumbar vertebra	-----
25	Old	M	One (probable) near leg	-----
26	Middle	F	Five	Healed parry fracures, left & ulna; trauma in thoracic area
28	Middle	F	One, inside skull	-----
29	Old	M	Seven	Cut marks, left femur
31	Old	M	Sevnteen, two embedded one in public symphysis, one in vertebra	Green fracture, left humerus
33	Middle	F	Eight	Notches, right ulna & radius, where point passed through
34	Young	F	Two	Healed parry fracture, right ulna
35	Unkn.	?	Six	-----
37	Middle	F	One	Cut marks, right femur
38	Middle	M	One	-----
42	Middle	M	One	-----
44	Young	F	Twenty-one	Healed fracture, left clavicle
45	Unkn.	F	One	-----
102	Middle	F	One	-----
103	Young	?	Two, one embedded in thoracic vertebra	-----
106	Young	M	One	-----

Table 3. Jebel Sahaba Graveyard: Adults with Artifacts or Other Trauma.

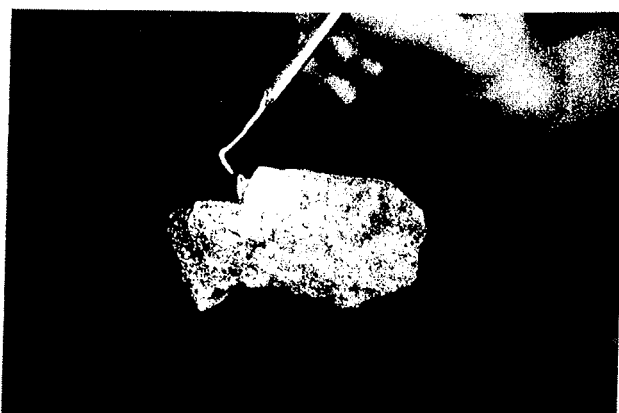


**Figure 13.** Healed "parry fracture" of left ulna, Burial 8 at Jebel Sahaba graveyard.

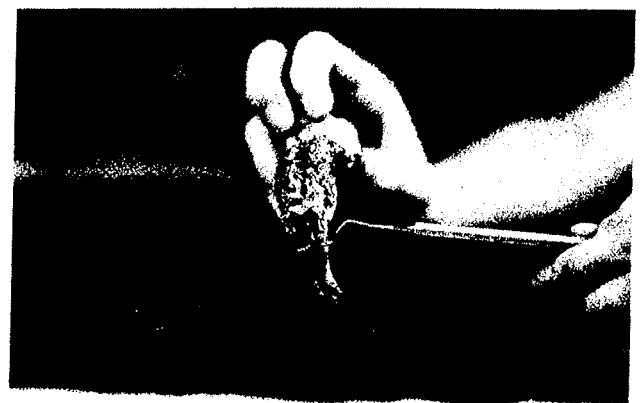
There appears to be no significant distinction between males, females and children in their exposure to violent death, evidently all members of the group were involved in conflict, not just the adult males (Table 1). The actual frequency of violent death among the burials in this graveyard is probably even higher, because eight of the burials with no associated artifacts (Nos. 1, 3, 4, 11, 30, 32, 46, and C-

1) all consisted of a few disarticulated bones or a skullcap, and either had been disturbed by later graves, or were partial bundle/secondary burials (Table 4). If these fragmentary burials were removed from the adult totals, the frequency of skeletons with associated artifacts would approach or exceed 50 percent among both adult males and females. An even higher frequency for violent deaths would result if the totals were further adjusted to include those burials where no associated artifacts were found, but where there were cut marks on the upper part of a femur (Burials 6 and 15). In addition, several of the skeletons (Burials 8, 10, 20 and 43), only one of which (no. 20) had associated stone artifacts, displayed prominent dark areas that were identified as blood stains from old hemorrhages and were the result of the breakdown of hemoglobin (Race 1968).

While there is no way to determine if the Sahaba graveyard records intra-group conflict between units of the Qadan community, or if the fighting was with some other entity (such as the Sebilian, which was partly contemporary and also occurred locally), we do know that Sahaba was not the only graveyard associated with the Qadan entity. Across the river, on the west bank opposite



**Figure 14.** Chip embedded in the ilium of right pelvis, Burial 21, Jebel Sahaba graveyard.



**Figure 15.** Chip embedded in left pubic symphysis of Burial 31, Jebel Sahaba graveyard.

Burial No.	Age	Sex	Comments
1	Unkn.	?	Fragments of skeleton, most removed by erosion
3	Unkn.	?	Only femur and humerus present
4	Middle	F	Central section removed by erosion
5	Middle	M	-----
7	Middle	F	-----
11	Unkn.	M	Disarticulated long bones only (bundle? or disturbed by Burials 13 and 14?)
16	Old	F	-----
18	Old	M	-----
19	Old	M	-----
22	Middle	F	-----
30	Unkn.	?	Disarticulated femurs and fibula, possibly disturbed by later group burial.
32	Unkn.	?	Disarticulated leg bones ongy, disturbed by Burial 26
36	Young	F	-----
39	Middle	M	-----
40	Young	M	-----
41	Young	M	-----
43	Unkn.	F	-----
46	Unkn.	?	Fragment of skull ongy
36	Unkn.	M	Position f hand suggests right wrist possibly broken
36	Unkn.	M	Artifacts found in fill, possibly associated
36	Unkn.	?	Only fragments of bone
36	Unkn.	F	Cranium only, probably belongs to Burial 107
36	Young	F	Cranium missing, probably Burial to 104 cranium

**Table 4. Jebel Sahaba Graveyard: Adults Without Associated Artifacts or Other Evidence of Trauma.**

Wadi Halfa, was a graveyard with 39 skeletons of probable Qadan association (Armelagos et al. 1965), and farther down stream at Tushka, north of Abu Simbel, was another graveyard with 19 Qadan burials (Wendorf 1968b). Except for one skeleton with an associated lithic artifact in the west bank Halfa

graveyard, none of these show evidence of violence.

Most of the Sahaba burials were interred on the left side, head to the east, facing south, hands to the face, and knees flexed with heels to or near buttocks. There were, however, a variety of exceptions. One was





placed on the right side; four were on their backs, one of which had the head to the northwest, facing southeast. One old adult male (Burial 29, Fig. 12) was on the stomach, head to the east, and face down. Nine burials had their heads to the southeast, and one head was to the northeast. There does not appear to be any correlation between burial position and age, sex or signs of trauma. Burial 29, the one on his stomach, had seven associated pieces. Two of the burials with the highest number of associated artifacts (Burials 21, a middle age male with 19 pieces, and 44, a young adult female with 21 pieces) were both placed like the majority, on left side, head to east, facing south. The burial with the next highest number of associated artifacts (Burial 31 with 17 pieces), an old adult male, was placed on his back, head to the northwest, and facing southeast.

The fact that there are large graveyards is of interest, because all earlier (pre Qadan) burials in Nubia occur as an individual or a group of two or three skeletons. Since Qadan sites are not significantly larger than those of earlier entities, why then, did they start burying their dead in large graveyards? A reasonable explanation is that the shift to large burial areas reflects a change in organization toward a social unit larger than the residential band. If this is true, the Sahaba graveyard probably was used by several different residential groups. Furthermore, that only one of the three large graveyards had significant evidence of violence supports the possibility that all of the burials at Jebel Sahaba were individuals who died violently, and that the associated artifacts in the non-violent burials at Sahaba were missed during the excavations. If so, group survival was not threatened by the high frequency violent deaths, because the Sahaba skeletons were drawn from a population larger than that evident at

the Sahaba graveyard.

If Sahaba was not a graveyard restricted to individuals who died violently, then the high incidence of conflict would undoubtedly represent an abnormal situation that no group could long endure. It seems likely that a mortality rate of this extent, involving both the children and productive females, would lead to the extinction of the group if continued for more than a few generations. Normal mortality rates for hunting and gathering groups range from 12 percent to 20 percent for adolescents, and from 35 to 70 percent for young adults (Saxe 1966).

There are several lines of evidence to indicate that the violent deaths at Jebel Sahaba did not occur in a single battle, but represented many conflicts over a considerable period of time. This is well illustrated by the stratigraphic positions of the burials, several of which were clearly disturbed by pits dug for the placement of later burials. Also, the disturbed articulation of the earlier burials indicates that enough time had passed for decay to occur before the older body was disturbed.

Additional evidence of sustained violence may be indicated by the healed or almost healed "parry" fractures of the ulna and/or radius on six burials (Nos. 8, 10, 20, 26, 29, 34; Fig. 13). While parry fractures can occur accidentally with a bad fall or during "stick fighting," in this context it seems more likely that they occurred while blocking a blow during a fight. Two of these (Burials 8 and 10) did not have associated artifacts. These suggest that conflict was not a rare event, but may have been a routine, perhaps continuous, part of life during the period the Sahaba graveyard was in use.

### The Kubbaniya Skeleton

A very interesting, nearly complete skele-

ton found near the mouth of Wadi Kubbaniya, about 10 km north of Aswan, adds another dimension to our discussion of conflict and warfare among Late Paleolithic groups in the Nubian Nile Valley (Wendorf et al. 1986). When first seen, the skull and the lower limbs of the Kubbaniya skeleton were exposed on the surface, but the rest of the skeleton was embedded in a rock-hard, carbonate cemented block of sediment eroding from a high remnant of the Middle Paleolithic Valley Fill (Schild and Wendorf 1986). At an elevation of ca. 105 m asl, and some 15 m above the modern floodplain, the eroded remnant of these upper Middle Paleolithic silts record an interval of silt accumulation that is believed to have begun after the Last Interglacial, perhaps between 70,000 and 65,000 years ago, and ended between 50,000 and 40,000 years ago. Several late Middle Paleolithic sites of that age occur in these silts near the burial. The outline of a burial pit or trench was noted when the skeleton was first discovered, but largely because of the firmly cemented sediments in the pit, it was thought that the skeleton might be of Middle Paleolithic age. That idea was rejected, however, when during cleaning of the skeleton in the laboratory two lightly retouched opposed platform bladelets were discovered inside the abdominal cavity, against the lumbar vertebra.

It was concluded that the skeleton was resting in a pit that had been dug into the eroded top of the Middle Paleolithic silts, and that carbonate brought in by seasonal flooding during the early Late Paleolithic had cemented the sediments of the pit. There are no associated radiocarbon dates, but during the work at Wadi Kubbaniya, the Late Paleolithic sedimentary sequence in the Wadi was studied in minute detail, and dated with a large suite of radiocarbon measure-

ments. This dated stratigraphy and the typology of the bladelets suggest that the burial occurred after 30,000 and before 20,000 years ago, and was probably between 24,000 and 22,000 calibrated radiocarbon years old (Schild and Wendorf 1986; Wendorf and Schild 1986: 73-74).

Apparently an isolated occurrence, there is no evidence for a nearby contemporary settlement, however, the area between the burial and the river had been so extensively eroded that any traces of such an occupation would have been destroyed. The skeleton was a strong, young adult male, between 20 and 25 years old, that had been placed in the pit, extended on its stomach, face down, with the head to the east and arms to the side. The position of the legs is not known, but the proximal portion of the right femur suggests that the legs were extended. A face-down extended position is not common among Late Paleolithic burials, but is not unknown. It was used on Burial 29 at Jebel Sahaba (although one leg of that burial was semi-flexed). The early Upper Paleolithic skeleton at Nazlet Khater was extended, but face up (Vermeersch et al. 1984: 283), as were also three of the Wadi Halfa skeletons (Saxe 1966: 6). At Jebel Sahaba the strongly preferred position was on the left side with head to the east.

Either of the two bladelets found in the abdominal cavity could have caused fatal hemorrhage. Both of the bladelets were on the left side, one between the ribs and the lumbar vertebra at the abdominal aorta, and the other near the left kidney and aorta (Angel and Kelley 1986: 62). Both bladelets had apparently entered the body from the back.

This individual had been in at least two other likely conflict situations, each separated from the others by at least several months,

if not longer. There was a healed parry fracture of the right ulna, and a more recent event represented by a small chip of stone embedded in the left humerus and partially healed. This, together with the evidence of prolonged if not continuous hostility at Jebel Sahaba, suggests that sustained conflict also may have existed at Wadi Kubbania several thousand years prior to that recorded at Jebel Sahaba. What were the factors that contributed to this conflict? Were they the same for both Kubbania and Sahaba?

### Why Did the Conflict Occur?

We propose that two factors were the primary causes of the sustained conflict seen during the Late Paleolithic in the Nile Valley: a very restricted environment that confined the people in an area with limited resources; and packing of the area by a variety of cultural entities. Unable to move when other groups encroach, because of the deserts on both sides of the river, and the packing in the best areas by other groups both upstream and down, their only option was to fight.

**The Environmental Setting.** During Oxygen Isotope Stages 2, 3 and 4, from about 65,000 to 12,000 years ago, northeastern Africa was hyperarid. This included the Nile Valley and the adjacent deserts of northern Sudan and Egypt (Wendorf et al. 1993). The Eastern Sahara during this period appears to have been devoid of life, there is no evidence of vegetation, animals or people.

It was also drier in the headwaters area of the Nile, and many of the lakes in Central and East Africa contained little or no water (Gillespie, et al. 1980; Kutzbach and Street-Perrott 1985; Street-Perrott and Roberts 1983). The prolonged drought in East and Central Africa must have had a profound ef-

fect on the people living there. As a consequence, some groups might have moved to the Nile where permanent water was available, forcing those who were already there to move farther north, to be repeated again and again in a chain-like sequence moving downstream to Nubia in northern Sudan and southern Egypt.

With less rainfall, the Nile was much smaller, perhaps around 20 percent of today, and flowed as a braiding and aggrading stream rather than the massive river of today (Schild and Wendorf 1989; Wendorf and Schild 1989). It was also a period of colder temperatures, of glacial advance in the higher latitudes of Europe and North America, and in the mountains of East and Central Africa. Because of the colder temperatures, the tree line was lower, there was less vegetation, and more frost action than today. Despite the general aridity, there were seasonal rains, probably in the summer as today. As a consequence of the frost action and the limited plant cover, the runoff water from these seasonal rains carried a heavy sediment load, which was deposited downstream in Sudan and Egypt where the Valley was filled with silt, to an elevation of 30+ m (at Wadi Halfa) and 20+ m (at Aswan and Wadi Kubbania) above the modern floodplain.

During this long period of hyperarid climate, with lifeless deserts bounding this smaller Nile on both sides, the only place where people could live was in and along the Nile floodplain. Beyond the edge of the then floodplain there was only desert, lacking water and devoid of life. Not surprisingly, there are no traces of human settlement anywhere in the desert during this entire interval, although there are numerous sites on the floodplain that were occupied at this time. Despite the presence of numerous human settle-

ments, however, even the floodplain in Nubia had a limited carrying capacity, as is indicated by the paucity of animal species present, the kinds of food that were eaten by the Paleolithic people, and the concentration of their sites in a few favorable localities.

Details of the food economy of some of the groups who lived in this area are known in considerable detail, thanks to the preservation at the sites excavated in Wadi Kubbania (Hillman et al. 1989). The major game animals were wild cattle, hartebeest, and gazelle, and occasionally, hippo. Crowded to the edge of the floodplain by the rising water, the cattle, hartebeest, and gazelle were heavily hunted during the seasonal flood (Wendorf et al. 1997). For the rest of the year they were occasionally taken, but there is no evidence that large animals were an important source of food at Kubbania.

In the embayment of Wadi Kubbania fishing was a major economic activity, particularly during the spawn that occurred in the early phase of the flood (Gautier and Van Neer 1989). Fishing was also important at the cutoff pools during and immediately after the retreat of the flood. During both periods fish were taken in large numbers, some had their heads removed and the remainder of the fish taken elsewhere, and some appear to have been smoked for later consumption. Good fishing areas, however, were limited to embayments, where the spawning fish would congregate, leave their eggs, and later the hatchlings could feed on the then submerged vegetation of the floodplain.

In the late fall, after the floodplain fishing was over, the Kubbania people turned to wetland tubers as the major food resource. These tubers, however, required considerable effort to collect and process for human consumption. Nut grass tubers grew abundantly

on the floodplain flats, and typha occurred in the numerous ponds after the flood. Both plants were collected in large quantities, and when mature both also had to be processed before they could be eaten. This consisted of roasting to remove the toxins, and grinding to break the fibers. The tubers, however, were abundant in only a few localities, and today the numerous grinding stones in most of the sites that occur there identify these areas.

In the fall and winter they also took large numbers of ducks and geese. Near the end of winter and through the spring, however, food resources must have been very limited. The major sources for food at that time were limited to some fishing in the main channel, and collecting dom palm nuts and shellfish, neither of which were very abundant or rich sources of energy.

It is suggested that the inhospitable deserts that sharply bounded the Valley on both the east and west sides were a contributing factor in the emergence in warfare during the Late Paleolithic along the Nile. Because of the deserts, the people were sharply circumscribed on both the east and west sides of the floodplain, and by their neighbors both upstream and down. Food was abundant in the embayments during the summer, fall and early winter, and during these periods there is good evidence that groups sharing a similar lifeway congregated in these favored areas. From late winter until the onset of the summer flood, however, there was much less food, and during that period it seems likely that the groups dispersed to exploit whatever resources were available. There may have been serious competition for food, and this competition may have led to the conflict documented by the burials at Jebel Sahaba and Wadi Kubba-

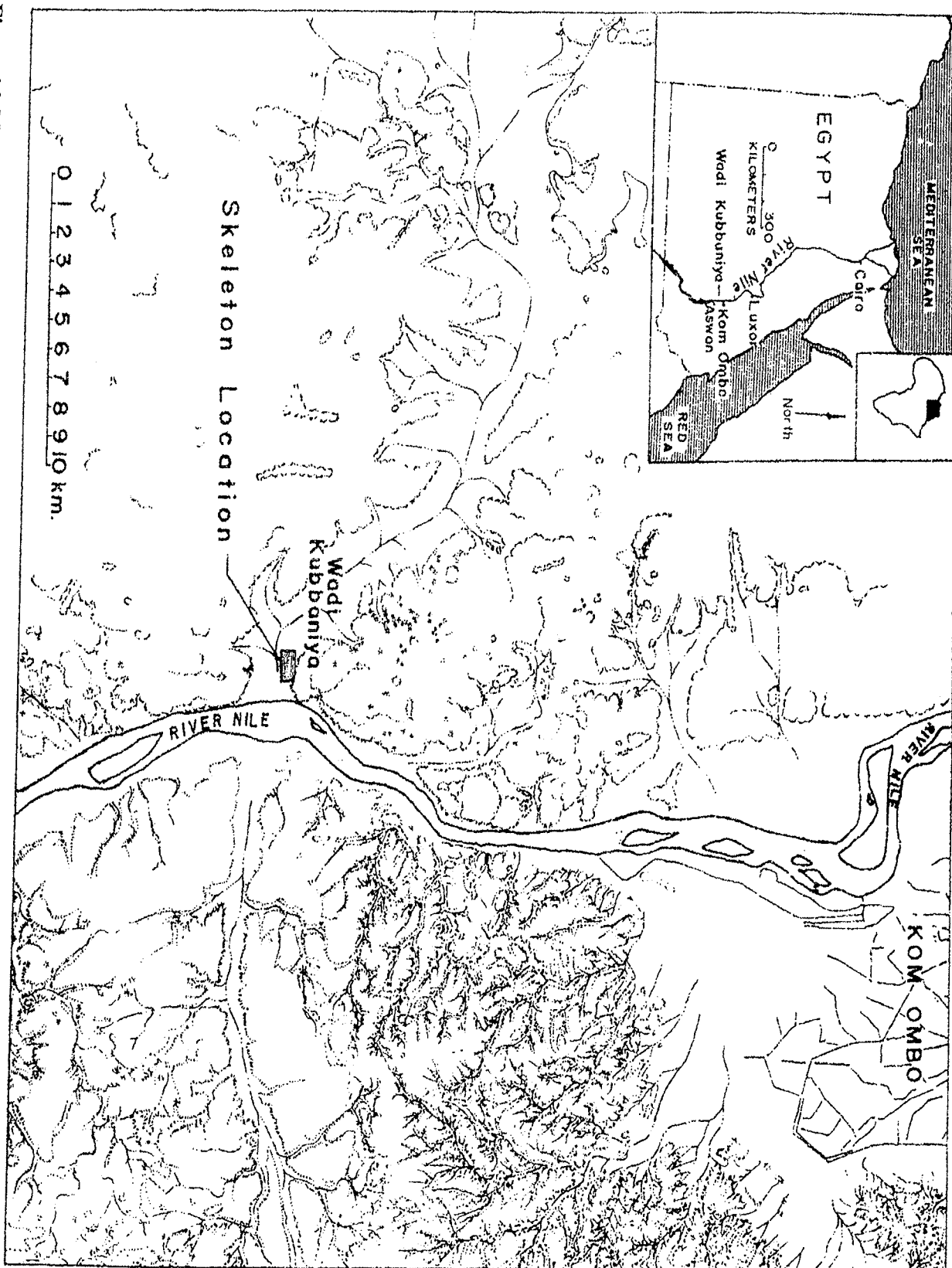


Figure 16. Map of the Nile Valley north of Aswan, showing location of Wadi Kubbaniya.

niya.

The Cultural Setting. The only area in the Nile Valley for which there are detailed studies of the Late Paleolithic is from the Second Cataract on the south to the Qena Bend on the north. Within this stretch of the River numerous archaeological entities have been identified and defined for the interval between around 23,000 and 13,000 calibrated radiocarbon years ago. While some might challenge whether all of these entities represent different social groups, there is, nevertheless, strong evidence to support that conclusion. All of these entities occur within limited time spans, they are found in restricted geographic areas, they are known at more than one site, they are not special activity localities, but living sites, and each entity is distinguished from the others by a distinctive set of lithic tools, and in some instances, by a different technology. It seems likely that each entity reflects a unique lifeway, and represents a group with a distinctive cultural tradition. It is also interesting that there is almost no evidence to suggest a long developmental sequence from one entity into another. The tools that distinguish one entity are rarely found in sites of a later complex.

This plethora of entities, often referred to as "industries," comes as a surprise to those familiar with the archaeology of most other areas, such as Europe or Southwest Asia, where long continuity is the norm in the Late Paleolithic. In those areas cultural developments often can be traced through an extended period of time and over a large area. Not so in the Late Paleolithic of the Nile Valley. Whether it is the Second Cataract/Ballana/Tushka areas on the south (Wendorf 1968), Wadi Kubbania in the center (Wendorf et al. 1989), or Isna/Qena/Dishna to the north (Phillips 1973; Lubell 1974; Wendorf and

Schild 1976; Hassan 1974; Vermeersch 2000), the story is the same: within a period of 9000 to 10,000 years, beginning around 22,000 - 23,000 years ago, each area was occupied by entities representing social units that had very different cultural traditions from those in adjacent areas.

For example, and without going into the details of the typology and technology, the lithic assemblages at Wadi Kubbania during this interval represent seven very different entities. The sequence begins with the Fakhurian as the oldest, then the Kubbanian, followed by the Ballanan-Silsilian, the Afian, the Sebilian, the Isnan, and the Qadan. Some of these may have partially overlapping time ranges, as indicated by their radiocarbon dates (Fakhurian and Kubbanian; Ballanan and Afian), or have both closely similar dates and stratigraphic positions (Sebilian, Isnan and Qadan). While all of these occurred at Kubbania, some of them are known mostly to the south (Qadan), while others are found mostly to the north (Fakhurian and Isnan). In this setting, as elsewhere along the Nubian Nile in Egypt and Sudan, we find different entities with overlapping distributions and time ranges occupying the most productive localities in an area that otherwise had very limited resources.

### Was it Warfare?

The question of what is warfare and how to distinguish it from other forms of violence, such as murder and raiding, has been discussed in many books and articles but never really resolved (Ross 1983; Knauff 1987; Otterbein 1989; Keeley 1996; Kelly 2000). It is clear from modern ethnographic studies that the idea of the peaceful, noble savage is a myth. Conflict is a near universal phenomenon among all social groups, except for a few of the smallest and most isolated



societies (Keeley 1996: 3-24). Several studies of the ethnographic literature indicates that there is a continuum of violence that ranges from carefully orchestrated battles designed to result in minimal injuries or deaths, to raids by small groups to gain wealth or women, to full-scale battles with the goal of exterminating or subjugating a competing group (Heider 1991; Chagnon 1997; Flannery and Marcus 2003). To some, any violence between two social entities is warfare (Wilson 1987). Others are more restricted in their identification of what constitutes warfare. Rather than add to that discussion, for our purposes here warfare is defined as armed conflict between societies with the goal of either exterminating the enemy group, driving them away, or subjugating them and acquiring their resources. In this definition, warfare differs from raids and killing of an individual in a conflict that involves only one or two people, or at most a very small sub-unit of a group.

The burials at Jebel Sahaba with two group burials of four, and in one instance possibly with eight individuals interred at the same time and with multiple wounds, suggest an organized conflict that was designed to inflict maximum mortal casualties on an opposing social unit. In addition, if the Sahaba graveyard was not restricted to those who died violently, then the frequency of violent deaths among all age groups and both sexes were so high that the survival of the group was seriously in doubt. This clearly represents vicious, sustained, long-term warfare, as defined above.

The evidence from Wadi Kubbania is not as persuasive as that from Jebel Sahaba. It is clear that there was conflict at Kubbania, that it continued for some period, and that the goal was to kill the enemy. What is miss-

ing is any evidence that it involved more than a small group, or even only another individual. It could have been warfare, but the evidence is weak.

The sequence of injuries to the Kubbania skeleton suggests either that this was a very disagreeable individual who kept picking the wrong enemies, or, more likely, as at Sahaba, that this was also a period of sustained, even continuous conflict at Kubbania. Unlike Sahaba, where there were two very different entities in the Halfa area at about that same time, the Fakhurian is the only entity known to be present at Kubbania at the time of the burial, assuming the age estimate is correct. If it was a few thousand years later, however, then the most recent of the Fakhurian sites, according to the radiocarbon dates, may have overlapped with the earliest Kubbanian, the next later entity recorded in the Wadi. For the period immediately prior to the Fakhurian, there is no information from Wadi Kubbania of any other entity being in the area. That does not say they were not present, only that no sites were found.

Although the simultaneous presence of two different social entities provides an obvious setting for friction, conflict does not require that the combatants be from units with different cultural backgrounds. With a population at or near the maximum that can be supported by the available resources and technology, any decline in those resources will result in tension and probably conflict.

There is still another possible explanation for the conflict evident at Jebel Sahaba. As was noted earlier, several large graveyards attributed to the Qadan entity are known, but prior to the Qadan the known burials are rare, but more important, they consist of single individuals or a group of no more than

three. We infer that the large graveyards indicate the emergence of social units or polities that were composed of several residential groups. We might call these "tribelets," each of which had their own graveyard where they buried their dead. Social units of this type tend to become very competitive with each other, particularly during periods of shortage or stress. Thus it is entirely possible that Jebel Sahaba represents warfare between two or more Qadan tribelets. This would explain why both the obvious weapon artifacts and those other pieces, such as cores and endscrapers thought to have been accidentally associated with the skeletons, were Qadan types.

What were the causes of this warfare? We favor a materialist explanation, based on a specific set of causes that in many ways was unique to the Nile Valley during the Late and Final Pleistocene. The resources available to the Late Paleolithic groups in the Nile Valley were sharply limited in its availability, were highly seasonal, and at least for the marshland tubers, required extensive preparation. For most of its length between the Batn el Hajar in northern Sudan and the Qena Bend in Upper Egypt, the river flowed through a narrow canyon with high, near vertical cliffs on both sides, and a very limited floodplain. These canyon areas were not very favorable for fishing or the harvest of marshland plants, and, not surprisingly, for most of this area archaeological sites are rare. The few favorable localities were those where the canyon was broken by the then dry drainages

that entered the Valley from either the east or west sides, such as the Khor Musa at Wadi Halfa, Wadi Tushka and Wadi Kubbaniya in Egyptian Nubia, and Kom Umbo, Idfu, Esna, and Wadi Qena in Upper Egypt. Numerous Late Paleolithic sites containing abundant fish bones and grinding stones for crushing the tubers occur in all of these reentrants. If people were going to live in the Valley, they would have to spend most of their time in these areas where the floodplain was wider.

Although there are no other well preserved skeletal remains available from the Nile Valley that relate to the period between the Kubbaniya and Sahaba burials, there is strong evidence that the hyperarid conditions continued unbroken in this part of Africa from well before the period of the Kubbaniya burial through the interval when the Sahaba graveyard was in use. Furthermore, the presence of diverse entities throughout this entire period is well documented. It seems reasonable to infer that it was the combination of these two factors that made warfare inevitable for both the people at Kubbaniya and those at Jebel Sahaba. Thus, during all of the Late Paleolithic, and perhaps before, those living in this area faced the same social setting and the same environmental limitations as those confronted by the people who used the graveyard at Jebel Sahaba. One should not be surprised, therefore, if evidence of warfare and conflict are found when other Late Paleolithic skeletal remains are discovered in this area.

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**ملخص:** إن أقدم الشواهد المعروفة على حالة هذه الحرب المستمرة والمنظمة، أتت من مقبرة تعود إلى العصر الحجري المتأخر، تقع على بُعد ثلاثة كيلومترات شمالي مدينة وادي حلفا القديمة، في شمال السودان. احتوت المقبرة، التي تقبع الآن في أعماق بحيرة ناصر، ٥٨ قبراً لرجال ونساء وأطفال، وقد قضى نصف هذا العدد نحبهم نتيجة للعنف. وقد حدّد القياس الإشعاعي الكربوني الوحيد، الذي خضع له عظم بشري، الزمان بحوالي ١٣,٧٤٠ عاماً قبل الوقت الراهن (قياس غير مدقّق). وتستكشف الورقة أسباب هذه الحرب الأولى، لتخلص إلى أن أسبابها تعود إلى عاملين أساسيين، هما: البيئة الفريدة للعصر البلايستوسيني المتأخر لوادي النيل والصحراء المتاخمة؛ ثم احتمال ظهور العُصب الاجتماعية، الأكبر مما تحتمله الأماكن المأهولة؛ فكانت تتنافس على المصادر المحدودة.

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**Selected by Zhana Ivanova**

**Material from  
Bertolt Brecht, *The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre*,  
ed. and trans. John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964), 1–5.**

# The Street Scene

## *A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre*

Bertolt Brecht

translated by John Willet

In the decade and a half that followed the World War [WWI] a comparatively new way of acting was tried out in a number of German theatres. Its qualities of clear description and reporting and its use of choruses and projections as a means of commentary earned it the name of 'epic'. The actor used a somewhat complex technique to detach himself from the character portrayed; he forced the spectator to look at the play's situations from such an angle that they necessarily became subject to his criticism. Supporters of this epic theatre argued that the new subject-matter, the highly involved incidents of the class war in its acutest and most terrible stage, would be mastered more easily by such a method, since it would thereby become possible to portray social processes as seen in their causal relationships. But the result of these experiments was that aesthetics found itself up against a whole series of substantial difficulties.

It is comparatively easy to set up a basic model for epic theatre. For practical experiments I usually picked as my example of completely simple, 'natural' epic theatre an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place. The bystanders may not have observed what happened, or they may simply not agree with him, may 'see things a different way'; the point is that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident.

Such an example of the most primitive type of epic theatre seems easy to understand. Yet experience has shown that it presents astounding difficulties to the reader or listener as soon as he is asked to see the implications of treating this kind of street corner demonstration as a basic form of major theatre, theatre for a scientific age. What this means of course is that the epic theatre may appear richer, more intricate and complex in every particular, yet to be major theatre it need at bottom only contain the same elements as a street-corner demonstration of this sort; nor could it any longer be termed epic theatre if any of the main elements of the streetcorner demonstration were lacking. Until this is understood it is impossible really to understand what follows. Until one understands the novelty, unfamiliarity and direct challenge to the critical faculties of the suggestion that street-corner demonstration of this sort can serve as a satisfactory basic model of major theatre one cannot really understand what follows.

Consider: the incident is clearly very far from what we mean by an artistic one. The demonstrator need not be an artist. The capacities he needs to achieve his aim are in effect universal. Suppose he cannot carry out some particular movement as quickly as the victim he is imitating; all he need do is to explain that *he* moves three times as fast, and the demonstration neither suffers in essentials nor loses its point. On the contrary it is important that he should not be too perfect. His demonstration would be spoiled if the bystanders' attention were drawn to his powers of transformation. He has to avoid presenting himself in such a way that someone calls out 'What a lifelike portrayal of a chauffeur!' He must not 'cast a spell' over anyone. He should not transport people from normality to 'higher realms'. He need not dispose of any special powers of suggestion.

It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from our street scene: the engendering of illusion. The street demonstrator's performance is essentially repetitive. The event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat. If the scene in the theatre follows the street scene in this respect then the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre, just as the street-corner demonstration admits it is a demonstration (and does not pretend to be the actual event). The element of rehearsal in the acting and of learning by heart in the text, the whole machinery and the whole process of preparation: it all becomes plainly apparent. What room is left for experience? Is the reality portrayed still experienced in any sense?

The street scene determines what kind of experience is to be prepared for the spectator. There is no

question but that the street-corner demonstrator has been through an 'experience', but he is not out to make his demonstration serve as an 'experience' for the audience. Even the experience of the driver and the victim is only partially communicated by him, and he by no means tries to turn it into an enjoyable experience for the spectator, however lifelike he may make his demonstration. The demonstration would become no less valid if he did not reproduce the fear caused by the accident; on the contrary it would lose validity if he did. He is not interested in creating pure emotions. It is important to understand that a theatre which follows his lead in this respect undergoes a positive change of function.

One essential element of the street scene must also be present in the theatrical scene if this is to qualify as epic, namely that the demonstration should have a socially practical significance. Whether our street demonstrator is out to show that one attitude on the part of driver or pedestrian makes an accident inevitable where another would not, or whether he is demonstrating with a view to fixing the responsibility, his demonstration has a practical purpose, intervenes socially.

The demonstrator's purpose determines how thoroughly he has to imitate. Our demonstrator need not imitate every aspect of his characters' behaviour, but only so much as gives a picture. Generally the theatre scene will give much fuller pictures, corresponding to its more extensive range of interest. How do street scene and theatre scene link up here? To take a point of detail, the victim's voice may have played no immediate part in the accident. Eye-witnesses may disagree as to whether a cry they heard (Look out!) came from the victim or from someone else, and this may give our demonstrator a motive for imitating the voice. The question can be settled by demonstrating whether the voice was an old man's or a woman's, or merely whether it was high or low. Again, the answer may depend on whether it was that of an educated person or not. Loud or soft may play a great part, as the driver could be correspondingly more or less guilty. A whole series of characteristics of the victim ask to be portrayed. Was he absent-minded? Was his attention distracted? If so, by what? What, on the evidence of his behaviour, could have made him liable to be distracted by just that circumstance and no other? Etc., etc. It can be seen that our streetcorner demonstration provides opportunities for a pretty rich and varied portrayal of human types. Yet a theatre which tries to restrict its essential elements to those provided by our street scene will have to acknowledge certain limits to imitation. It must be able to justify any outlay in terms of its purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The demonstration may for instance be dominated by the question of compensation for the victim, etc. The driver risks being sacked from his job, losing his licence, going to prison; the victim risks a heavy hospital bill, loss of job, permanent disfigurement, possibly unfitness for work. This is the area within which the demonstrator builds up his characters. The victim may have had a companion; the driver may have had his girl sitting alongside him. That would bring out the social element better and allow the characters to be more fully drawn.

Another essential element in the street scene is that the demonstrator should derive his characters entirely from their actions. He imitates their actions and so allows conclusions to be drawn about them. A theatre that follows him in this will be largely breaking with the orthodox theatre's habit of basing the actions on the characters and having the former exempted from criticism by presenting them as an unavoidable consequence deriving by natural law from the characters who perform them. To the street demonstrator the character of the man being demonstrated remains a quantity that need not be completely defined. Within certain limits he may be like this or like that; it doesn't matter. What the demonstrator is concerned with are his accident-prone and accident-proof qualities.<sup>2</sup> The theatrical scene may show more fully-defined individuals. But it must then be in a position to treat their individuality as a special case and outline the field within which, once more, its most socially relevant

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<sup>1</sup>We often come across demonstrations of an everyday sort which are more thorough imitations than our street-corner accident demands. Generally they are comic ones. Our nextdoor neighbour may decide to 'take off' the rapacious behaviour of our common landlord. Such an imitation is often rich and full of variety. Closer examination will show however that even so apparently complex an imitation concentrates on one specific side of the landlord's behaviour. The imitation is summary or selective, deliberately leaving out those occasions where the landlord strikes our neighbour as 'perfectly sensible', though such occasions of course occur. He is far from giving a rounded picture; for that would have no comic impact at all. The street scene, perforce adopting a wider angle of vision, at this point lands in difficulties which must not be underestimated. It has to be just as successful in promoting criticism, but the incidents in question are far more complex. It must promote positive as well as negative criticism, and as part of a single process. You have to understand what is involved in winning the audience's approval by means of a critical approach. Here again we have a precedent in our street scene, i.e. in any demonstration of an everyday sort. Next-door neighbour and street demonstrator can reproduce their subject's 'sensible' or his 'senseless' behaviour alike, by submitting it for an opinion. When it crops up in the course of events, however (when a man switches from being sensible to being senseless, or the other way round), then they usually need some form of commentary in order to change the angle of their portrayal. Hence, as already mentioned, certain difficulties for the theatre scene. These cannot be dealt with here.

<sup>2</sup>The same situation will be produced by all those people whose characters fulfil the conditions laid down by him and show the features that he imitates.

effects are produced. Our street demonstrator's possibilities of demonstration are narrowly restricted (indeed, we chose this model so that the limits should be as narrow as possible). If the essential elements of the theatrical scene are limited to those of the street scene then its greater richness must be an enrichment only. The question of border-line cases becomes acute.

Let us take a specific detail. Can our street demonstrator, say, ever become entitled to use an excited tone of voice in repeating the driver's statement that he has been exhausted by too long a spell of work? (In theory this is no more possible than for a returning messenger to start telling his fellow countrymen of his talk with the king with the words 'I saw the bearded king'.) It can only be possible, let alone unavoidable, if one imagines a street-corner situation where such excitement, specifically about this aspect of the affair, plays a particular part. (In the instance above this would be so if the king had sworn never to cut his beard off until . . . etc.) We have to find a point of view for our demonstrator that allows him to submit this excitement to criticism. Only if he adopts a quite definite point of view can he be entitled to imitate the driver's excited voice; e.g. if he blames drivers as such for doing too little to reduce their hours of work. ('Look at him. Doesn't even belong to a union, but gets worked up soon enough when an accident happens. "Ten hours I've been at the wheel."')

Before it can get as far as this, i.e. be able to suggest a point of view to the actor, the theatre needs to take a number of steps. By widening its field of vision and showing the driver in other situations besides that of the accident the theatre in no way exceeds its model; it merely creates a further situation on the same pattern. One can imagine a scene of the same kind as the street scene which provides a well-argued demonstration showing how such emotions as the driver's develop, or another which involves making comparisons between tones of voice. In order not to exceed the model scene the theatre only has to develop a technique for submitting emotions to the spectator's criticism. Of course this does not mean that the spectator must be barred on principle from sharing certain emotions that are put before him; none the less to communicate emotions is only one particular form (phase, consequence) of criticism. The theatre's demonstrator, the actor, must apply a technique which will let him reproduce the tone of the subject demonstrated with a certain reserve, with detachment (so that the spectator can say: 'He's getting excited—in vain, too late, at last. . . .') etc.). In short, the actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger, he must not suppress the 'he did that, he said that' element in his performance. He must not go so far as to be wholly transformed into the person demonstrated.

One essential element of the street scene lies in the natural attitude adopted by the demonstrator, which is two-fold; he is always taking two situations into account. He behaves naturally as a demonstrator, and he lets the subject of the demonstration behave naturally too. He never forgets nor does he allow it to be forgotten, that he is not the subject but the demonstrator. That is to say, what the audience sees is not a fusion between demonstrator and subject, not some third, independent, uncontradictor entity with isolated features of (a) demonstrator and (b) subject, such as the orthodox theatre puts before us in its productions.<sup>3</sup> The feelings and opinions of demonstrator and demonstrated are not merged into one.

We now come to one of those elements that are peculiar to the epic theatre, the so-called A-effect (alienation effect). What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view. Can we show that this A-effect is significant for our street demonstrator?

We can picture what happens if he fails to make use of it. The following situation could occur. One of the spectators might say: 'But if the victim stepped off the kerb with his right foot, as you showed him doing. . . .' The demonstrator might interrupt saying: 'I showed him stepping off with his left foot.' By arguing which foot he really stepped off with in his demonstration, and, even more, how the victim himself acted, the demonstration can be so transformed that the A-effect occurs. The demonstrator achieves it by paying exact attention this time to his movements, executing them carefully, probably in slow motion; in this way he alienates the little subincident, emphasizes its importance, makes it worthy of notice. And so the epic theatre's alienation effect proves to have its uses for our street demonstrator too; in other words it is also to be found in this small everyday scene of natural street-corner theatre, which has little to do with art. The direct changeover from representation to commentary that is so characteristic of the epic theatre is still more easily recognized as one element of any street demonstration. Wherever he feels he can the demonstrator breaks off his imitation in order to give explanations.

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<sup>3</sup>Most clearly worked out by Stanislavsky.

The epic theatre's choruses and documentary projections, the direct addressing of the audience by its actors, are at bottom just this.

It will have been observed, not without astonishment I hope, that I have not named any strictly artistic elements as characterizing our street scene and, with it, that of the epic theatre. The street demonstrator can carry out a successful demonstration with no greater abilities than, in effect, anybody has. What about the epic theatre's value as art?

The epic theatre wants to establish its basic model at the street corner, i.e. to return to the very simplest 'natural' theatre, a social enterprise whose origins, means and ends are practical and earthly. The model works without any need of programmatic theatrical phrases like 'the urge to self-expression', 'making a part one's own', 'spiritual experience', 'the play instinct', 'the story-teller's art', etc. Does that mean that the epic theatre isn't concerned with art?

It might be as well to begin by putting the question differently, thus: can we make use of artistic abilities for the purposes of our street scene? Obviously yes. Even the street-corner demonstration includes artistic elements. Artistic abilities in some small degree are to be found in any man. It does no harm to remember this when one is confronted with great art. Undoubtedly what we call artistic abilities can be exercised at any time within the limits imposed by our street scene model. They will function as artistic abilities even though they do not exceed these limits (for instance, when there is meant to be no complete transformation of demonstrator into subject). And true enough, the epic theatre is an extremely artistic affair, hardly thinkable without artists and virtuosity, imagination, humour and fellow-feeling; it cannot be practised without all these and much else too. It has got to be entertaining, it has got to be instructive. How then can art be developed out of the elements of the street scene, without adding any or leaving any out? How does it evolve into the theatrical scene with its fabricated story, its trained actors, its lofty style of speaking, its make-up, its team performance by a number of players? Do we need to add to our elements in order to move on from the 'natural' demonstration to the 'artificial'?

Is it not true that the additions which we must make to our model in order to arrive at epic theatre are of a fundamental kind? A brief examination will show that they are not. Take the *story*. There was nothing fabricated about our street accident. Nor does the orthodox theatre deal only in fabrications; think for instance of the historical play. None the less a story can be performed at the street corner too. Our demonstrator may at any time be in a position to say: 'The driver was guilty, because it all happened the way I showed you. He wouldn't be guilty if it had happened the way I'm going to show you now.' And he can fabricate an incident and demonstrate it. Or take the fact that the text is learnt by heart. As a witness in a court case the demonstrator may have written down the subject's exact words, learnt them by heart and rehearsed them; in that case he too is performing a text he has learned. Or take a rehearsed programme by several players: it doesn't always have to be artistic purposes that bring about a demonstration of this sort; one need only think of the French police technique of making the chief figures in any criminal case re-enact certain crucial situations before a police audience. Or take making-up. Minor changes in appearance—ruffling one's hair, for instance—can occur at any time within the framework of the non-artistic type of demonstration. Nor is make-up itself used solely for theatrical purposes. In the street scene the driver's moustache may be particularly significant. It may have influenced the testimony of the possible girl companion suggested earlier. This can be represented by our demonstrator making the driver stroke an imaginary moustache when prompting his companion's evidence. In this way the demonstrator can do a good deal to discredit her as a witness. Moving on to the use of a real moustache in the theatre, however, is not an entirely easy transition, and the same difficulty occurs with respect to *costume*. Our demonstrator may under given circumstances put on the driver's cap—for instance if he wants to show that he was drunk: (he had it on crooked)—but he can only do so conditionally, under these circumstances; (see what was said about borderline cases earlier). However, where there is a demonstration by several demonstrators of the kind referred to above we can have costume so that the various characters can be distinguished. This again is only a limited use of costume. There must be no question of creating an illusion that the demonstrators really are these characters. (The epic theatre can counteract this illusion by especially exaggerated costume or by garments that are somehow marked out as objects for display.) Moreover we can suggest another model as a substitute for ours on this point: the kind of street demonstration given by hawkers. To sell their neckties these people will portray a badly-dressed and a well-dressed man; with a few props and technical tricks they can perform significant little scenes where they submit essentially to the same restrictions as apply to the demonstrator in our street scene: (they will pick up tie, hat, stick, gloves and give certain significant imitations of a man of the world, and the whole time they will refer to him as 'he'!) With hawkers we also find *verse* being used within the same framework as that of our basic model.

They use firm irregular rhythms to sell braces and newspapers alike.

Reflecting along these lines we see that our basic model will work. The elements of natural and of artificial epic theatre are the same. Our streetcorner theatre is primitive; origins, aims and methods of its performance are close to home. But there is no doubt that it is a meaningful phenomenon with a clear social function that dominates all its elements. The performance's origins lie in an incident that can be judged one way or another, that may repeat itself in different forms and is not finished but is bound to have consequences, so that this judgment has some significance. The object of the performance is to make it easier to give an opinion on the incident. Its means correspond to that. The epic theatre is a highly skilled theatre with complex contents and far-reaching social objectives. In setting up the street scene as a basic model for it we pass on the clear social function and give the epic theatre criteria by which to decide whether an incident is meaningful or not. The basic model has a practical significance. As producer and actors work to build up a performance involving many difficult questions—technical problems, social ones—it allows them to check whether the social function of the whole apparatus is still clearly intact.

[Die Strassenszene. Grundmodell eines epischen Theaters', from *Versuche 10*, 1950]

NOTE: Originally stated to have been written in 1940, but now ascribed by Werner Hecht to June 1938. This is an elaboration of a poem 'Über alltägliches Theater' which is supposed to have been written in 1930 and is included as one of the 'Gedichte aus dem Messingkauf' in *Theaterarbeit, Versuche 14* and *Gedichte 3*. The notion of the man at the street-corner miming an accident is already developed at length there, and it also occurs in the following undated scheme (*Schriften zum Theater 4*, pp. 51–2):

#### EXERCISES FOR ACTING SCHOOLS

- (a) Conjuring tricks, including attitude of spectators.
- (b) For women: folding and putting away linen. Same for men.
- (c) For men: varying attitudes of smokers. Same for women.
- (d) Cat playing with a hank of thread.
- (e) Exercises in observation.
- (f) Exercises in imitation.
- (g) How to take notes. Noting of gestures, tones of voice.
- (h) Exercises in imagination. Three men throwing dice for their life. One loses. Then: they all lose.
- (i) Dramatizing an epic. Passages from the Bible.
- (k) For everybody: repeated exercises in production. Essential to show one's colleagues.
- (l) Exercises in temperament. Situation: two women calmly folding linen. They feign a wild and jealous quarrel for the benefit of their husbands; the husbands are in the next room.
- (m) They come to blows as they fold their linen in silence.
- (n) Game (l) turns serious.
- (o) Quick-change competition. Behind a screen; open.
- (p) Modifying an imitation, simply described so that others can put it into effect.
- (q) Rhythmical (verse-) speaking with tap-dance.
- (r) Eating with outsize knife and fork. Very small knife and fork.
- (s) Dialogue with gramophone: recorded sentences, free answers.
- (t) Search for 'nodal points'.
- (u) Characterization of a fellow-actor.
- (v) Improvisation of incidents. Running through scenes in the style of a report, no text.
- (w) The street accident. Laying down limits of justifiable imitation.
- (x) Variations: a dog went into the kitchen. [A traditional song]
- (y) Memorizing first impressions of a part.

Werner Hecht suggests that these exercises, like those cited on p. 147, may relate to lessons given by Helene Weigel at a Finnish theatre school.



**Selected by Zhana Ivanova**

**Material from  
Bojana Cvejić, “An Unfaithful Return to Poetics <in four arguments>,”  
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## An Unfaithful Return to Poetics <in four arguments>

Bojana Cvejić

I would like to begin by observing a peculiar fact. Nowadays, many more concepts of philosophy and critical theory can be found in art than there are artistic ideas or tropes feeding back into the philosopher's Imaginary. The paradox is that the eloquent overuse of notions such as "body-without-organs" (BwO) by artists today overlooks the indebtedness of the artists' favorite philosopher (Gilles Deleuze) to an artist (Antonin Artaud) in this glaring example. My interest isn't to restore the legitimacy of art discourse proper and "pure," a stance that would be hard to defend. Rather, I'm compelled to ask what has happened to the conceptual imagination of the artists today? Does the fact that philosophy and critical theory enjoy the status of intellectual authority in matters of art mean that artists, in spite of their linguistic proficiency and excellence in self-reflectiveness, lack conceptual imagination? The claim remains recklessly general unless we limit and define the sense of our interrogation. That is, we might have to address the problem from a historical-materialistic account of the conjuncture in which contemporary art is produced today.<sup>1</sup>

### ***#1 Praxis overall, or anti-production***

Coming out of an excessively professionalized art education, artists are trained to communicate and manage the conditions of their production (funding), as well as the reception of their work on the institutional market, outside of which, they are taught, their art doesn't exist, i.e. doesn't appear public. "An artist who cannot speak English is no artist" (Mladen Stilinović, 1994). A large amount of artistic writing takes the form of applications and post-hoc reports for subsidy, and of course, also emails to curators and programmers in which one exercises persuasive expression. The purpose of this substantial textual production has recalibrated the art discourse by instrumental reason, whereby transparency, accountability, and what is arguably deemed social usefulness, are prominent criteria that shape artistic procedures and reflection upon them.<sup>2</sup> But we must be wary of harsh criticism of artists, who aren't alone in the business of internalizing the capitalist demands of production. It is also thanks to the recent curatorial and performative turns conjoint that art institutions adapt to the moods of experience economy, which is reflected, in particular, in the curatorial term "participation." As the Croatian dramaturg and theatermaker Goran Sergej Pristaš has argued, the mandate of cultural institutions is no longer to produce a work of art in order for a public to valorize it, but rather to reproduce consumer relations with a work of art, to reproduce and exchange its valorization through performatively

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson has argued that theory, which supplanted philosophy in the twentieth century, represents another characteristic superstructural development of late capitalism, whose dynamic of expansion could be described as "imperialist": "the supplanting of one language by another" by disciplines appropriating and translating one theory after another. He also compares the language of theory with "language police": a "search and destroy mission" of any affirmative positions, outruled as ideological. F. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no.2 (winter 2004): 403–8. Obtained from <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1315975.files/The%20Gathering/Jameson%20-%20Symptoms%20of%20Theory.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> I have argued elsewhere that procedural knowledge characterizes the modus operandi of the artists in neoliberal capitalism (see "Social Choreography" in *Public Sphere by Performance*).

monitored participation of the visitors.<sup>3</sup> This process is paralleled with the transformation of artistic work into praxis, whereby artistic labor is extended, atomized and dispersed in a variety of activities in which the artist manifests his/her will. These purportedly free, yet commodified activities are often presented under the paradigm of art as research and education: lectures, workshops, encounters, methodological exchanges, residencies etc., a familiar rhythm of fragmentation and subsumptions of life under work, i.e. the all-encompassing term *artistic praxis*.<sup>4</sup> In all this, little time is left for artist to actually engage with his/her art, Pristaš concludes. To do that, the artist must endorse (and perfect) laziness, as Stilinović's *Praise of Laziness* recommends in an emphatic annihilation of capitalist production and institutional market.<sup>5</sup> Laziness emerges as a notion of poetics for Stilinović (but also in Kazimir Maljevič and Marcel Duchamp, whom he draws upon), or as a condition for poetics, understood as an engagement with the principles of production (*poiesis*).

Let me pause here for a moment to reformulate the problem. According to Aristotle's classification, *poiesis* is one of the three categories of human activity. It is *poietikai technai* which designates the art of making, forming and composing, or production, in difference to, on the one hand, *praktikai technai*, which refers to activity without an end or product, carried out to have an effect in public, hence, as a performing art or the political life of citizens. On the other hand, poetics is also distinguished from *teoretikai technai*, which signifies investigation, or theory thus opposed to practice. However, this distinction can barely hold anymore, as the term of practice has broadened to such an extent that it incorporates both poetics and theory.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the discourse on artistic practice has cannibalized poetics, emptying it of thought concerning what the product of artistic activity is, what it means, how its principles might become instruments to look past art into society. Instead, practice today enfolds everything into itself, mixing the public and the private, work and life, activity and its product into the self-performance of the artist. In the last instance, practice becomes an ever blander notion, signalling artists' quest for continuity of atomized labor, for dwelling in art which might bridge the gaps between dispersed activities. We might also regard artistic practice today as anti-production (Pristaš), for it incorporates distribution and consumption and turns into the production of subjectivity (of the artist, but also of the public), or rather, conversely, into a performative consumption of abilities, the human "capital" actualized in these manifold activities.

So, to underline our first argument in favor of poetics: if we return to our first example, the Deleuzo-Artaudian trope, BwO can't be relegated to an artistic technical

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<sup>3</sup> See B. Cvejić, "Notes for a Society of Performance" in *Composing Differences*, ed. Virginie Bobin (Paris: Presses du réel, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Goran Sergej Pristaš, "Monetization" (*TkH* vo. 23, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Stilinović writes: "Artists from the East were lazy and poor because in the East, that entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore, they had enough time to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing." He concludes *Praise of Laziness* (1993) with two quotes about work: "Work is a disease (Karl Marx). Work is a shame (Vlado Martek)."

<sup>6</sup> "Agamben made an important point in this respect when he noticed that, in the modern Western world, all human doing began to be perceived as practice—but now conceived as a productive activity. In this process, the meaning of praxis was not only broadened to such an extent that it became a general term for all human activities; it went through a complete transformation to the point that it started to signify a manifestation of the human being's will and vital impulse, along with the concrete effects thereof." B. Cvejić and A. Vujanović, *Public Sphere by Performance* (Berlin: b\_books, 2012), 136.

procedure, nor does it have an image of the human body. Rather, it is a poetical notion that surfaces as a principle of a non-organic intensive process of production based on desire. It can account for the way that a collective transforms itself, or for the syntax of a poem as well. Its power lies in the thought that parallels, is adequate, but not equal to action and practice.

## **#2 Expression, abduction and feigning**

There is a definition of poetics that we must brush aside on our way to discern the kind of thought that poetics, as I consider it here, yields. Stemming from the study of poetry, poetics was considered for a long time to be normative—as in the post-Renaissance treatises which, after the Latin version of Aristotle’s *Ars poetica*, prescribed stylistic conventions of literary genres. Thanks to French structuralism, poetics was resuscitated, with a new advantage, into literary criticism: its analysis of the deep structure of a text mediates between its immanent properties and the transcendent views of its critical interpretation. In a slight modification of that notion, poetics *expresses* how an artwork arises, comes into being and is thought. I propose to view it through the principle of expression, whereby expression here embraces both the way things come to be in reality, and the way they are perceived and known in thought, since the act of thinking something is the same act that produces it and the means by which it comes to be.

Expression devises a relationship between sensibility and thought, which remains problematic, based on a noncausal parallelism between thinking and acting.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, expression is a logic opposed to representation; it is a certain way of thinking and forming ideas outside of analogy and eminence that govern (transcendental) relations of agreement between the idea and the object. It is the thought that forces a practical path in which ideas, in the form of problems and compositions, arise in parallel, noncausal correspondence. The probing of this path requires time to be inserted into the construction of the problem, doubled by a sensorial and affective experience of an experiment parallel to the thought. This time could be regarded as a time of unlearning or ungrounding the knowledge of possibilities that reproduce rather than create new thoughts, images, movements, bodies, sounds, and their relations. Such learning implies “violent” training without a general method, but with a dedication to the problem that, as Deleuze describes, “demand[s] the very transformation of our body and our language.”<sup>8</sup> The French choreographer Xavier Le Roy explicitly refers to learning as the process of removing habit under the construction of constraints:

I always worked with constructing constraints in order to produce “new” movement or to transform the perception of the body in a situation. What can you do when you cannot do this or that; you have to look for another way, and you have to go around habits. In a way, it’s making things difficult in order to explore ways outside the power of habits.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This claim draws on the Spinozist univocity of being, an immanentist ontology that posits an absolute power of thinking and of acting (doing, making, etc.) as autonomous and equal on the same plane. Immanence is like the movement of a vertigo, as Cull has put it (*Theatres of Immanence*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2013, 12–13) that ceaselessly produces processes which interfere in one another: processes of thought, sensibility, imagination, physical movement, attention, and so on.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 1994) 192.

<sup>9</sup> From a conversation with Le Roy, 2009.

To demonstrate the thought born in expression, I will briefly unpack a case of a creation of a performance *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001). The duet made and performed by a dancer and choreographer, Jonathan Burrows, and a theater director without professional dance training, Jan Ritsema, was determined by the initial constraint of improvisation (since the “non-dancer” wasn’t capable of repeating a movement). However, it wasn’t a sufficient departure point for the two to begin to move together: an idea about movement that would determine how, where, when, and why they were to dance still had to be invented. The idea slowly began to emerge in discussions, during which a poem, *Burnt Norton* from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, echoed:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance

The poem *Burnt Norton* lent the notion of a movement “neither from nor towards”: the thought of a dance for which they couldn’t envisage a possible movement because it addressed the inconcrete nature of time that they couldn’t grasp through movement. Movement outside of time was impossible to think, and this impossibility forced them to eliminate all possibilities they could rely on in improvisation. In other words, the fantasy of movement that has neither spatial nor temporal structure, a movement that internalizes “the still point,” created—a problem. The problem led *Weak Dance Strong Questions* to diverge from improvisation, when conceived as an exploration of the conditions of possible movement based on the capabilities of dancers. The formulation of the problem began when Burrows asked Ritsema, “Can you dance a question?”

We can dispense here with the technical details about the terms and rules of dancing that these artists invented in order to be able to dance and question movement by movement itself, for my interest here is to examine their thought. Burrows observes that the process of questioning led to such a short time of thought or expression to the extent “that we were almost dealing with interruptions only.” The two contrary desires—to move and yet not produce a cognizable movement—constitute the paradox as a matter of disequilibrium between, on the one hand, the possibilities that have to be eliminated or “forgotten”, and, on the other, dancing in a state of questioning. Thus it results in a special syntax comprised of “stutterances”—utterances that are cut before they can develop into a sequence comparable to a phrase. Each utterance appears like a new beginning and thus affirms the power of beginning and beginning again. What does it mean exactly to stammer in movement, to become a stutterer in dance in the case of *Weak Dance Strong Questions*? It implies a disjunction between the times of thinking and moving, whereby the problem of dancing and questioning are two divergent series. Although they must run parallel, they also try to interfere with each other without ever achieving the equation *movement = question*. This destabilizes every utterance as a new beginning in which two disjunct series attempt to converge in vain. Movement stutters because it reaches its limit—in the stops, in the moments of stillness, when the dancer realizes that the movement may yield to the habits, “the don’ts” specified by the terms and conditions.

“Stuttering” appears as a poetical idea in the creation of the aforementioned dance. The moment of creating the problem, captured in the phrase “can you dance a

question?” could be regarded as one of discovery, which corresponds to a third kind of inference in logic, neither deduction, where a particular fact is explained by a general rule, nor induction, where a hypothesis is empirically tested on particular instances. It is *abduction* that Charles Peirce introduced as a non-necessary type of reasoning, which explains the invention of a new idea, a new hypothesis that will only have to be assessed. A new idea or hypothesis “is where we find some very curious circumstance, which would be explained by the supposition that it was the case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition.”<sup>10</sup> Abductive inference is summarized in the following logical formula:

The surprising fact, C, is observed;  
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,  
Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.<sup>11</sup>

Then the hypothesis must be “entertained,” or in other words, interrogated or probed by experiment.<sup>12</sup> As long as we consider it an interrogation, we needn’t fear error. We have agreed to think within uncertainty or probability, which involves an element of guess-work, prediction, even belief. We have resolved to speculate, where to speculate would mean to conjecture a certain outcome without having firm evidence.

Although it remains somewhat controversial, Peirce’s abduction has been accepted in philosophy as an inference frequently employed, in some form or other, both in everyday and in scientific reasoning. My inclusion of it here isn’t meant to be revelatory for artistic creation; rather, in a more cautious mood, I resort to abduction in order to divorce poetics from the instrumental reason that we nowadays find in artistic discourse. Abductive reasoning enables an amount of imagination and fiction, which might be capable of disentangling the possible from the feasible. I am referring here to what I discussed within the previous argument as the economization of theory, degraded to the means of intellectually legitimizing an artwork.

In the legacy of rationalist philosophy, imagination is an inadequate kind of knowledge, also called feigning, or pretending to know. In my view, feigning is a close relative of abduction and therefore merits our attention here. In a somewhat unfaithful reading of Spinoza, the British philosopher Christopher Norris suggests that fictions that are products of imagination ought to be considered as expressions of a positive mental capacity: the capacity to feign.<sup>13</sup> We feign not that which we know to be true or that which we know to be untrue, but that of which we are ignorant. Feigning is inversely proportional to understanding, but as long as we treat it as an aid to, rather than a substitute of, understanding, it is a point of access to truth. Rephrasing imagining into “feigning” might introduce a useful approach to the specific knowledge artists produce in their research. Feigning thus could mean “pretending” or “faking to know,” while being conscious of the “as-if” clause that frames the cognitive value of such knowledge: artists feign because they do not have a proper knowledge of the concepts they imagine. They produce concepts from

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 1, 1893–1913, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 189.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “Abduction and Induction, in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 151.

<sup>12</sup> “The operation of testing a hypothesis by experiment, which consists in remarking that, if it is true, observations made under certain conditions ought to have certain results, and then causing those conditions to be fulfilled, and noting the results, and, if they are favourable, extending a certain confidence to the hypothesis, I call induction.” Peirce, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Critical Theory*.

imagination, which blurs the border between being affected and acting from the mind alone.

### #3 Poetry piercing dance

It is more than symptomatic to find that a poem acted as a cue for two dancers seeking to pose a problem (in *Weak Dance Strong Questions*). As I concoct these arguments to call forth poetics above praxis, I notice how a poetic use of natural language surfaces in performance and dance anew. The history of experimental art practices across music, visual arts and performance in the twentieth century has been frequently punctuated with offbeat manifestations of poetic writing, sound and visual poetry, conceptual statements formulated in poetic language, scores that needn't only be performed but could be read as poems instead, and so on. From a wide range of functions that they accommodated, what might be of interest here are those moments in which poetry "pierced through" where it wasn't expected.<sup>14</sup> By "piercing through" I am invoking a poetic notion again, a term that the Slovene artist Janez Janša<sup>15</sup> coined to describe the status that modern dance had in Yugoslavia. During the communist regimes in East Europe, dance wasn't granted institutional status. Only folklore, ballet and military parades were the expressions of dance-like movement in socialism that the Western history of dance registered, confirming its contentious claim that modern dance was the legacy of the twentieth-century democracy, born in America. But dance was present all along, emerging in those sites of Neo-avantgarde experiments (visual arts, happenings and performance art, experimental music) that allowed it.<sup>16</sup>

By way of an opposite movement, we are now witness to poetry piercing contemporary dance, and it is not a matter of a passing fad, or of a novel, aesthetically unified expression. The Norwegian choreographer and performer Mette Edvardsen creates a performance conceived as a "library collection of living books." In her work titled *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (since 2010), a group of people (not necessarily professional performers) memorize a book of their choice, and make themselves "ready to be consulted by a visitor," who will be the spectator of their reciting performance that takes place wherever it is convenient, in a library, cafeteria, park, or courtyard, where I had the pleasure to listen to Herman Melville's *Bartleby* performed by Kristien Van Den Brande (2012, during the festival In-Presentable, Madrid). Edvardsen writes in her author's note: "*Books are read to remember and written to forget.*" To memorise a book, or more poetically "to learn a book by heart," is, in a way, a rewriting of that book. In the process of memorizing, the reader steps for a moment into the place of the *writer*, or rather he/she *is becoming the book.*" The

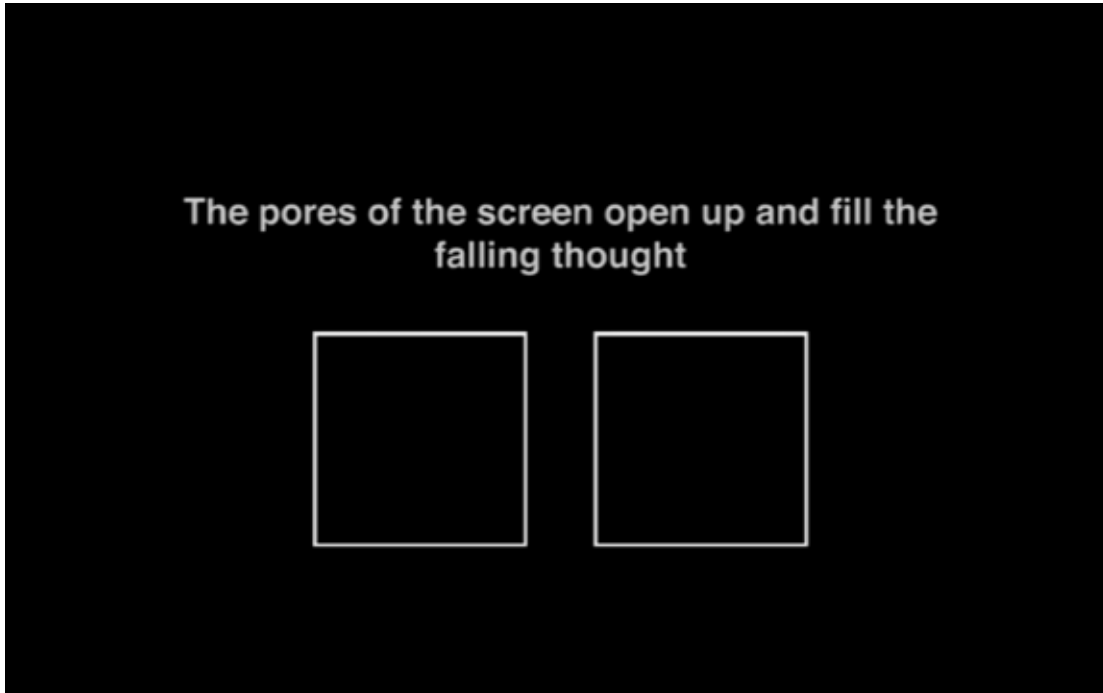
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<sup>14</sup> Hereby a few examples: the ironic commentary which acts as a détournement from interpretative instructions in Erik Satie's piano scores; John Cage's speech acts in his performance lectures composed by the method of musical works, including the famous statement "I have nothing to say, I am saying it, and it's poetry, as I need it" ("Lecture on Nothing" 1961); conceptual idiosyncrasy in Marcel Broodthaers's work. These have become almost canonical examples of recourse to poetry as the means of articulating a distinctive, usually problem-posing position within an art discipline: Satie questioning

<sup>15</sup> In dialogue with Aldo Milohnić, Goran Sergej Pristaš and Bojana Kunst

<sup>16</sup> The famous example is *Pupilija, Papa Pupilo, and the Pupilčeks*, a performance made by the Slovene poets' collective Pupilija Ferkeverk, in which dance and physical movement became manifest in the 1960s, or the theater experiments of *Kugla Glumište* and Milana Broš in Croatia in the 1970s, or the performance art pieces of Katalin Ladik in Serbia in the 1980s.

visitor/spectator surrenders her faith to the book she is bound to listen to, which may stumble and stutter when memory fails it, or be reedited in the performer's imagination. The idea of rescuing fiction from the dystopic futurist society that censors it – in François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* – resumes urgency today when we receive our daily portions of fiction more through TV series consumed on laptop screens than by the solitary effort of picking a book to read or attending an auteur cinema screening. Literature might be relegated to an endemic genre of fiction.



Screenshot from the performance *Sixteen Candles* by Bryana Fritz and Christoffer Schieche, October 8, 2015, BUDA Kortrijk.

Edvardsen's "performing books" could be said to have become the corporeal figures of literature. In the work of another Norwegian, the dancer and poet Janne-Camilla Lyster, poetry makes up a choreographic script. In *Escape and Transformation* (2015), five dancers are given a poem, composed in several parts timed with a certain duration. Each dancer "reads" the poem autonomously, saying it to herself by heart and translating the text that she internalized into movement. No mimetic relationship is assigned between movements and words, each dancer keeps her autonomy and discretion of her own shaping of the movement language of her embodiment. The result are five simultaneous layers, like five voices or parts of a thick polyphonic composition. We the audience are given the poem to read at our convenience. What usually remains a concealed implicit dimension of dancers' mode of performance, is now unraveled in the voice of the poem: a poetic transfiguration of images, words, sounds, thoughts, which dancers use as the imaginary prosthesis of their movements, is intimated. A distinctive quality of this writing qua poetry appears in tropes combining an intricate insider's experience of bodily things (parts, organs, tissues, fluids, sensations etc.) and incorporeal objects and verbs detailing movement.



you are dialled-up from deep inside the chest, you are dialled-up from the gut, you are dialled. you are dialled-up from the silent, meaty beast that hangs from you, that hangs from your bones. what do you want? it's me, yeah, hey, it's me, too. what! I see

further than my eyes, you can count on it. I thought this was going to be about silence, but it only amounts to noise, an anatomically landscaped noise, a noise of skin and teeth. you forgot the hair. the hair is gathered in one place.

Excerpt 1 from the choreographic script *Escape and Transformation* for the eponymous performance by Janne-Camilla Lyster (courtesy of the artist)

the white bone mass that slides and slides through the room, creeping into a long, narrow, old sack, you arrange yourself mildly bewitched, deep inside it. at the bottom of the sack. then the sack's surface resembles a wrinkled arm, you are the only - and malleable - knuckle. in the mouth of the sack you arrange yourself, mirrored, mildly bewitched. death scares you, but only in moments that come like short body-coughs.

Excerpt 2 from the choreographic script *Escape and Transformation* for the eponymous performance by Janne-Camilla Lyster (courtesy of the artist)

Such poetry reflects catachresis, originally the Greek stylistic figure that designates a semantic error or a necessary misuse of language which often entails crossing categorical boundaries with words, because there would otherwise be no “proper” expression. Most common instances in everyday language conjoin an animate corporal element to an inanimate thing (leg of the table, wing of the airplane, etc.). The American literary theorist writing on social choreography, Andrew Hewitt, uses catachresis, in Jacques Derrida’s understanding of the incompleteness of meaning and unstability of metaphors, to show that the natural language doesn’t only reflect dancing movement by way of an imprecise metaphor. Instead, it brings into being its referent (dance), just as here, the odd detailed poetic conjunctions of bodies, actions and attributes generate an imagination of movement beyond specific representational categories of dance.<sup>17</sup> The dancers are invited to “abductively” infer about and “feign,” i.e. invent, the movements invoked by the poetic triggers of imagination. The

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Hewitt. *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham, South Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007).

audience, too, are compelled to dwell in the opaque and ambiguous, to readjust their attention to something akin to listening, discerning detail through time, in spite of the prevalence of sight.

#### **#4 Poetic heteronomy/autonomy: A mode of action, a production mode**

I have chosen to speak about what a poetic use of language does to dance, choreography and performance. *Piercing* was the poetical notion used to elucidate the situation of a breakthrough, resolution of a lack, or impossibility to renew conceptual imagination beyond recognition rooted in a legitimizing theoretical interpretation of an artwork. What remains to be gauged are the modes of action and production that poetry affords, not only for dance and performance (as in the cases discussed until now), but as a frame of artwork that doesn't fall under the specification of one art discipline.

Such is the work of the French artist Franck Leibovici, who has introduced the term "document poétique" (poetic document) for a variety of modes of textual presentation.<sup>18</sup> The field of Leibovici's investigation is low-intensity conflicts (unresolved and protracted conflicts, asymmetrical fragmented guerrilla wars), which exists as massive data in forms inaccessible to the public. His approach is to use various modes of classification, transcription and redescription to render these materials into texts or performance scores. Thus, Colin Powell's U.N. speech about the evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or testimonies at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, transcribed in the original language of the witnesses (and not the languages of the court itself only), are redescribed as texts that offer themselves as a new kind of knowledge, an "intellectual technology" devised between poetry, social science and politics. The performance of the poetic document (as an opera, book, installation, etc.) promotes a kind of heteronomy, where the document shows how it behaves both in a context-sensitive and context-free, that is, displaced, environment. As the poetic document underlines the subjection of materials to different laws, at the same time, it offers itself as an instrument of fabricating reality. The mode of action of such poetic documents can become political, as for instance in the case of an in-depth investigation of the mass killings in a village in Congo (the working title of Leibovici's poetic document *Bogoro*), where the text is issued in Swahili, which allows it to circulate in Congo, where the documents of the International Criminal Court do not reach. Hence, the poetic document is given the opportunity to intervene in the public sphere of a certain context.

From the economic point of view of production, the recourse to poetry is rather meaningful. Poetry is often said to be at the lowest level of the food chain, as the famous expression has it. As a mode of production, it is cheap, requiring a minimum of ownership of means, often as little as a writing machine, which is less costly than hiring space and bodies. "The pores of the screen open up and fill the fallen thought," the voice of American dancer and choreographer, Bryana Fritz whispers in her performance *Sixteen Candles*. I wouldn't want to risk being misunderstood as demagogically defending the vulgar truism that there is more creativity the emptier the stomach. But there is something to be learned from the situation in which artists seek out poetry to divorce their work from the aesthetic norms and economic

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<sup>18</sup> franck leibovici. *document poétique* (Paris: Al Dante, 2008).

contracts linked to their specific mediums. The upshot is an increase of uncertain, speculative, non-necessary (“abductive”) thought, as well as opaque and heteronomous expressions. As the Belgian curator and cultural activist and writer, Laurence Rassel, told me, the poetic means (as much or as little, as intensive or as imperceptible, I would add) that it *might* happen. Our wish then is to try to unravel poetics as the productive kind of thought that drives and accounts for such potential.

**Selected by Zhana Ivanova**

**Material from  
Robert Robinson, “Portraying the World through Neutral Eyes,” in  
*As If an Entrance Is Over There*, ed. Edward Clydesdale Thomson  
(Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Lecturis, 2013), 78–83.**

## PORTRAYING THE WORLD THROUGH NEUTRAL EYES

In 1996, commercially produced audio description in movie theatres for blind or visually impaired people was just beginning in the UK, but it was common in live theatre, using a hearing loop and live describers who watched the action on stage as it unfolded. The describers had to work in real time and be present in the theatre, for a stage play can, of course, take unforeseen directions and its pace can differ each night. It should perhaps have been easier in the cinema, but the technical problem of syncing description to the gaps in dialogue was difficult. Only when DVD and digital projection became common was the way clear for people with visual impairment to fully experience a movie in the cinema, with all the joy that a collective, mass reaction to events portrayed on screen can bring. The aim was to enable visually impaired people to have an experience as close to that of all other cinemagoers. This meant that the audio description should enable them to interpret the film rather than have it interpreted for them, and also be as fluent and as detailed as possible without impinging on the film's soundtrack. I have written descriptions of the visual events on screen for several films, some of which were also distributed on DVD.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge for the writer of audio description for film is that of converting a visual 'text' to a written one, making sure it is effective aurally. The intended audience never comes into contact with the written text, which acts as an intermediary between the visual information on the screen and its metamorphosis into sounds. In many ways the audio describer has the same concerns as a poet. A written text is produced, but the sound of the words, their rhythm, their mood and its buildup to climaxes, or

to bathos, or to humour, etc., is more important to the audience. For each segment of a description of a film, the words are written, corrected, read aloud and improved many times before the final recording. As a final step, the company for whom I wrote descriptions always used professional actors to do their recording—thus another voice has to be convinced by the rhythms and detail of the description—creating further opportunities for interpretation and mood development.

The process of describing a moving picture is in some respects paradoxical, for the audio describer will often stop the movie in order to write his or her description from a frozen image. Then, when the description is inserted into the film's soundtrack, it should link clearly and succinctly to the action on screen as it unfolds over time. Describing what is on a screen, which is of course constantly changing, means that the describer's written snapshots usually focus on the main visual source of action and sound, and seek to add peripheral, atmospheric details when they can. The choice of these details—peripheral but essential for full enjoyment of the movie—could be said to be more instinctive than organised or methodical. The tone created by these choices may be one of the ways in which we could judge whether an audio description is effective or not. The notion of the describer's eye following a structured path around the image—emulating a regulated process of looking—does not apply for the mostly practical reasons stated above, and also because the final text is usually shortened drastically. Thus the process has less observable regularity than, for example, the movement of vision while browsing or reading the page of a broadsheet newspaper.

The complication in audio description for me, in the films I worked on (between 1996 and 2005), was to convey the events happening on screen during gaps in dialogue, without patronising or leading the audience by attempting to 'read' the film in terms of theme, character, symbolism etc. Gaps in movie dialogue are usually small, so description that becomes subjective and overwrought

with adjective or adverb is almost always too long. However, it is possible to slip into the habit of, say, using adverbs that imply attitudes or intentions not justified by what is in the visual information. To give a simple, hypothetical example: there is a choice between someone advancing 'slowly' and someone advancing 'menacingly' on a person from behind. Both can be justified, but the latter interprets from more than the physical, visual information. The choice as an audio describer is whether the physical fact ('slowness') is portrayed as menacing by the visual information on screen. Usually it would be clear that the motives and emotions were quite adequately conveyed by the dialogue, music and sound effects, and the process of describing did not need to identify more than the physical. It sometimes feels artificial to write in this way, when the simple inclusion of an 'interpretative' adjective or adverb would speed description up, but the choice is between conveying the information as if the writer is a pair of eyes only, rather than a pair of eyes and a decision making/infering brain. The former is the equivalent of objectivity, and the latter is a kind of didactic teaching stance that seeks to impose a point of view and leave little or no space for the reaction of, and interpretation by the audience.

Of course, even if the describer is limited to what is seen by his or her eyes, and his or her work is linked mainly to the physical, there are still choices to be made. Every section of the screen has something in it, even if it is black space. Choosing which to describe, and the order in which to describe it, conveys information too. I often felt that a good audio description script had the kind of terse and dynamic feel of a short story by the American author, Raymond Carver.<sup>2</sup> There is enough detail so that the listener/reader can pick up the story, but the real wealth of emotion and meaning lies in the gaps left for the audience to fill in. Essentially the audio describer is *showing* through his or her language what is on the screen, and not *telling* the audience how to react by including loaded words that carry obvious connotations. In my experience, after a while, the kind of spare, stripped-down

language needed for audio description becomes familiar, the urge to enhance and embellish disappears and the essence of a picture becomes apparent.

However, the laudable intention of removing altogether the interpretative eye of the audio describer or reference to the way the visual image has been produced, sometimes works against accuracy and completeness in the final description. In my work describing for the visually impaired, while generally being reluctant to remind the listener that they cannot see well, or at all, does not have to treat as a complete taboo reference to the biological mechanism of seeing, or the mechanical production of images. There is, of course, a delicate tension between the need for precision and care for the sensitivities of the listener and their situation.

Some tasks for audio description are difficult to keep objective and totally denotative. A photograph I described in the manner of an audio descriptive script was for Edward C Thomson, who later recorded the text and transferred it to a vinyl record:<sup>3</sup>

As through a lens; a patch of grassy land with the foreground blurred as is the middle to near distance. There is a background of grey shapes and hints of more vegetation around the plants which are in focus.

A long flower stalk rises from a grassy patch, in which grow longer and shorter stalks of tall wispy grass mixed with broader leaves of emerging plants.

This description process provoked much agonising, specifically about the first four words, which hint at a subjective view of what the picture looked like through a lens. The actual picture was taken through a lens—an objective, presumably provable fact—but nevertheless this was the audio describer's opinion given the only evidence I had (the photographic print). As is sometimes the case with audio description, I felt it was impossible

to remove any reference to 'seeing' and instead, in this instance, I acknowledged that important component by referring to the means of the image's production (via the lens or camera) even though the effect was not necessarily *visible* in the image itself. The rest of the description attempted to be as denotative as possible, but the impossible task of bringing totally neutral language means that some mood or atmosphere is evoked. What, of course, is for the reader or listener to say.

I am, therefore, portraying here a challenge often doomed to failure. Although I attempted to keep my written language sparse and lean, it often defied my attempts to strip it of all but the basic connotations, and, no matter how much we search for the neutral, the very act of searching implies its own values.

Auchterarder, December 2011

1

Audio description exists in other arenas than that of movie description and theatre; they have also been commissioned to allow visually impaired people greater access and enjoyment from sensory gardens; I have written a description of a leaflet for a National Health Service Trust which gives aural information for patients prior to a stay in hospital. I am sure many other examples exist, and many other people are working in this field, down to the individual carer who may take his or her visually impaired charge to a football match or event, and whisper a description in their ear.

2

A section of a story "Kindling" from *Call if you Need Me: the uncollected fiction & prose* by Raymond Carver could illustrate this: "This is my wife. This is Bonnie, Sol said. Bonnie was watching TV but moved her eyes to see who it was coming inside. She pushed a button on the device she held in her hand and the volume went off. She pushed it again and the picture disappeared. Then she got up from the sofa and onto her feet. She was a fat girl. She was fat all over and she huffed when she breathed." (London: Harvill, 2000), 7.

3

The recording was heard through headphones in Thomson's exhibition, *Borderline Picturesque & the Recounting Prospect* at the Tromsø Kunstforening in 2010.

**Selected by Zhana Ivanova**

**Material from  
Richard Siken, "You Are Jeff," in *Crush* (New Haven, CT: Yale University  
Press, 2008), 50–58.**



*You are Jeff*  
Richard Siken

1

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road, beyond the hairpin turn, or just before it, depending on which twin you are in love with at the time. Do not choose sides yet. It is still to your advantage to remain impartial. Both motorbikes are shiny red and both boys have perfect teeth, dark hair, soft hands. The one in front will want to take you apart, and slowly. His deft and stubby fingers searching every shank and lock for weaknesses. You could love this boy with all your heart. The other brother only wants to stitch you back together. The sun shines down. It's a beautiful day. Consider the hairpin turn. Do not choose sides yet.

2

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road. Let's call them Jeff. And because the first Jeff is in front we'll consider him the older, and therefore responsible for lending money and the occasional punch in the shoulder. World-wise, world-weary, and not his mother's favorite, this Jeff will always win when it all comes down to fisticuffs. Unfortunately for him, it doesn't always all come down to fisticuffs. Jeff is thinking about his brother down the winding road behind him. He is thinking that if only he could cut him open and peel him back and crawl inside this second skin, then he could relive that last mile again: reborn, wild-eyed, free.

3

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road, beyond the hairpin turn, or just before it, depending on which Jeff you are. It could have been so beautiful—you scout out the road ahead and I will watch your back, how it was and how it will be, memory and fantasy—but each Jeff wants to be the other one. My name is Jeff and I'm tired of looking at the back of your head. My name is Jeff and I'm tired of seeing my hand me down clothes. Look, Jeff, I'm telling you, for the last time, I mean it, etcetera. They are the same and they are not the same. They are the same and they hate each other for it.

4

Your name is Jeff and somewhere up ahead of you your brother has pulled to the side of the road and he is waiting for you with a lug wrench clutched in his greasy fist. O how he loves you, darling boy. O how, like always, he invents the monsters underneath the bed to get you to sleep next to him, chest to chest or chest to back, the covers drawn around you in an act of faith against the night. When he throws the wrench into the air it will catch the light as it spins toward you. Look—it looks like a star. You had expected something else, anything else, but the wrench never reaches you. It hangs in the air like that, spinning in the air like that. It's beautiful.

5

Let's say God in his High Heaven is hungry and has decided to make himself some tuna fish sandwiches. He's already finished making two of them, on sourdough, before he realizes that the fish is bad. What is he going to do with these sandwiches? They're already made, but he doesn't want to eat them.

Let's say the Devil is played by two men. We'll call them Jeff. Dark hair, green eyes, white teeth, pink tongues—they're twins. The one on the left has gone bad in the middle, and the other one on the left is about to. As they wrestle, you can tell that they have forgotten about God, and they are very hungry.

6

You are playing cards with three men named Jeff. Two of the Jeffs seem somewhat familiar, but the Jeff across from you keeps staring at your hands, your mouth, and you're certain that you've never seen this Jeff before. But he's on your team, and you're ahead, you're winning big, and yet the other Jeffs keep smiling at you like there's no tomorrow. They all have perfect teeth: white, square, clean, even. And, for some reason, the lighting in the room makes their teeth seem closer than they should be, as if each mouth was a place, a living room with pink carpet and the window's open. *Come back from the window, Jefferson. Take off those wet clothes and come over here, by the fire.*

7

You are playing cards with three Jeffs. One is your father, one is your brother, and the other is your current boyfriend. All of them have seen you naked and heard you talking in your sleep. Your boyfriend Jeff gets up to answer the phone. To them he is a mirror, but to you he is a room. *Phone's for you,* Jeff says. Hey! It's Uncle Jeff, who isn't really your uncle, but you can't talk right now, one of the Jeffs has put his tongue in your mouth. Please let it be the right one.

8

Two brothers are fighting by the side of the road. Two motorbikes have fallen over on the shoulder, leaking oil into the dirt, while the interlocking brothers grapple and swing. You see them through the backseat window as you and your parents drive past. You are twelve years old. You do not have a brother. You have never experienced anything this ferocious or intentional with another person. Your mother is pretending that she hasn't seen anything. Your father is fiddling with the knobs of the radio. There is an empty space next to you in the backseat of the station wagon. Make it the shape of everything you need. Now say hello.

9

You are in an ordinary suburban bedroom with bunk beds, a bookshelf, two wooden desks and chairs. You are lying on your back, on the top bunk, very close to the textured ceiling, staring straight at it in fact, and the room is still dark except for a wedge of powdery light that spills in from the adjoining bathroom. The bathroom is covered in mint green tile and someone is in there, singing very softly. Is he singing to you? For you? Black cherries in chocolate, the ring around the moon, a beetle underneath a glass—you cannot make out all the words, but you're sure he knows you're in there, and he's singing to you, even though you don't know who he is.

10

You see it as a room, a tabernacle, the dark hotel. You're in the hallway again, and you open the door, and if you're ready you'll see it, but maybe one part of your mind decides that the other parts aren't ready, and then you don't remember where you've been, and you find yourself down the hall again, the lights gone dim as the left hand sings the right hand back to sleep. It's a puzzle: each piece, each room, each time you put your hand to the knob, your mouth to the hand, your ear to the wound that whispers.

You're in the hallway again. The radio is playing your favorite song. You're in the hallway. Open the door again. Open the door.

11

Suppose for a moment that the heart has two heads, that the heart has been chained and dunked in a glass booth filled with river water. The heart is monologing about hesitation and fulfillment while behind the red brocade the heart is drowning. Can the heart escape? Does love even care? Snow falls as we dump the booth in the bay.

Suppose for a moment we are crowded around a pier, waiting for something to ripple the water. *We believe in you. There is no danger. It is not getting dark,* we want to say.

12

Consider the hairpin turn. It is waiting for you like a red door or the broken leg of a dog. The sun is shining, O how the sun shines down! Your speedometer and your handgrips and the feel of the road below you, how it knows you, the black ribbon spread out on the greens between these lines that suddenly don't reach to the horizon. It is waiting, like a broken door, like the red dog that chases its tail and eats your rosebushes and then must be forgiven. Who do you love, Jeff? Who do you love? You were driving toward something and then, well, then you found yourself driving the other way. The dog is asleep. The road is behind you. O how the sun shines down.

13

This time everyone has the best intentions. You have cancer. Let's say you have cancer. Let's say you've swallowed a bad thing and now it's got its hands inside you. This is the essence of love and failure. You see what I mean but you're happy anyway, and that's okay, it's a love story after all, a lasting love, a wonderful adventure with lots of action, where the mirror says mirror and the hand says hand and the front door never says Sorry Charlie. So the doctor says you need more stitches and the bruise cream isn't working. So much for the facts. Let's say you're still completely in the dark but we love you anyway. We love you. We really do.

14

After work you go to the grocery store to get some milk and a carton of cigarettes. Where did you get those bruises? You don't remember. Work was boring. You find a jar of bruise cream and a can of stewed tomatoes. Maybe a salad? Spinach, walnuts, blue cheese, apples, and you can't decide between the Extra Large or Jumbo black olives. Which is bigger anyway? Extra Large has a blue label, Jumbo has a purple label. Both cans cost \$1.29. While you're deciding, the afternoon light is streaming through the windows behind the bank of checkout counters. Take the light inside you like a blessing, like a knee in the chest, holding onto it and not letting it go. Now let it go.

15

Like sandpaper, the light, or a blessing, or a bruise. Blood everywhere, he said, the red light hemorrhaging from everywhere at once. The train station blue, your lips blue, hands cold and the blue wind. Or a horse, your favorite horse now raised up again out of the mud and galloping galloping always toward you. In your ruined shirt, on the last day, while the bruise won't heal, and the stain stays put, the red light streaming in from everywhere at once. Your broken ribs, the back of your head, your hand to mouth or hand to now, right now, like you mean it, like it's splitting you in two. Now look at the lights, the lights.

16

You and your lover are making out in the corner booth of a seedy bar. The booths are plush and the drinks are cheap and in this dim and smoky light you can barely tell whose hands are whose. Someone raises their glass for a toast. Is that the Hand of Judgment or the Hand of Mercy? The bartender smiles, running a rag across the burnished wood of the bar. The drink in front of you has already been paid for. Drink it, the bartender says. *It's yours, you deserve it. It's already been paid for. Somebody's paid for it already. There's no mistake, he says. It's your drink, the one you asked for, just the way you like it. How can you refuse* Hands of fire, hands of air, hands of water, hands of dirt. Someone's doing all the talking but no one's lips move. Consider the hairpin turn.

17

The motorbikes are neck and neck but where's the checkered flag we all expected, waving in the distance, telling you you're home again, home? He's next to you, right next to you in fact, so close, or. . . he isn't. Imagine a room. Yes, imagine a room: two chairs facing the window but nobody moves. Don't move. Keep staring straight into my eyes. It feels like you're not moving, the way when, dancing, the room will suddenly fall away. You're dancing: you're neck and neck or cheek to cheek, he's there or he isn't, the open road. Imagine a room. Imagine you're dancing. Imagine the room now falling away. Don't move.

18

Two brothers: one of them wants to take you apart. Two brothers: one of them wants to put you back together. It's time to choose sides now. The stitches or the devouring mouth? You want an alibi? You don't get an alibi, you get two brothers. Here are two Jeffs. Pick one. This is how you make the meaning, you take two things and try to define the space between them. Jeff or Jeff? Who do you want to be? You just wanted to play in your own backyard, but you don't know where your own yard is, exactly. You just wanted to prove there was one safe place, just one safe place where you could love him. You have not found that place yet. You have not made that place yet. You are here. You are here. You're still right here.

19

Here are your names and here is the list and here are the things you left behind: The mark on the floor from pushing your chair back, your underwear, one half brick of cheese, the kind I don't like, wrapped up, and poorly, and abandoned on the second shelf next to the poppyseed dressing, which is also yours. Here's the champagne on the floor, and here are your house keys, and here are the curtains that your cat peed on. And here is your cat, who keeps eating grass and vomiting in the hallway. Here is the list with all of your names, Jeff. They're not the same name, Jeff. They're not the same at all.

20

There are two twins on motorbikes but they are not on motorbikes, they're in a garden where the flowers are as big as thumbs. Imagine you are in a field of daisies. What are you doing in a field of daisies? Get up! Let's say you're not in the field anymore. Let's say they're not brothers anymore. That's right, they're not brothers, they're just one guy, and he knows you, and he's talking to you, but you're in pain and you cannot understand him. What are you still doing in this field? Get out of the field! You should be in the hotel room! You should, at least, be trying to get back into the hotel room. Ah! Now the field is empty.

21

Hold onto your voice. Hold onto your breath. Don't make a noise, don't leave the room until I come back from the dead for you. I will come back from the dead for you. This could be a city. This could be a graveyard. This could be the basket of a big balloon. Leave the lights on. Leave a trail of letters like those little knots of bread we used to dream about. We used to dream about them. We used to do a lot of things. Put your hand to the knob, your mouth to the hand, pick up the bread and devour it. I'm in the hallway again, I'm in the hallway. The radio's playing my favorite song. Leave the lights on. Keep talking. I'll keep walking toward the sound of your voice.

22

Someone had a party while you were sleeping but you weren't really sleeping, you were sick, and parts of you were burning, and you couldn't move. Perhaps the party was in your honor. You can't remember. It seems the phone was ringing in the dream you were having but there's no proof. A dish in the sink that might be yours, some clothes on the floor that might belong to someone else. When was the last time you found yourself looking out of this window. Hey! This is a beautiful window! This is a beautiful view! 1 hose trees lined up like that, and the way the stars are spinning over them like that, spinning in the air like that, like wrenches.

23

Let's say that God is the space between two men and the Devil is the space between two men. Here: I'll be all of them-Jeff and Jeff and Jeff and Jeff are standing on the shoulder of the highway, four motorbikes knocked over, two wrenches spinning in the ordinary air. Two of these Jeffs are windows, and two of these Jeffs are doors, and all of these Jeffs are trying to tell you something. Come closer. We'll whisper it in your ear. It's like seeing your face in a bowl of soup, cream of potato, and the eyes shining back like spoons. If we wanted to tell you everything, we would leave more footprints in the snow or kiss you harder. One thing. Come closer. Listen . . .

24

You're in a car with a beautiful boy, and he won't tell you that he loves you, but he loves you. And you feel like you've done something terrible, like robbed a liquor store, or swallowed pills, or shoveled yourself a grave in the dirt, and you're tired. You're in a car with a beautiful boy, and you're trying not to tell him that you love him, and you're trying to choke down the feeling, and you're trembling, but he reaches over and he touches you, like a prayer for which no words exist, and you feel your heart taking root in your body, like you've discovered something you don't even have a name for.

**Selected by Zhana Ivanova**

**Material from  
Jan Verwoert, “Description,” in *As If an Entrance Is Over There*,  
ed. Edward Clydesdale Thomson (Eindhoven, the Netherlands:  
Lecturis, 2013), 86–91.**

## DESCRIPTION

So how do you find an image? It's not as if you lost one and look for it now, is it? Usually it's rather a case of: you find it as you come across it. When that happens, what is it that comes across in the image? Well, first of all a sense of having found something. Yes, but what is it that gives you that sense? Is it a moment of recognition? Perhaps. Then what is it that you recognise? Something you once knew, maybe, and forgot you knew, and which, now that you see it again you remember you forgot... It's a very powerful feeling, a sense of homecoming, of returning to a place you had once maybe known very well but, with time passing, stopped relating to the way you did. So what the image gets across when you come across it is: *you*. It takes you across the gulf that time opened up, and transports you back to where your passage may have begun. And that is quite something.

But then, how can you be sure that the place you're taken to is home? After all you might simply be deceived by the feeling of relief that comes with that sense of arrival, the relief to have arrived somewhere—which could be anywhere, really, as long as it offers you the comfort of knowing you reached some kind of destination. You made it. Glad you did. Still, how can you tell that this destination is yours? And not just any? For all you know it might well be, and the place the image takes you to is nowhere you have ever been. That you feel you have, may only be the trick that the image plays on you. For this is how images work when they work on your imagination: they give you a sense of being *in* the image, that is, in a place in which you are not, presently, when you look at them (and if you were, it would be funny, wouldn't it?) And since images therefore, almost by definition, take

you somewhere you are not, what reasons are there to trust them to transport you to where you once were? Anyhow, it's hard to check. All you can go by is the sense of place you associate with the memories that the image evokes. And, who knows, if the image deceives you, what's evoked may be no more than a ghost that resides behind the lens, inside the hull of the camera, or within the walls of the archive, from where the image originated. A ghost. Not necessarily even yours. So far.

To be honest, the secret of the trade that image-makers practice—and musicians, writers and performers do too—lies precisely in the art of giving people that sense of coming home to locales they may never have been in before, locales which may not even exist in the first place. If I were now to speak to you about the place that I take you to when you read this: then it truly is the place from which I address you. But it's not where I am while I write this. The place from which my voice speaks could in fact not be further away from where I currently sit, jotting down these lines. If any sense of serenity is evoked by my words here, it's because I fake it, taking great care, as I do now, that the pace at which my sentences unfold is as even as I can possibly manage to keep it, while I write on a busy commuter train on a rainy morning in the Netherlands. Just now, my attention had been fully absorbed by the slender black rubber boots that the elderly lady seated next to me was wearing: they were Hunters. After Kate Moss had been seen wearing such boots at the Glastonbury festival (notorious for its muddy grounds), the brand became very popular. In Bergen, I realised the other day, one in four Norwegian girls owns a pair. Does the elderly lady who just got off the train at the stop 'Goes' know? And: Where are the Norwegian girls when they put on their Hunters? In Kate's shoes in rural Britain? Pondering this, I walked into an artist's studio in Bergen and froze: on her bookshelf sat a copy of Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. We know that



home is where the heart is. But where does it go when it goes hunting?

Writing these lines, I got so carried away that I almost missed my stop, Middelburg, but got off, just in time, only to be stopped in my tracks, as the bridge across the channel by the station was up (or rather, it was rotated on its base in the middle of the channel into a position paralleling the banks of the channel) to let a small oil tanker pass. Wagenborg was written across its hull in huge capital letters. Mild drizzle. And an older woman, on a bench outside the station comforting a younger woman seated next to her, who was crying, like she lost someone, and had two heavy shopping bags at her feet. I'll stop here. The bridge has moved back into position. I'll have to go.

This is exactly how it was. I swear. But by the time this has gone to print and you read it, of course, things are no longer like they were, there and then. The channel for sure still runs by the station. Apart from that, however, everyone in the picture will have moved on to other places, myself included. How wide is the gulf that opened up between then and now, there and here (wherever you may be in this moment)? How do you measure the distance? In days? Or miles? In terms of the number of times that this text will have been revised in the process of being transcribed and edited? None of that would make too much sense, would it? It rather seems that the distance between the time and place of an event and the moment of reading of it, defies quantification. Yet, strangely enough, since neither the distance to the event nor the intimacy in which it is shared (in the moment of reading) can be broken down into a logic of hard facts, distance and proximity here seem to exist in a peculiar continuum in which things past and far away can easily come to seem present and close, and, just as easily, recede and fade into unreality.

How to navigate this continuum? There are ways, one of the most vital indeed being *description*. Describing is

a cultural technique—an artform! It bridges distance while acknowledging it fully. In describing what you see (in a picture, in actuality or before your mind's eye) to someone else, you respond to the circumstance that they don't presently see it, you answer to their need to see, or act upon your desire to let them partake in your experience, without, however, promising—or pretending—that you could ever fully satisfy this need and desire: For whoever describes something with care will, in the very act of choosing their words wisely, also foreground the fact that, indeed, it's only *words* they are offering. The sense of proximity, that is, the feeling of moving up close to what is described, generated by careful descriptions, is therefore inseparable from an avowal of the distance that prevails between the words and what is pictured. The *care taken* (in the process of pondering on the right choice of words) comes to fruition in the *intimacy created* (between the reader or listener and that which goes beyond words and exists in the mind or out there somewhere). Yet, by virtue of the fact that it's the words receiving the care, it's them that remain at the heart of the matter.

So, when a good close description gives you that sense of home-coming, the home that it guides you back to is a home that exists as much in the world because it lies in language, and in language alone. Description therefore is the art of *inhabiting the continuum* in which what is in the world is related to what is in language in terms of proximity *and* distance, identity *and* difference, intimacy *and* separation... as well as fiction *and* nonfiction.

Fiction indeed is as much a means for inhabiting the continuum between words and the world as nonfiction is. They differ in terms of the type of veracity we expect from them. Yet, they still resemble each other closely in terms of the way in which they generate that sense of veracity in language: by means of producing moments of *plausibility* that in turn remain strictly immanent to the manner in which words are made to relate to other

words within the vocabulary chosen and scenario evoked. A report about an American president fluently chatting with the governor of Vladivostok in his local Russian dialect, for example, will strike you as implausible for the same reasons that will make you recoil in disbelief from a tale in which a unicorn addresses a maiden by roaring like a lion, or making an extremely coarse joke. Plausibility is veracity relative to language.

It's what qualifies a carelessly woven web of lies as a good alibi. Yet, it also allows for fiction—of all kind, not just in writing but also in music, image making and theatre—to build a relation to the world in the very act of suspending that relation. So, if you sing a song in a language that never existed and underlay it with sounds from a sea voyage you (most likely) weren't on at the time (and in the place) when (and where) you recorded the singing, the manner in which those sounds chime together with the tone of the singers' voices, then the flow of the tunes and the sound of the instruments creates its very own form of plausibility: You will suddenly hear the folk music of a people that perhaps never walked the face of the earth. But now that you hear their music, it's indeed highly plausible that they actually may have—not least because something in the songs, while being fiction, through being sung, may actually tap deep into the memories and sentiments of a culture that did and does still exist. Yet, as a culture it in turn also only survives in the music that it passes on. So it, too, exists, in reality, always already in the key of being translated and transfigured into song.

So, what you might find in an image, and what description can give you via the care taken of words in this sense resembles what may touch you in a song: the sense of coming to a place which comes to you, at which you arrive because it arrives in the image, writing and song. So even if it's not a home and it possibly never existed, you still inhabit it as a home, in the act of navigating

the space between proximity and distance that the image, description and song travels across.

**Selected by Tobias Kaspar**

**Material from  
Claire Fontaine, "G.C.A.," *ReadThis*, 2011, [http://readthis.wtf/  
translation/claire-fontaine-g-c-a/](http://readthis.wtf/translation/claire-fontaine-g-c-a/).**

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BLOG MEDIA TRANSLATION WRITING

016

## Claire Fontaine, 'G.C.A.'

TOPICS

Essay by Claire Fontaine on the work of Philippe Thomas. Translated at short notice on request of the curator of a 2016 exhibition. The curator then didn't pay me for the translation and since then has refused to answer my emails. (She's now director of a gallery in LA).

Without imagining anything without drawing anything without tiring yourself out you can become a global contemporary artist (G.C.A.) by calling upon the services of the 'readymades belong to everyone' agency.  
— Extract from BDDP/Paris, *This advert could change your life*, readymades belong to everyone®

Who can deny the pleasure of reading a room, and that it only improves with similar dinners? You learn to see

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the early stages of a career. You can hear the money  
laughing in his ripped jeans, all the way across the room.  
You can almost taste an artist emerging in a dealer's mouth.  
Eventually you are even able to spot the missing people and  
predict the newcomers.  
—John Kelsey, *Rich Texts, Selected Writings for Art*,  
Sternberg Press, 2010

The strange adventure of the institutional reception of Philippe Thomas's œuvre is disquieting. Not so much because, in the wake of Broodthaers but in a far more troubling manner, Philippe Thomas created devices for the showing, conservation, and market conventions of what he had to show, to conserve, and to sell; but because, in our view, a certain truth emerges clearly from his story: that there is a very close connection between institutional reception and a certain kind of solitude that is proper to the *individual*.<sup>1</sup> One must be able to extract and isolate from the rest one object, one approach, one author, in order for it to be included in the official history of art. We might go so far as to say that the solitude of the work and that of the artist who produces it are the fundamental conditions of possibility for exhibition. The same goes for groups and collectives: in so far as they remain recognisable, and their members do not change, they function exactly like an individual, like a limited company in the economy of the archive and the collection. For there is indeed a recognition that is prior to public recognition, one that consists in a cold, quasi-clinical scrutiny—something that accumulates heavily in a blank silence, like money. Museal consecration is built on the capacity to discreetly stockpile constants, forms, and attitudes in the memory of experts until they cohere, in order that one day these experts may grant full citizenship of art history to the physical and intellectual gestures attributed to a person. Thus they decide, they cut, they mutilate sequences of work so as to isolate the masterpieces; they choose one being from a social pool and separate it out from all those made its life meaningful, for it alone is worth something, and the others are worth nothing.<sup>2</sup>

But Philippe Thomas was by no means alone.

Even apart from his explicit association with Jean-François Brun and Dominique Pasqualini, with whom he formed first *Ligne Générale*, and

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of a sort of community in which he permanently absented himself. One might think that he multiplied pseudonyms, created an advertising agency to relinquish rights of authorship, and built a mirror of the digestive system of institutional memory, all in order to protect his oeuvre and to control its reception.

But one would be wrong.

Meta-fiction, the multitude of real and imaginary identities, and the accumulation of plastic and conceptual devices were developed and refined into a gigantic mechanism of contamination and inclusion, in opposition to the myth of the unicity of the artist's genius. To the extent that, when one comes to Philippe Thomas from a younger generation, for example to curate a section of an exhibition, as is our case, and when one has known him only through his texts, a few of his works, and (rare) photographic reproductions of them, one feels oneself to be in the presence of a very tight circle of collusion and complicity, almost a magnetic field. For Philippe Thomas developed ways in which not only to share his works but to distribute—and dilute—his glory (even posthumously); he short-circuited critical distance by leaving behind, in his place, collaborators of uncertain status and a host of open questions.

First of all, that of the oeuvre as enigma: the writings, the images, the sculptures, the exhibitions and performances are designed like a puzzle where, provided one manages to join together enough pieces, one begins to hear a faint laughter like that of Odradek, like a rustling of leaves; a laughter that has no lungs behind it and which sends shivers down your spine. Philippe Thomas used the void left behind by the author-function to capture the set-ups of subjectivation at work, the desires of collectors to change their life without changing, to live by proxy through the work of art. He made the most complex and embarrassing relation—that between the artist and the buyer of his work, which the mediation of the gallery usually obfuscates—into a collaboration, a paradoxical convergence of interests which put the laws of capital into reverse. As he wrote: '[The readymades are for everyone<sup>®</sup> agency] endows these pieces, which ultimately were only made possible by the collaboration of at least two people (say, Philippe Thomas and a collector), with a corporate name, an extension of these 'micro-companies' of which each of them provides the respective proof'<sup>3</sup>—the proof of a paradoxical possibility, a prosecution exhibit perhaps? And if so,

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Parnet, but from which Parnet's voice is absent because she only engendered the space *between* the two of them and then disappeared: 'when it comes down to it', Deleuze writes, 'you are all alone, and yet you are like a conspiracy of criminals. You are no longer an author, you are a production studio, you have never been more populated'. And it is a matter of making a rich usage of this solitude between two or more beings, without trying to deny it; 'using it as a means of encounter, making a line or bloc shoot between two people, producing all the phenomena of a double capture, showing what the conjunction AND is, neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight? AND ... AND ... AND ...'.<sup>4</sup>

Our hypothesis is that, by scrambling the boundaries between collectors and artists, by integrating modes and devices of presentation into works and titles, Philippe Thomas wanted to show that the ultimate consequences of the readymade were to be sought in the bodies of artists, become readymades in their turn, subjects without qualities promoted to the rank of exceptional people simply by the context in which they were placed. That not only had the author-function left a void, but what remained 'full' in it, namely the role of the artist, needed to be unmasked and redistributed. Philippe Thomas discovered a detached tone in which to show, without cynicism, with a cold anger, the effects of capitalism on our ideas and our bodies, to illustrate calmly the collusions in which we are all immersed, and to undo stereotypes. He did so without any fuss, laboriously, elegantly, across dreadful years, surrounded by silent complicities and embarrassed glances.

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In each of us there is, as it were, an ascesis, in part turned against ourselves. We are deserts, but populated by tribes, flora and fauna. We pass our time in ordering these tribes, arranging them in other ways, getting rid of some and encouraging others to prosper. And all these clans, all these crowds, do not undermine the desert, which is our very ascesis; on the contrary they inhabit it, they pass through it,

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— G. Deleuze, C. Parnet, *Dialogues*

Philippe Thomas created a territory and populated it, he offered ownership of it and shared it with those who wished to accompany him in this adventure; but now that the author is physically dead, the expansion of this space draws to a close and the inhabitants of this place, despite themselves, have become keepers, messengers, protagonists of a story that is now complete.

Even beyond the pseudonyms that Thomas used, one is faced with a body of work that has a multitude of signatories, and it matters little whether or not one can call them authors, for Philippe Thomas did not hide himself in this crowd, he merged with it, even when this seemed ill-advised, shaking off all moralism so as to go further. It has been said that his oeuvre was an operation of ventriloquism, but in reality what is most compelling about the 'Philippe Thomas constellation' is that sometimes his characters are *real*. Even when they are subject to the knowing supervision of the artist, certain voices bring with them their true identity, wearing it like a mask and mixing with the chorus of other fictions. In this regard the dialogue between George Verney-Carron and Eric Duyckaerts, which gives its title to the 1999 Mamco publication *Sur un lieu commun*, is exemplary. In it Verney-Carron plays the role of himself to a dizzying degree. The entrepreneur incarnates at once the old bourgeoisie and the new spirit of advertising. The son of an arms dealer but a collector and organiser of artistic events, he gives us a terribly pragmatic vision of art on whose basis the disquieting substitution is carried out. The exhibition mounted by Yves Aupetitallot at the Saint Etienne Maison de la Culture in 1988 bore the title *Agencement 88: Georges Verney-Carron*, and in particular it contained the magnificent sculpture *Agencement 88*, consisting of a Decaux billboard with Verney-Carron's name on one side, and on the other a phrase taken from his conversation with Duyckaerts, overprinted on a photograph of an empty conference table: 'It is enough to say yes in order to change the face of things.' When asked about his transformation into an artist and author, Verney-Carron admitted that this had had 'a strange effect' on him: whereas normally he bought advertising space for his clients, this time he had bought it for himself, even though he was not 'the creator of the campaign'. But this made sense for him because he was quite sure that the museum where the work was to be found was, in its turn, an 'advertising spot'. A builder of bridges between what he called



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everyday story of the bringing together of art and business. For example, last year when the Monin group presented a work to Bernard Ceysson, in Saint Etienne, Gilbert Monin organised a seminar for his executives in a hotel in Saint Etienne and, after dinner, all the executives went to visit the museum, with a guided tour, and so on.... People who had never set foot in a museum before were led inside. As for the head of the company, he must fulfil his cultural responsibilities: he can talk about the role of the company in a different way, and the executives will take pride in the fact that their firm is playing a part in the heritage of France. This has an effect on both internal and external communication, and the loop is closed.<sup>5</sup> With these company meals, guided visits, and this internal and external communication, it is corporatist affects that assert their citizenship of the museum. Works of art, taken up in this closed loop, certainly cannot have much meaning for the lives of the executives forcibly trailed around the museum while they digest their working dinner—but there is nothing unusual in this, for not only has art become compatible with the market economy, it has become the equivalent of other commodities, like second houses or cars. Its place, in the world of contemporary art, can be bought for oneself and, as *La Pétition de principe* shows us very clearly, this is how one becomes an *actor* in this fiction. 'Personally,' says Verney-Carron, 'I believe that I have been an actor from the moment I began to buy art. It's clear for me: to be an actor in art, in cultural life, means to buy—it means that, rather than buying myself a car or a weekend break, I set aside some money for the purchase of paintings, of artworks. It's at that point that I begin to be an actor.'<sup>6</sup>

The activist nature of Philippe Thomas's set-up is clear: collectors have been represented enough, now the time has come to let them play a part. As Verney-Carron writes in 'Publicité publicité' (where he does not speak in his own voice): 'When art history makes of the very people who supposedly tore it down the radical heroes of a gesture which it seeks to repeat, it invites us to recognise in representation a force of destabilisation which the New York agency, following Warhol and Johns, will of course make the most of.'<sup>7</sup>

Philippe Thomas questioned the position of the artist in the same world in which Marcel Broodthaers had posed in 1971 as a model for Van Laack shirts, manufactured by a company belonging to the collector couple Rolf and Erika Hoffmann. The advertisement appeared in the German

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(Director)'. Readymades belong to everyone<sup>®</sup> tried to respond to this question.

\*

*Pour avoir des souliers, elle a vendu son âme;  
Mais le bon Dieu rirait si près de cette infâme,  
Je tranchais du Tartufe et singeais la hauteur,  
Moi qui vends ma pensée et qui veux être auteur.  
[In order to have shoes, she has sold her soul;  
But the Good Lord would laugh if, in the presence of that  
vile woman,  
I played the hypocrite and acted lofty—  
I who sell my thought and would be an author.]  
— Baudelaire, *Je n'ai pas pour maîtresse une lionne  
illustre*, cited by Walter Benjamin in *Bohemia*, 1938.<sup>8</sup>*

Three years after the founding of the New York agency, collectors lent their image *and* their name to a work. The faces we see in the 1985 *Hommage à Philippe Thomas, autoportrait en groupe* are the reflection of themselves ('yes, we act like a mirror,' says Georges Verney-Carron of the effects of the readymades are for everyone<sup>®</sup> agency);<sup>9</sup> and even if we fail to notice that the plaque beneath Thomas's photograph/conceptual portrait is inverted, surely the mirrored cover of the *Frage des Präsention* cannot escape us. One can allow oneself to be swept up in the vertigo of the multiple levels on which this work can be read (the image of the sea which 'represents' Philippe Thomas, probably an echo of the sea into which Blanchot's Thomas the Obscure plunges, the composition which explicitly cites Fantin-Latour's *Homage to Delacroix*...) but the context in which the work is presented leads us elsewhere. The group self-portrait, supposedly an homage to the artist by seven collectors, is shown for the first time in 1985 at the Claire Burrus gallery in what is described as a group show, entitled *Fictionnalisme. Une pièce à conviction [Fictionalism; An Exhibit for the Prosecution]*. The police investigation evoked explicitly in the title must be of a very peculiar kind to admit of such a 'proof', as indeed it is. For the strange assembly of collectors around a portrait/simulacrum of the artist

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to the point where they pay homage to him, as the title emphasises, but the homage that they pay to the artist is also something of which they are the inalienable owners. Looking at them, one cannot help but see them as having been taken hostage by the story of which they are the protagonists. The (paying) presence of a sponsor in a portrait is not unusual in the history of art, but the role that someone's image plays in the composition is as complex an affair as the plot of a crime novel.

\*

I asked myself a number of questions: I said to myself that, even so, there are authors in philosophy and in literature [...] Well then, I was completely reassured because I had the impression of a sort of extremely brilliant conjuring trick: what Michel Foucault took away from the author, that is to say his work, he gave back with interest with the appellation 'founder of discursivity', since in doing so not only does he give back his work, but also those of others.  
— Jean d'Ormesson, discussion following Michel Foucault's presentation *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*, in M. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001)

The importance of Foucault's memorable Collège de France lecture entitled 'What Is An Author?' for Philippe Thomas's practice is perhaps too obvious for us to examine it at length; we will insist only on the fact that, in this text, Foucault emphasised the consequences of laws passed between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in that same bourgeois society that sought the best measures for the recognition and punishment of delinquents and the colonised.

'Texts, books, and discourses', says Foucault, 'really began to have authors [...] to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.'<sup>10</sup> It is at this moment, according to Foucault, that transgression becomes a sort of duty in literature (and in art), in order to bring back some danger to a writing (or other creation) that has been guaranteed all the benefits of property.

Thus there is a monetary economy that accompanies the risk

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at an entrance of this problem he has even breached the question that Jean-  
Joseph Goux, part of the same luminous constellation as Alfred Sohn-  
Rethel—they both brought together the history of metaphysics and that of  
monetary abstraction in economics.<sup>11</sup> The museum qua gold standard for the  
value of works itself participates in commerce, when Duchamp makes his  
*boîtes en valise* and when Broodthaers establishes his *musée des aigles*.  
These operations, Jean-Marc Avrilla/Philippe Thomas assures us, are part of  
the same economy, of the same remunerated and self-conscious  
transgression in which every author finds himself trapped, because  
'doubtless the same performative contradiction is at work in the Cretan who  
says that all Cretans are liars and to the artist who claims to abhor the very  
museum that puts him on a pedestal'.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1991 photograph attributed to Marc Blondeau and entitled  
*Lisbon*, on a deserted café table dappled with light, in a perfectly artificial  
composition worthy of an advertising spot, we see the face of Fernando  
Pessoa reproduced on a 100-escudo note. Faced with this, it falls to us to feel  
the affects of the general abstract equivalent, the metaphysical consequences  
of the fact that the face of the writer whose body hosted so many different  
voices, and whose hands transcribed styles and writings that could not be  
more varied, is reproduced in millions of copies, on paper money.

\*

Do not be deceived!  
Life is very short.  
— Brecht, *Against Temptation*

As this text draws toward its close, we are aware that there are many  
things we have had to leave out, including the immense sadness we felt  
when we were in close contact with the work of Philippe Thomas. Pessoa's  
face printed on banknotes is a metaphor for what Thomas continually  
foretold—namely that in our society, success, for an artist, can be the worst  
of poisons and a shame that will pursue him even after his death, a zero-sum  
game where the artist loses when he wins and loses when he loses. Indeed, if  
he wins, it is only in the same way a racehorse wins: in fact it is others who  
win instead of him. And yet life continues relentlessly, even in the dolorous  
flesh of he who has read and understood all books; and the desire to make

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How can we speak sincerely of this desire? How can we extract ourselves from the value economy? One thinks of workers' strikes in the private sector, where the names of brands reappear in marches, but metamorphosed, finally reconnected with the bodies that make the products they adorn, as they decry their distress and their exploitation. This is how, thanks to documentaries which immortalised their striking workers, Lip, Peugeot, Rhodia Acétate, and the Wonder factory<sup>13</sup> have become names for masses of workers, proper names of power relations in need of transformation. This is the miracle of the strike, and Philippe Thomas became the vehicle of such a strike, as he took on the names of patrons and regularly effaced his own. This must have been very difficult some days. Someone said to us that at the end of his life he saw himself disappear, but he knew that he had already disappeared in the eyes of art history, into whose ranks he had continually recruited strangers. A strange gesture, to make the owner into the author (and one which also reveals the extent to which the author is always also an owner). But once we understand that there is no cynicism whatsoever in this, we can see it as an attempt to re-enchant the everyday prostitution of commerce, a way of feigning love or friendship where money makes a scorched earth of feelings.

The reason why readymades belong to everyone is certainly not because everyone can become a collector, but because everyone can make themselves sensitive to the potential, to the possibility harboured by every vulgar mass-manufactured object to be or not to be a work of art. Everything can become a readymade, anyone can be an artist; it is enough just to develop the sensibility that allows one to unmask, behind social classes, the almost physiological universality of the 'whatever-singularity', which in our societies only appears in debased form in total institutions, in the form of naked life. Philippe Thomas's oeuvre, which sometimes lacks lightness of touch, at moments seems over-controlled and even scholarly, while at other times it is luminous and powerful, elegant and uncompromising. But we understand what it is that weighs down the literary élan or compels one to stick to a pre-written script. There is no spontaneity in fiction, everything must be calculated in order to be credible: we pardon mediocrity and inefficiency only in real life, the life that appears like a watermark behind the work of Thomas (and others), poignant in its absence, generous, a stranger to the market economy, unheeding of the laws of value, anonymous.

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This text must necessarily end with the words of someone else, but they are words that have continually reminded us of Philippe Thomas over the last few years: in her *Notes Scattered and Lost* the Italian poet Amelia Rosselli wrote:

For you I have the most surprising love  
 the most surprising one could imagine  
 and the life that I have lost is your life.

**Claire Fontaine, 2011**

1. On this subject see particularly Bernard Edelman, *De la propriété littéraire et artistique*. Propos recueillis par Jacques Salomon: 'The very idea of author's rights was a part of an immense movement of legal individualism [...] The "death of the author", as far as the law is concerned, means nothing. It is in total contradiction with our culture, whose defining moment we may consider to be the birth of the individual'. In Jean-Marc Avrilla, Marc Blondeau, Daniel Bosser, Carine Campo, Laura Carpenter, Simone de Cosi, Sylvie Couderc, Lidevij Edelkoort, Bernard Edelman, Jean-Louis Froment, Michel Gransard, Stéphane Mallarmé, Christoph Sattler, Estelle Schwarkz, Philippe Thomas, Michel Tournereau, Georges Verney-Carron, *Sur un lieu commun et autres textes* (Geneva and Saint-Etienne: Mamco/Presses Université de Rennes, 1999), 258, 259. 'The law' here, of course, concerns the legal right to participate in the history of art. ↵
2. Philippe Thomas was particularly sensitive to the theme of institutional 'dismemberment', and one might even venture the hypothesis that his deliberate dissemination of himself and his oeuvre may have been a way of anticipating it. On this subject he notably quotes Duchamp, who, in 1955, declared in his conversation with James Johnson Sweeney: 'I always felt that showing one painting in one place and another in another place is just like amputating one finger each time, or a leg.' (Jean-Marc Avrilla, 'Le Musée réfléchi', in *Sur un lieu commun*, 247 ['Marcel Duchamp', in *Wisdom: Conversations with the Elder Wise Men of Our Day*, ed. James Nelson (New York: Norton, 1958), 91]). ↵
3. Georges Verney-Carron, *Publicité, publicité. De quelques cas de figures*, in *Sur un lieu commun*, 121. ↵
4. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 9–10. ↵
5. Georges Verney-Carron, 'Sur un lieu commun, Propos recueillis par Eric Duyckaerts', in *Sur un lieu commun*, 174. ↵
6. *Ibid.*, 173. ↵
7. Georges Verney-Carron, 'Publicité publicité. De quelques cas de figures', in *Sur un lieu commun*, 122. ↵
8. Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *The Writer of Modern*

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University Press, 2006), 66. ↗

9. Verney-Carron, 'Sur un lieu commun', 173. ↗

10. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, vol II.*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. R. Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1998). ↗

11. Philippe Thomas cites *Les Monnayeurs du langage* in Avrilla, 'Le Musée réfléchi', 250. Alfred Sohn-Rethel developed the same problematic of philosophical abstraction as profoundly linked to monetary economy in *La pensée marchandise* (Boissieux: Éditions du croquant, 2010). ↗

12. Avrilla, 'Le Musée réfléchi', 247. ↗

13. *Les LIP, l'imagination au pouvoir*, 2007, dir. Christian Rouaud; *Avec le sang des autres*, 1974, dir. Bruno Muel; *Rhodia 4/8*, 1969, Les Groupes Medvedkine; *Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, 1968, dir. Jacques Willemont. ↗

**Selected by Tobias Kaspar**

**Material from**

**T. J. Clark, “The Look of Self-Portraiture,” in Anthony Bond and Joanna Woodall, *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005), 57–65.**



# THE LOOK OF SELF-PORTRAITURE

T.J. Clark

This essay is an attempt to come to terms with the special circumstances of looking in self-portraiture – the peculiar business of attending to oneself – and the distinctive sort of looking out at us that seems to issue from those circumstances. The descriptions I offer apply to many self-portraits, I believe, and may reveal some basic presuppositions of the genre; but they were generated in the first place by a confrontation with an extreme, and in a sense untypical, example of the breed: Jacques-Louis David's *Self-portrait* of 1794 (fig. 30). The painting was done in prison, in the months immediately after the fall of the Robespierre regime. David had been one of the regime's leading actors. He had every reason to expect a sentence of death – which in the end he was spared, probably because of his artistic preeminence.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with the look. If we take the basic fiction of this kind of self-portraiture seriously – the notion, I mean, that what we are looking at is what the painter saw in the mirror – then it follows that the look of self-portraiture must be a very specific one: the look, we could say, of someone looking at him or herself looking. The trouble is that where we put an end to the last part of the preceding sentence can only be decided by pure fiat. The sentence is designed to go on for ever: 'The look of someone looking at him or herself looking at the look he or she has when it is a matter of looking not just at anything, at something else, but back to the place from which one is looking...'. Would that do better? Is that what self-portraiture is about? Simple questions in self-portraiture open regularly onto infinite dialectical regress. And is not one of the things we admire in self-portraits precisely the effort to represent this kind of dialectical

vertigo? Isn't this what David is concentrating on?

Well, yes and no. The look in the picture does seem to be meant to be complicated, as if it issued from some process of inquiry; but it is also meant to be businesslike. There may be some epistemological anxiety about, but we are surely not supposed to take the subject as overwhelmed by it – his look is poised, cool and craftsmanlike, the look of a professional. (These last are class attributes as well as professional ones, and the look of self-portraiture is shot through with signs of class and gender. It is the look of mastery: of containment, detachment, distance, *sang froid*, self-possession. It comes out of an aristocratic matrix. The fact that the look seems to have come into being, or taken on a certain consistency, at the moment of Mannerism may not be beside the point.) Perhaps in the end, for all its coolness, this is a look that intends to break through the surface to some truth within. But we cannot be sure, and it is part of self-portraiture that we should not be; maybe the point or effect of the mirror is to let the look deal strictly with appearances. The look in self-portraiture never stops oscillating between these two possibilities, these two kinds of reading. The oscillation is what the look is. On the one hand Rembrandt (fig. 31), on the other Sir Joshua Reynolds (fig. 32, cat. 22). But are we so sure, on reflection, who is on the one hand and the other? Are not both of them on both? Is there not pathos even to Reynolds's professionalism? We accept the hand shading the eye as a sign of technical steadying and control on the artist's part; but inevitably it seems partly a gesture of defence, a way of keeping the full intensity of the world at bay.

The problems already have us by the throat. Let me try to restate

Opposite Jacques-Louis David, *Self-portrait* (fig. 30, detail)

Fig.30  
 Jacques-Louis David  
 (1748–1825)  
*Self-portrait*, 1794  
 Oil on canvas, 810 x 640mm  
 (32 x 25")  
 Musée du Louvre, Paris

Fig.31  
 Rembrandt  
 (Harmensz van Rijn)  
 (1606–69)  
*Self-portrait*, 1669  
 Oil on wood, 860 x 705mm  
 (33 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ ")  
 National Gallery, London

them in less intractable form. For a start, we could ask if the painter of a self-portrait is normally taken to be a privileged witness to what he is looking at. (For reasons that will emerge in a moment, the masculine pronoun turns out to be the least offensive choice in this case.) If so, what kind of privilege is it? Presumably it would be stretching things to say that a self-portraitist does not have some special knowledge of – or access to – what he is like. But it does not follow that he is necessarily a good judge of what he looks like. And he may be exactly the wrong person to tell us or show us how his self – if we mean by that a certain continuity of character and attitude to things – is manifest on the outside, in the way he presents what is visible to others. This might be opaque to him, and in any case not open to inspection in a mirror; it might be something he (happily) took for granted and in a sense positively avoided observing in everyday life, whereas the rest of us had been doing the observing like mad, as part of our ordinary dealings with him. We would be better portraitists of him, if we had the skills, than he will ever be; there are plenty of pairs of portraits and self-portraits that seem to prove the point.

So what does a portraitist think he is doing looking in the mirror in the first place? Everyone knows the game is risky. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is trotting out a platitude when he associates self-portraiture with Narcissus. The language in general does much the same thing. Self-regard, for example, is not a neutral term in common usage, and shades off quickly into *amour propre*. Looking too hard at oneself is embarrassing. Even self-consciousness is an equivocal concept (more so in English than French): some contexts

make it a high and difficult attainment, and others an unfortunate condition linked with adolescence and bad skin. Self-portraits are partly made, I think, against this background of suspicion, and the look in them has to signify, before all else, that the painter cast a cold eye on his subject matter as opposed to a warm one. Hence there emerged a whole deeply conventional repertoire of poses and expressions meant to prove the point: casual, momentary, disabused, warts-and-all, professional, pessimistic, would-be Nietzschean; all of them determined not to be self-absorbed or self-regarding, or not in ways to which viewers could condescend. (This is one of the reasons why the set-up in self-portraiture that has the painter 'looking back' at himself over his shoulder becomes such a favourite [see figs 33, 34]: it looks so much like a pose struck *en passant*, for no more than a moment, before the painter turned back to what he was really interested in – in other words, the canvas.)

This kind of scepticism towards self-portraiture is not, I think, just something I have worked up for the occasion: it seems to be built into the very language of self-scrutiny, and to have had effects on painters' practice. All the same, there is a sense in which it leaves our most deeply held prejudices untouched. Say what you will, nothing is ever quite going to budge us from the conviction that a self-portraitist is privileged and does look back at us from a special place. I can ironise about *amour propre* until I am blue in the face; put me back in front of a Rembrandt and the circuitry is largely intact. What is it then that we cannot escape from?

First of all, there does not seem to be an exit from the situation we are put in as viewers of a self-portrait: we cannot entirely escape from



ourselves, and the invitation to double and project that entity or location or condition – the game thrives on the ontology hereabouts being so slippery – on to the image in front of us. This is a powerful constraint, a real generator of readings. The beholder of David's self-portrait, say, is put in that place (but is it a place at all, exactly?) from which, or in which, it is imagined, the depicting got done; and this not metaphorically – after all, the beholder is used to that – but literally. Not that the 'literally' here is at all to be trusted, or even meant to be: we are not physically in any such place, and on one level we know it. It is just that in order to get on any kind of terms with a self-portrait we have to accept that our eyes are roughly where the painter's once were, and not only eyes but mind. 'We' (the word is always to be understood in scarequotes in this essay, but now it had better wear them with pride) are meant to assume – to resume – the position of consciousness whose outside is there on the canvas. That outside is not just the evidence for the position, it is its product; and the cast of mind on show is not general – not an invitation to any and every projection on our part – but specific. What we are shown is consciousness directed to that exotic entity, its own outside, its 'appearance'. And is not that where and how our consciousness is directed? Cannot we duplicate as viewers those very movements of seeing or mind that are pictured and that led to the picturing? All viewing of paintings is a kind of complicity, no doubt. Not all of it involves this kind of haunting.

These are structures, I believe, that can resist all sorts of scepticism. Many philosophers – most notably David Hume in the *Treatise of Human Nature* – have called into question the self's

Overleaf Joshua Reynolds, *Self-portrait* (fig. 32, cat. 22)



identity, or simplicity, or continuity through time. And in front of a Rembrandt we are free – maybe we are encouraged – to half-remember the sceptics' arguments. We can go on taking the movements of seeing and mind to add up finally to a singularity, or we can revel in their unravelling. We can have the self or its negation: intimacy can disperse into otherness, unity into multiplicity, soul into matter, 'what we meant' into the 'free play of the signifier'. Any movement will do as long as it is we who do it. They are all part of the same fiction, the same 'figure of reading or of understanding'.<sup>3</sup>

My imagery in the last couple of paragraphs has been of coercion, as if I thought the game we had been inveigled into playing was one with actual costs and deficits, which it would be good not to run up. The reader may be wondering what I think the costs are. Is the account of self and self-knowledge I see in these pictures' set-ups strong enough to count as coercive? Have we been sold any very particular bill of goods?

I think we have – which is not to say that I see any other better bills on offer for the time being. The items are three. We have been sold a certain metaphysics of spatiality – a picture of the self as having insides and outsides, and being somewhere. We have acquiesced in an equation of seeing with knowing and vice-versa, one that is built deep into our accounts of the world: Paul de Man calls it 'the fundamental metaphor of understanding as seeing'.<sup>3</sup> And we have given in to the great argument of self-portraiture, that a clear and fundamental distinction can be drawn between seeing and representing. I shall speak to the first two items straight away.

What does it mean, would be my question, to say that in the







Fig.32  
**Joshua Reynolds**  
 (1723–92)  
*Self-portrait*, c.1747–9  
 Oil on canvas, 635 x 743mm  
 (25 x 29¼")  
 National Portrait Gallery, London

Fig.33  
**Anthony van Dyck**  
 (1599–1641)  
*Self-portrait*, c.1613  
 Oil on canvas, 430 x 325 mm  
 (16⅞ x 12¾")  
 Gemäldegalerie, Vienna



David we are looking at a self's outside, or at a body with a self inside it? We are looking at a body. A 'self' is a way of describing it. Obviously we may want to specify all manner of things about that self, but why necessarily its *location*? And yet, of course, the movement to spatialise the self runs deep, and seems bound up, at least lately, with the effort to articulate what is special and irreducible in any one person's take on the world. Perhaps it is true, to quote the philosopher Charles Taylor, that 'the modern conception of a unified personality may not be possible' without a 'space of disclosure ... considered to be *inside*, in the mind'.<sup>4</sup> 'We may want to judge this in the end as fanciful a view as the ones which preceded it, but this doesn't dispense us from understanding the process of self-transformation which was partly constituted in this shift.'

It may even be that the 'movement of interiorization' Taylor is talking about captures something about selfhood that is basic and ineradicable; it does not sound good to eradicate it: we all know the claptrap of anti-individualism when we hear it. Nonetheless, I intend to stick to my guns. The movement in question seems impoverishing to me, and certainly it has come to stand in the way of capturing or even addressing various other dimensions to what it might mean to have or be a self. It may or may not be true, for example, that 'the Dinka language ... compels its speakers to integrate the moral and physical attributes of persons together within the physical matrix of the human body'.<sup>5</sup> 'Compels' is a difficult word here. Anthropologists disagree. But in any case the point the anthropologist is making can stand *a contrario*: our language, in contrast to the Dinkas', invites its speakers to think of

persons and bodies separately. Likewise, it may or may not be useful to think of selfhood as a code of sorts, a kind of performance or negotiation, and therefore to put our stress on the self's belonging to social practice. The language for this exists, of course; the language but not the discourse: no context of practice, that is – no proper language-games – of the kind that would truly extend and intensify the syntax and lexicon of the self and oblige them to draw on their full resources. So we simply do not know if the alternative models and metaphors of self could have purchase on new particulars or not; for what happens when they are tried is that the attempt to state them is infiltrated, not to say recaptured, by the very spacing and siding of self they see as the enemy. 'We are never fully ourselves in our utterances. What we make or say is always somewhat alien to us, never wholly ours, as we ourselves are not wholly ours ... We are *outside* ourselves, and that "outsidedness" ... creates the tragedy of expression' (Gary Morson interpreting Mikhail Bakhtin).<sup>6</sup> Either this, or bloodless abstraction: 'A self is a repertoire of behavior appropriate to a different set of contingencies.' 'The self is the code that makes sense out of almost all the individual's activities and provides a basis for organising them' (Erving Goffman).<sup>7</sup> The notion of code turns out in practice too thin to provoke much more than vague assent. Goffman's multiplication of particular social scenarios, which is where the real interest of his work is to be found, does not ultimately help. When it comes time to pin back the description of activities and contingencies to the concept of self, the concept stays largely uninflected by its excursions.

Neither Goffman nor Morson is brought on here as an easy







Fig. 34  
 Pierre Subleyras  
 (1699–1749)  
*Self-portrait*, c. 1746  
 Oil on canvas,  
 1250 x 990 mm (49 x 39")  
 Gemäldegalerie, Vienna

target: in a sense they are the least easy of the bunch. Morson in particular is working out of a rich tradition, and often profits from it. The quotes are there to show what it means to swim against the tide.

The model of inside and outside would not have the kind of hold on us it has if it were not bound up with the second item on my bill of goods, the equation of seeing and understanding. This takes me back to the painter's look. The type of self-portrait I am interested in, of which David's is a strong case, is out to show not just the likeness of a person who happens to be the artist – there are admittedly plenty of portraits with no higher ambition – but the activity of self-scrutiny. It wants to get down the physical 'look' of examining one's own face – in a mirror, most likely, though the mechanics of the transaction may be stressed or not – and the connection between this looking and the attendant movement of totalisation which is (what verb will do here?) *possessing* a self, or coming to consciousness of oneself as one.

Self-portraiture thrives on the further premise that *seeing*, in this connection, is uniquely privileged: we are being shown someone seeing the thing he or she understands best, or, at least, in a way nobody else could. And the understanding the self has of itself is *too a kind of seeing*; or shall we say, it is a process that can only be properly imagined after the model of seeing: that is, as a discrete, continuous, immediate proceeding from a centre: a movement out, as of some Will, but at the same time a stillness and receptivity, as of some Eye to which the world comes. Of course there is more to understanding the self than just seeing – self-portraits never tire of producing that piety – but the more is more of the same. Understanding is a seeing of the mind: a vector or trajectory of some kind, starting, so to speak, from an inch or two behind the eye, at the space or point which is our identity, and going out to the image in the mirror. And the fact that the model of seeing is thus generalised to *mind* reflects back prestige on seeing itself. People may say there is more to understanding the self than seeing, but they are not painters or epistemologists. Perhaps if they just looked hard enough ...

This picture of the world is powerful. David's self-portrait shows us someone under its spell, I think, and part of the reason we respond to it so readily is that we know, as the saying goes, where the painter is coming from: we come from the same place. I have been arguing, and no doubt demonstrating, that it takes a lot of painful mental gymnastics to imagine, even roughly, what an alternative picture would be. It goes against the grain. What would it be like, for instance, to think of the self as a thing without sides? Sides as opposed to what? Moments? Deployments? Different kinds of outwardness with no inwardness to match? Places, aspects, modes, numbers (-dividual and in-dividual), forms of ownership (one is not always self-possessed), kinds of texture or consistency? And even if a *painter* will not be inclined to do without the notion of the self as known spatially, then are there other conceivable relations in space besides those turning on 'in' versus 'out'? Do the various places of knowledge in the case of self have to be divided – by a partition which is all the more absolute for being at one and the same time so grossly, self-evidently material (in *here*, on the other side of *that*) and so entirely a matter of mind? 'Il me suffit ... de rentrer au dedans de moi.' 'Consultons la lumière intérieure' ('It is enough for me to go back inside myself.' 'Let us consult the interior light').<sup>8</sup> To which Diderot replies: 'Je ne sais si vous pouvez dire que l'âme soit dans le corps, ni de



quel côté elle est' ('I do not know if you can say that the soul is in the body, or on what side of the body it is').<sup>9</sup> Put 'self' for 'soul' in the Diderot sentence, and his question still nags at some basic presuppositions.

Suppose the stitching that normally holds seeing and understanding together in our view of things were to come undone. Where would that leave the look of self-portraiture? Nobody for the moment is out to deny that looking at one's face in a mirror is a form of self-knowledge. On the contrary, let us posit it as an ordinary and adequate one, with the emphasis on the ordinary; one among several or many, none of them distinct or immutable, none exactly trustworthy. We might choose to give up talking altogether about looking in general, or try to, and opt for ways of speaking in which looking is tied close to circumstances: this looking, constituted in any one case by a great pattern of contingencies: by mirrors and maulsticks and eyeshades, for certain, but also by the ways in which looking at a given moment is constituted by language – vaunted, doubted, distinguished from other mental operations, idealised, materialised, made subject to social constraints and permissions, and so on. It might be possible as a result to pose the question of identity in a new way – to rescue it from the one mode of cognition (the privileged 'visual') and have it be scattered among the modes of mask, place, sign, name, lineage, affiliation, performance, language-game. Under this rubric all forms of self-knowledge, looking included, would be 'insufficient' (it is the dream of a sufficiency of self to self, with looking as the means to that sufficiency, that strikes me as self-portraiture's most deadly fiction). All of them would be external, in the sense of being always renegotiated in the public realm; maybe all of them would be open to description in materialist terms; and no doubt they would still be caught up in some version of Charles Taylor's 'movement of interiorization'. Inside, outside; fragmentary, unitary; authentic or made up for the occasion; something acted out, something one has or is: the structures are not going to be dislodged merely by multiplying the materials they are called on to organise. What might be thinkable, though – and here finally is my apology for pluralism – is a version of self-portraiture in which seeing would be pictured as itself a form of representation, not a proceeding somehow exempt from that circuit, or prior to it, or capable of breaking through it from one side to the other. That would lead to, and issue from, very different looks and poses from the ones we have.

1 For a full treatment of the painting see T.J. Clark, 'Gross David with the Swain Check: An Essay on Self-Portraiture', in M. Roth (ed.), *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994).

2 Paul de Man, 'Autobiography As De-Facement', in Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1984), p.70: 'Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution ... This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be by someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case.' One way of putting my question about David's self-portrait would be to say that I am interested in whether it ends up being by someone – and understandable to the extent that this is the case.

3 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979), p.620 n.5.

4 This and the following quote from Charles Taylor, 'The Person', in Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Luke (eds.), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p.277. Compare Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1989).

5 Godfrey Lienhardt, 'Self: Public, private. Some African representations', in Carrithers et al., 1985, p.150.

6 Gary Morson, 'Who speaks for Bakhtin? A dialogic introduction', *Critical Inquiry* 10, no.2 (December 1983), p.242. Morson is fully aware of the pitfalls here: this statement of Bakhtin's case is put in the mouth of one of two speakers, and is immediately disputed by the other, who 'sees no tragedy' and wants a Bakhtin of Vyotsky's 'empirical and scientific frame of mind.'

7 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959), quoted in Martin Hollis, 'Of masks and men', in Carrithers et al., 1985, p.227.

8 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Profession de Foi', *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris, 1959) vol.4, p.569. One main purpose of de Man's chapter on the *Profession* is to demonstrate how the text in practice cannot (or anyway does not) sustain the opposition of inner and outer on which its epistemology ostensibly depends.

**Selected by Tobias Kaspar**

**Material from  
Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (Uttar Pradesh, India: OM Books  
International, 2018), 529–30.**

often in low spirits. When one of them was in good spirits and the other was not, peace was not broken; but if both chanced to be out of sorts, collisions resulted from causes so trifling as to be incomprehensible. Often afterwards they could not remember what they had quarrelled about. However, when both were in good spirits their happiness was doubled – and yet the early days of their married life were very trying.

All that time they were conscious of peculiar strain, as if the chain that bound them were being pulled first one way and then the other. Altogether, the honeymoon – the first month of their marriage, from which Levin had expected so much – was not delightful, but remained in both their recollections as the most oppressive and humiliating time of their lives. They both tried in after life to efface from their memories all the ugly shameful circumstances of this unhealthy time during which they were rarely in a normal state and rarely themselves. Only in the third month of their married life, after returning from Moscow where they had spent a month, did their life begin to run more smoothly.

## Chapter 15

They had just returned from Moscow and were glad of the solitude. He was in his study and sat at the table writing. She, in the dark lilac dress she had worn during the first days of her marriage and which was specially memorable and dear to him, sat with her embroidery on that same old leather-covered sofa which had stood in the study through his father's and grandfather's times. As he sat thinking and writing he was all the while blissfully conscious of her presence. He had not abandoned his work on the estate, or on the book in which the foundations of a new farming system were to be explained; but as those thoughts and that work formerly appeared to him trivial and insignificant in comparison with the gloom that overshadowed all existence, so now they appeared trivial and insignificant in comparison with his future prospects all bathed in the bright sunshine of happiness.

He went on with his work with a feeling that the centre of gravity of his attention had shifted, and that he consequently saw

the matter differently and with greater clearness. Formerly this work had been his salvation from life. He used to feel that without it life would be too dismal, and now he needed it in order that his life should not be too monotonously bright.

Having set to work again on his manuscript and read over what he had written, he was glad to find that the work seemed worth doing. Many of his former thoughts now appeared superfluous and extreme, but many omissions became clear to him when he went over the matter afresh. He was writing a fresh chapter on why agriculture was not profitable in Russia. He argued that Russia's poverty was caused not only by a wrong distribution of landed property and a false policy, but that of late years those evils had been fostered by a foreign civilization artificially grafted upon Russia, especially as to ways of communication – viz., the railways, which had conduced to a centralization in the cities, a growth of luxury, and consequently to a development of factories at the expense of agriculture, and, attendant upon this, to credit operations and speculation. It seemed to him that when the growth of a nation's wealth is normal these things follow only after a considerable amount of labour has been devoted to agriculture, and after the latter has been placed in its rightful – or at any rate in a definite – position: that a nation's wealth ought to grow proportionately at the same rate in all its branches, and especially in such a way that the other branches should not out-distance agriculture; that means of communication should conform to the agricultural conditions, and that with our wrong methods of using the land, the railways – brought about not by economic but by political necessity – had come prematurely, and instead of promoting agriculture as had been expected, had interfered with it and hindered it by stimulating the development of manufactures and credit. Therefore, as the one-sided and premature development of a single organ in an animal would injure its general development, so credit, railways, and the forced growth of manufactures, though undoubtedly necessary in Europe, where the time is ripe for them – had in Russia only harmed the general development of wealth by thrusting aside the most important current question, namely, the organization of agriculture.

While he was writing his thoughts, she was thinking about his unnatural attention to young Prince Charsky, who had been very tactlessly paying court to her on the day before their departure

**Selected by Gabriel Kuri**

**Material from  
Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), 208–22.**

puters the most human of our mental activities and intellectual pursuits, particularly "tasks that demand wisdom."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to being a learned treatise on the workings of computers and software, Weizenbaum's book was a *cri de coeur*, a computer programmer's passionate and at times self-righteous examination of the limits of his profession. The book did not endear the author to his peers. After it came out, Weizenbaum was spurned as a heretic by leading computer scientists, particularly those pursuing artificial intelligence. John McCarthy, one of the organizers of the original Dartmouth AI conference, spoke for many technologists when, in a mocking review, he dismissed *Computer Power and Human Reason* as "an unreasonable book" and scolded Weizenbaum for unscientific "moralizing."<sup>15</sup> Outside the data-processing field, the book caused only a brief stir. It appeared just as the first personal computers were making the leap from hobbyists' workbenches to mass production. The public, primed for the start of a buying spree that would put computers into most every office, home, and school in the land, was in no mood to entertain an apostate's doubts.

WHEN A CARPENTER picks up a hammer, the hammer becomes, so far as his brain is concerned, part of his hand. When a soldier raises a pair of binoculars to his face, his brain sees through a new set of eyes, adapting instantaneously to a very different field of view. The experiments on pliers-wielding monkeys revealed how readily the plastic primate brain can incorporate tools into its sensory maps, making the artificial feel natural. In the human brain, that capacity has advanced far beyond what's seen in even our closest primate cousins. Our ability to meld with all manner of tools is one of the qualities that most distinguishes us as a species. In combination with our superior cognitive skills, it's what makes us so good at using new technologies. It's also what makes us so good at inventing them. Our brains can imagine the mechanics and the benefits of using a new device before that device even exists. The evolution of

our extraordinary mental capacity to blur the boundary between the internal and the external, the body and the instrument, was, says University of Oregon neuroscientist Scott Frey, “no doubt a fundamental step in the development of technology.”<sup>16</sup>

The tight bonds we form with our tools go both ways. Even as our technologies become extensions of ourselves, we become extensions of our technologies. When the carpenter takes his hammer into his hand, he can use that hand to do only what a hammer can do. The hand becomes an implement for pounding and pulling nails. When the soldier puts the binoculars to his eyes, he can see only what the lenses allow him to see. His field of view lengthens, but he becomes blind to what’s nearby. Nietzsche’s experience with his typewriter provides a particularly good illustration of the way technologies exert their influence on us. Not only did the philosopher come to imagine that his writing ball was “a thing like me”; he also sensed that he was becoming a thing like it, that his typewriter was shaping his thoughts. T. S. Eliot had a similar experience when he went from writing his poems and essays by hand to typing them. “Composing on the typewriter,” he wrote in a 1916 letter to Conrad Aiken, “I find that I am sloughing off all my long sentences which I used to dote upon. Short, staccato, like modern French prose. The typewriter makes for lucidity, but I am not sure that it encourages subtlety.”<sup>17</sup>

Every tool imposes limitations even as it opens possibilities. The more we use it, the more we mold ourselves to its form and function. That explains why, after working with a word processor for a time, I began to lose my facility for writing and editing in longhand. My experience, I later learned, was not uncommon. “People who write on a computer are often at a loss when they have to write by hand,” Norman Doidge reports. Their ability “to translate thoughts into cursive writing” diminishes as they become used to tapping keys and watching letters appear as if by magic on a screen.<sup>18</sup> Today, with kids using keyboards and keypads from a very young age and schools discontinuing penmanship lessons, there is mounting evidence that the ability to write in cursive script is disappearing altogether from



our culture. It's becoming a lost art. "We shape our tools," observed the Jesuit priest and media scholar John Culkin in 1967, "and thereafter they shape us."<sup>19</sup>

Marshall McLuhan, who was Culkin's intellectual mentor, elucidated the ways our technologies at once strengthen and sap us. In one of the most perceptive, if least remarked, passages in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan wrote that our tools end up "numbing" whatever part of our body they "amplify."<sup>20</sup> When we extend some part of ourselves artificially, we also distance ourselves from the amplified part and its natural functions. When the power loom was invented, weavers could manufacture far more cloth during the course of a workday than they'd been able to make by hand, but they sacrificed some of their manual dexterity, not to mention some of their "feel" for fabric. Their fingers, in McLuhan's terms, became numb. Farmers, similarly, lost some of their feel for the soil when they began using mechanical harrows and plows. Today's industrial farm worker, sitting in his air-conditioned cage atop a gargantuan tractor, rarely touches the soil at all—though in a single day he can till a field that his hoe-wielding forebear could not have turned in a month. When we're behind the wheel of our car, we can go a far greater distance than we could cover on foot, but we lose the walker's intimate connection to the land.

As McLuhan acknowledged, he was far from the first to observe technology's numbing effect. It's an ancient idea, one that was given perhaps its most eloquent and ominous expression by the Old Testament psalmist:

Their idols are silver and gold,  
The work of men's hands.  
They have mouths, but they speak not;  
Eyes have they, but they see not;  
They have ears, but they hear not;  
Noses have they, but they smell not;  
They have hands, but they handle not;



Feet have they, but they walk not;  
Neither speak they through their throat.  
They that make them are like unto them;  
So is every one that trusteth in them.

The price we pay to assume technology's power is alienation. The toll can be particularly high with our intellectual technologies. The tools of the mind amplify and in turn numb the most intimate, the most human, of our natural capacities—those for reason, perception, memory, emotion. The mechanical clock, for all the blessings it bestowed, removed us from the natural flow of time. When Lewis Mumford described how modern clocks helped “create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences,” he also stressed that, as a consequence, clocks “disassociated time from human events.”<sup>21</sup> Weizenbaum, building on Mumford's point, argued that the conception of the world that emerged from time-keeping instruments “was and remains an impoverished version of the older one, for it rests on a rejection of those direct experiences that formed the basis for, and indeed constituted, the old reality.”<sup>22</sup> In deciding when to eat, to work, to sleep, to wake up, we stopped listening to our senses and started obeying the clock. We became a lot more scientific, but we became a bit more mechanical as well.

Even a tool as seemingly simple and benign as the map had a numbing effect. Our ancestors' navigational skills were amplified enormously by the cartographer's art. For the first time, people could confidently traverse lands and seas they'd never seen before—an advance that spurred a history-making expansion of exploration, trade, and warfare. But their native ability to comprehend a landscape, to create a richly detailed mental map of their surroundings, weakened. The map's abstract, two-dimensional representation of space interposed itself between the map reader and his perception of the actual land. As we can infer from recent studies of the brain, the loss must have had a physical component. When people came to rely on maps rather than their own bearings, they would have experienced a diminishment of

the area of their hippocampus devoted to spatial representation. The numbing would have occurred deep in their neurons.

We're likely going through another such adaptation today as we come to depend on computerized GPS devices to shepherd us around. Eleanor Maguire, the neuroscientist who led the study of the brains of London taxi drivers, worries that satellite navigation could have "a big effect" on cabbies' neurons. "We very much hope they don't start using it," she says, speaking on behalf of her team of researchers. "We believe [the hippocampal] area of the brain increased in grey matter volume because of the huge amount of data [the drivers] have to memorize. If they all start using GPS, that knowledge base will be less and possibly affect the brain changes we are seeing."<sup>23</sup> The cabbies would be freed from the hard work of learning the city's roads, but they would also lose the distinctive mental benefits of that training. Their brains would become less interesting.

In explaining how technologies numb the very faculties they amplify, to the point even of "autoamputation," McLuhan was not trying to romanticize society as it existed before the invention of maps or clocks or power looms. Alienation, he understood, is an inevitable by-product of the use of technology. Whenever we use a tool to exert greater control over the outside world, we change our relationship with that world. Control can be wielded only from a psychological distance. In some cases, alienation is precisely what gives a tool its value. We build houses and sew Gore-Tex jackets because we *want* to be alienated from the wind and the rain and the cold. We build public sewers because we *want* to maintain a healthy distance from our own filth. Nature isn't our enemy, but neither is it our friend. McLuhan's point was that an honest appraisal of any new technology, or of progress in general, requires a sensitivity to what's lost as well as what's gained. We shouldn't allow the glories of technology to blind our inner watchdog to the possibility that we've numbed an essential part of our self.

AS A UNIVERSAL medium, a supremely versatile extension of our senses, our cognition, and our memory, the networked computer serves as a particularly powerful neural amplifier. Its numbing effects are equally strong. Norman Doidge explains that “the computer extends the processing capabilities of our central nervous system” and in the process “also alters it.” Electronic media “are so effective at altering the nervous system because they both work in similar ways and are basically compatible and easily linked.” Thanks to its plasticity, the nervous system “can take advantage of this compatibility and merge with the electronic media, making a single, larger system.”<sup>24</sup>

There's another, even deeper reason why our nervous systems are so quick to “merge” with our computers. Evolution has imbued our brains with a powerful social instinct, which, as Jason Mitchell, the head of Harvard's Social Cognition and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory, says, entails “a set of processes for inferring what those around us are thinking and feeling.” Recent neuroimaging studies indicate that three highly active brain regions—one in the prefrontal cortex, one in the parietal cortex, and one at the intersection of the parietal and temporal cortices—are “specifically dedicated to the task of understanding the goings-on of other people's minds.” Our innate ability for “mind reading,” says Mitchell, has played an important role in the success of our species, allowing us to “coordinate large groups of people to achieve goals that individuals could not.”<sup>25</sup> As we've entered the computer age, however, our talent for connecting with other minds has had an unintended consequence. The “chronic overactivity of those brain regions implicated in social thought” can, writes Mitchell, lead us to perceive minds where no minds exist, even in “inanimate objects.” There's growing evidence, moreover, that our brains naturally mimic the states of the other minds we interact with, whether those minds are real or imagined. Such neural “mirroring” helps explain why we're so quick to attribute human characteristics to our computers and computer characteristics to ourselves—why we hear a human voice when ELIZA speaks.

Our willingness, even eagerness, to enter into what Doidge calls "a single, larger system" with our data-processing devices is an outgrowth not only of the characteristics of the digital computer as an informational medium but of the characteristics of our socially adapted brains. While this cybernetic blurring of mind and machine may allow us to carry out certain cognitive tasks far more efficiently, it poses a threat to our integrity as human beings. Even as the larger system into which our minds so readily meld is lending us its powers, it is also imposing on us its limitations. To put a new spin on Culkin's phrase, we program our computers and thereafter they program us.

Even at a practical level, the effects are not always as beneficial as we want to believe. As the many studies of hypertext and multimedia show, our ability to learn can be severely compromised when our brains become overloaded with diverse stimuli online. More information can mean less knowledge. But what about the effects of the many software tools we use? How do all the ingenious applications we depend on to find and evaluate information, form and communicate our thoughts, and carry out other cognitive chores influence what and how we learn? In 2003, a Dutch clinical psychologist named Christof van Nimwegen began a fascinating study of computer-aided learning that a BBC writer would later call "one of the most interesting examinations of current computer use and the potential downsides of our increasing reliance on screen-based interaction with information systems."<sup>26</sup> Van Nimwegen had two groups of volunteers work through a tricky logic puzzle on a computer. The puzzle involved transferring colored balls between two boxes in accordance with a set of rules governing which balls could be moved at which time. One of the groups used software that had been designed to be as helpful as possible. It offered on-screen assistance during the course of solving the puzzle, providing visual cues, for instance, to highlight permitted moves. The other group used a bare-bones program, which provided no hints or other guidance.



In the early stages of solving the puzzle, the group using the helpful software made correct moves more quickly than the other group, as would be expected. But as the test proceeded, the proficiency of the members of the group using the bare-bones software increased more rapidly. In the end, those using the unhelpful program were able to solve the puzzle more quickly and with fewer wrong moves. They also reached fewer impasses—states in which no further moves were possible—than did the people using the helpful software. The findings indicated, as van Nimwegen reported, that those using the unhelpful software were better able to plan ahead and plot strategy, while those using the helpful software tended to rely on simple trial and error. Often, in fact, those with the helpful software were found “to aimlessly click around” as they tried to crack the puzzle.<sup>27</sup>

Eight months after the experiment, van Nimwegen reassembled the groups and had them again work on the colored-balls puzzle as well as a variation on it. He found that the people who had originally used the unhelpful software were able to solve the puzzles nearly twice as fast as those who had used the helpful software. In another test, he had a different set of volunteers use ordinary calendar software to schedule a complicated series of meetings involving overlapping groups of people. Once again, one group used helpful software that provided lots of on-screen cues, and another group used unhelpful software. The results were the same. The subjects using the unhelpful program “solved the problems with fewer superfluous moves [and] in a more straightforward manner,” and they demonstrated greater “plan-based behavior” and “smarter solution paths.”<sup>28</sup>

In his report on the research, van Nimwegen emphasized that he controlled for variations in the participants’ fundamental cognitive skills. It was the differences in the design of the software that explained the differences in performance and learning. The subjects using the bare-bones software consistently demonstrated “more focus, more direct and economical solutions, better strategies, and

better imprinting of knowledge.” The more that people depended on explicit guidance from software programs, the less engaged they were in the task and the less they ended up learning. The findings indicate, van Nimwegen concluded, that as we “externalize” problem solving and other cognitive chores to our computers, we reduce our brain’s ability “to build stable knowledge structures”—schemas, in other words—that can later “be applied in new situations.”<sup>29</sup> A polemicist might put it more pointedly: The brighter the software, the dimmer the user.

In discussing the implications of his study, van Nimwegen suggested that programmers might want to design their software to be less helpful in order to force users to think harder. That may well be good advice, but it’s hard to imagine the developers of commercial computer programs and Web applications taking it to heart. As van Nimwegen himself noted, one of the long-standing trends in software programming has been the pursuit of ever more “user-friendly” interfaces. That’s particularly true on the Net. Internet companies are in fierce competition to make people’s lives easier, to shift the burden of problem solving and other mental labor away from the user and onto the microprocessor. A small but telling example can be seen in the evolution of search engines. In its earliest incarnation, the Google engine was a very simple tool: you entered a keyword into the search box, and you hit the Search button. But Google, facing competition from other search engines, like Microsoft’s Bing, has worked diligently to make its service ever more solicitous. Now, as soon as you enter the first letter of your keyword into the box, Google immediately suggests a list of popular search terms that begin with that letter. “Our algorithms use a wide range of information to predict the queries users are most likely to want to see,” the company explains. “By suggesting more refined searches up front, [we] can make your searches more convenient and efficient.”<sup>30</sup>

Automating cognitive processes in this way has become the modern programmer’s stock-in-trade. And for good reason: people naturally seek out those software tools and Web sites that offer the most

help and the most guidance—and shun those that are difficult to master. We *want* friendly, helpful software. Why wouldn't we? Yet as we cede to software more of the toil of thinking, we are likely diminishing our own brain power in subtle but meaningful ways. When a ditchdigger trades his shovel for a backhoe, his arm muscles weaken even as his efficiency increases. A similar trade-off may well take place as we automate the work of the mind.

Another recent study, this one on academic research, provides real-world evidence of the way the tools we use to sift information online influence our mental habits and frame our thinking. James Evans, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, assembled an enormous database on 34 million scholarly articles published in academic journals from 1945 through 2005. He analyzed the citations included in the articles to see if patterns of citation, and hence of research, have changed as journals have shifted from being printed on paper to being published online. Considering how much easier it is to search digital text than printed text, the common assumption has been that making journals available on the Net would significantly broaden the scope of scholarly research, leading to a much more diverse set of citations. But that's not at all what Evans discovered. As more journals moved online, scholars actually cited fewer articles than they had before. And as old issues of printed journals were digitized and uploaded to the Web, scholars cited more recent articles with increasing frequency. A broadening of available information led, as Evans described it, to a “narrowing of science and scholarship.”<sup>31</sup>

In explaining the counterintuitive findings in a 2008 *Science* article, Evans noted that automated information-filtering tools, such as search engines, tend to serve as amplifiers of popularity, quickly establishing and then continually reinforcing a consensus about what information is important and what isn't. The ease of following hyperlinks, moreover, leads online researchers to “bypass many of the marginally related articles that print researchers” would routinely skim as they flipped through the pages of a journal or a book.

The quicker that scholars are able to “find prevailing opinion,” wrote Evans, the more likely they are “to follow it, leading to more citations referencing fewer articles.” Though much less efficient than searching the Web, old-fashioned library research probably served to widen scholars’ horizons: “By drawing researchers through unrelated articles, print browsing and perusal may have facilitated broader comparisons and led researchers into the past.”<sup>32</sup> The easy way may not always be the best way, but the easy way is the way our computers and search engines encourage us to take.

Before Frederick Taylor introduced his system of scientific management, the individual laborer, drawing on his training, knowledge, and experience, would make his own decisions about how he did his work. He would write his own script. After Taylor, the laborer began following a script written by someone else. The machine operator was not expected to understand how the script was constructed or the reasoning behind it; he was simply expected to obey it. The messiness that comes with individual autonomy was cleaned up, and the factory as a whole became more efficient, its output more predictable. Industry prospered. What was lost along with the messiness was personal initiative, creativity, and whim. Conscious craft turned into unconscious routine.

When we go online, we, too, are following scripts written by others—algorithmic instructions that few of us would be able to understand even if the hidden codes were revealed to us. When we search for information through Google or other search engines, we’re following a script. When we look at a product recommended to us by Amazon or Netflix, we’re following a script. When we choose from a list of categories to describe ourselves or our relationships on Facebook, we’re following a script. These scripts can be ingenious and extraordinarily useful, as they were in the Taylorist factories, but they also mechanize the messy processes of intellectual exploration and even social attachment. As the computer programmer Thomas Lord has argued, software can end up turning the most intimate and personal of human activities into mindless “rituals” whose steps are



“encoded in the logic of web pages.”<sup>33</sup> Rather than acting according to our own knowledge and intuition, we go through the motions.

WHAT EXACTLY WAS going on in Hawthorne’s head as he sat in the green seclusion of Sleepy Hollow and lost himself in contemplation? And how was it different from what was going through the minds of the city dwellers on that crowded, noisy train? A series of psychological studies over the past twenty years has revealed that after spending time in a quiet rural setting, close to nature, people exhibit greater attentiveness, stronger memory, and generally improved cognition. Their brains become both calmer and sharper. The reason, according to attention restoration theory, or ART, is that when people aren’t being bombarded by external stimuli, their brains can, in effect, relax. They no longer have to tax their working memories by processing a stream of bottom-up distractions. The resulting state of contemplativeness strengthens their ability to control their mind.

The results of the most recent such study were published in *Psychological Science* at the end of 2008. A team of University of Michigan researchers, led by psychologist Marc Berman, recruited some three dozen people and subjected them to a rigorous, and mentally fatiguing, series of tests designed to measure the capacity of their working memory and their ability to exert top-down control over their attention. The subjects were then divided into two groups. Half of them spent about an hour walking through a secluded woodland park, and the other half spent an equal amount of time walking along busy downtown streets. Both groups then took the tests a second time. Spending time in the park, the researchers found, “significantly improved” people’s performance on the cognitive tests, indicating a substantial increase in attentiveness. Walking in the city, by contrast, led to no improvement in test results.

The researchers then conducted a similar experiment with another set of people. Rather than taking walks between the rounds of testing, these subjects simply looked at photographs of either calm rural

scenes or busy urban ones. The results were the same. The people who looked at pictures of nature scenes were able to exert substantially stronger control over their attention, while those who looked at city scenes showed no improvement in their attentiveness. "In sum," concluded the researchers, "simple and brief interactions with nature can produce marked increases in cognitive control." Spending time in the natural world seems to be of "vital importance" to "effective cognitive functioning."<sup>34</sup>

There is no Sleepy Hollow on the Internet, no peaceful spot where contemplativeness can work its restorative magic. There is only the endless, mesmerizing buzz of the urban street. The stimulations of the Net, like those of the city, can be invigorating and inspiring. We wouldn't want to give them up. But they are, as well, exhausting and distracting. They can easily, as Hawthorne understood, overwhelm all quieter modes of thought. One of the greatest dangers we face as we automate the work of our minds, as we cede control over the flow of our thoughts and memories to a powerful electronic system, is the one that informs the fears of both the scientist Joseph Weizenbaum and the artist Richard Foreman: a slow erosion of our humanness and our humanity.

It's not only deep thinking that requires a calm, attentive mind. It's also empathy and compassion. Psychologists have long studied how people experience fear and react to physical threats, but it's only recently that they've begun researching the sources of our nobler instincts. What they're finding is that, as Antonio Damasio, the director of USC's Brain and Creativity Institute, explains, the higher emotions emerge from neural processes that "are inherently slow."<sup>35</sup> In one recent experiment, Damasio and his colleagues had subjects listen to stories describing people experiencing physical or psychological pain. The subjects were then put into a magnetic resonance imaging machine and their brains were scanned as they were asked to remember the stories. The experiment revealed that while the human brain reacts very quickly to demonstrations of physical pain—when you see someone injured, the primitive pain centers in

your own brain activate almost instantaneously—the more sophisticated mental process of empathizing with psychological suffering unfolds much more slowly. It takes time, the researchers discovered, for the brain “to transcend immediate involvement of the body” and begin to understand and to feel “the psychological and moral dimensions of a situation.”<sup>36</sup>

The experiment, say the scholars, indicates that the more distracted we become, the less able we are to experience the subtlest, most distinctively human forms of empathy, compassion, and other emotions. “For some kinds of thoughts, especially moral decision-making about other people’s social and psychological situations, we need to allow for adequate time and reflection,” cautions Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, a member of the research team. “If things are happening too fast, you may not ever fully experience emotions about other people’s psychological states.”<sup>37</sup> It would be rash to jump to the conclusion that the Internet is undermining our moral sense. It would not be rash to suggest that as the Net reroutes our vital paths and diminishes our capacity for contemplation, it is altering the depth of our emotions as well as our thoughts.

There are those who are heartened by the ease with which our minds are adapting to the Web’s intellectual ethic. “Technological progress does not reverse,” writes a *Wall Street Journal* columnist, “so the trend toward multitasking and consuming many different types of information will only continue.” We need not worry, though, because our “human software” will in time “catch up to the machine technology that made the information abundance possible.” We’ll “evolve” to become more agile consumers of data.<sup>38</sup> The writer of a cover story in *New York* magazine says that as we become used to “the 21st-century task” of “flitting” among bits of online information, “the wiring of the brain will inevitably change to deal more efficiently with more information.” We may lose our capacity “to concentrate on a complex task from beginning to end,” but in recompense we’ll gain new skills, such as the ability to “conduct 34 conversations simultaneously across six different media.”<sup>39</sup> A promi-

ment economist writes, cheerily, that “the web allows us to borrow cognitive strengths from autism and to be better infovores.”<sup>40</sup> An *Atlantic* author suggests that our “technology-induced ADD” may be “a short-term problem,” stemming from our reliance on “cognitive habits evolved and perfected in an era of limited information flow.” Developing new cognitive habits is “the only viable approach to navigating the age of constant connectivity.”<sup>41</sup>

These writers are certainly correct in arguing that we’re being molded by our new information environment. Our mental adaptability, built into the deepest workings of our brains, is a keynote of intellectual history. But if there’s comfort in their reassurances, it’s of a very cold sort. Adaptation leaves us better suited to our circumstances, but qualitatively it’s a neutral process. What matters in the end is not our becoming but what we become. In the 1950s, Martin Heidegger observed that the looming “tide of technological revolution” could “so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking.” Our ability to engage in “meditative thinking,” which he saw as the very essence of our humanity, might become a victim of headlong progress.<sup>42</sup> The tumultuous advance of technology could, like the arrival of the locomotive at the Concord station, drown out the refined perceptions, thoughts, and emotions that arise only through contemplation and reflection. The “frenziedness of technology,” Heidegger wrote, threatens to “entrench itself everywhere.”<sup>43</sup>

It may be that we are now entering the final stage of that entrenchment. We are welcoming the frenziedness into our souls.

**Selected by Gabriel Kuri**

**Material from  
Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 30–51.**

## Senses Plus Mind Equals Reality

The eye that sees is not a mere physical organ but a means of perception conditioned by the tradition in which its possessor has been reared. —RUTH BENEDICT

**T**HE DISTINCTION BETWEEN the conscious and the unconscious has been made in one form or another since the time of the Greeks.<sup>1</sup> Among the most influential of the thinkers delving into the psychology of consciousness was the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. During his time, psychology was not an independent subject but merely a catchall category for what philosophers and physiologists discussed when they speculated about the mind.<sup>2</sup> Their laws concerning human thought processes were not scientific laws but philosophical pronouncements. Since these thinkers required little empirical basis for their theorizing, each one was free to favor his own purely speculative theory over his rival's purely speculative theory. Kant's theory was that we actively construct a picture of the world rather than merely documenting objective events, that our perceptions are not based just on what exists but, rather, are somehow created—and constrained—by the general features of the mind. That belief was surprisingly near the modern perspective, though today scholars generally take a more expansive view than Kant's of the



mind's general features, especially with regard to biases arising from our desires, needs, beliefs, and past experiences. Today we believe that when you look at your mother-in-law, the image you see is based not only on her optical qualities but also on what is going on in your head—for example, your thoughts about her bizarre child-rearing practices or whether it was a good idea to agree to live next door.

Kant felt that empirical psychology could not become a science because you cannot weigh or otherwise measure the events that occur in your brain. In the nineteenth century, however, scientists took a stab at it. One of the first practitioners was the physiologist E. H. Weber, the man who, in 1834, performed the simple experiment on the sense of touch that involved placing a small reference weight at a spot on his subjects' skin, then asking them to judge whether a second weight was heavier or lighter than the first.<sup>3</sup> The interesting thing Weber discovered was that the smallest difference a person could detect was proportional to the magnitude of the reference weight. For example, if you were just barely able to sense that a six-gram weight was heavier than a reference object that weighed five grams, one gram would be the smallest detectible difference. But if the reference weight were ten times heavier, the smallest difference you'd be able to detect would be ten times as great—in this case, ten grams. This doesn't sound like an earth-shattering result, but it was crucial to the development of psychology because it made a point: through experimentation one *can* uncover mathematical and scientific laws of mental processing.

In 1879 another German psychologist, Wilhelm Wundt, petitioned the Royal Saxon Ministry of Education for money to start the world's first psychology laboratory.<sup>4</sup> Though his request was denied, he established the laboratory anyway, in a small classroom he had already been using, informally, since 1875. That same year, a Harvard MD and professor named William James, who had taught Comparative Anatomy and Physiology, started teaching a new course called *The Relations Between Physiology and Psychology*. He also set up an informal psychology laboratory in two basement rooms of Lawrence Hall. In 1891 it attained official status as the Harvard Psychological Laboratory. In recognition of their pathbreaking efforts, a Berlin newspaper referred to Wundt as “the psychological Pope of the Old World” and James as “the psychological Pope of the

New World.”<sup>5</sup> It was through their experimental work, and that of others inspired by Weber, that psychology was finally put on a scientific footing. The field that emerged was called the “New Psychology.” For a while, it was the hottest field in science.<sup>6</sup>

The pioneers of the New Psychology each had his own views about the function and importance of the unconscious. The British physiologist and psychologist William Carpenter was one of the most prescient. In his 1874 book *Principles of Mental Physiology*, he wrote that “two distinct trains of Mental action are carried on simultaneously, one consciously, the other unconsciously,” and that the more thoroughly we examine the mechanisms of the mind, the clearer it becomes “that not only an automatic, but an unconscious action enters largely into all its processes.”<sup>7</sup> This was a profound insight, one we continue to build on to this day.

Despite all the provocative ideas brewing in European intellectual circles after the publication of Carpenter’s book, the next big step in understanding the brain along the lines of Carpenter’s two-trains concept came from across the ocean, from the American philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce—the man who did the studies of the mind’s ability to detect what should have been undetectable differences in weight and brightness. A friend of William James’s at Harvard, Peirce had founded the philosophical doctrine of pragmatism (though it was James who elaborated on the idea and made it famous). The name was inspired by the belief that philosophical ideas or theories should be viewed as instruments, not absolute truths, and their validity judged by their practical consequences in our lives.

Peirce had been a child prodigy.<sup>8</sup> He wrote a history of chemistry when he was eleven. He had his own laboratory when he was twelve. At thirteen, he studied formal logic from his older brother’s textbook. He could write with both hands and enjoyed inventing card tricks. He was also, in later life, a regular user of opium, which was prescribed to relieve a painful neurological disorder. Still, he managed to turn out twelve thousand printed pages of published works, on topics ranging from the physical sciences to the social sciences. His discovery of the fact that the unconscious mind has knowledge unknown to the conscious mind—which had its unlikely origin in the incident in which he was able to form an accurate hunch about the identity of the man who stole his gold watch—was the forerun-



ner of many other such experiments. The process of arriving seemingly by chance at a correct answer you aren't aware of knowing is now used in what is called a "forced choice" experiment, which has become a standard tool in probing the unconscious mind. Although Freud is the cultural hero associated with popularizing the unconscious, it is really to pioneers like Wundt, Carpenter, Peirce, Jastrow, and William James that we can trace the roots of modern scientific methodology and thought about the unconscious mind.

TODAY WE KNOW that Carpenter's "two distinct trains of Mental action" are actually more like two entire railway systems. To update Carpenter's metaphor, we would say that the conscious and unconscious railways each comprise a myriad of densely interconnected lines, and that the two systems are also connected to each other at various points. The human mental system is thus far more complex than Carpenter's original picture, but we're making progress in deciphering its map of routes and stations.

What has become abundantly clear is that within this two-tier system, it is the unconscious tier that is the more fundamental. It developed early in our evolution, to deal with the basic necessities of function and survival, sensing and safely responding to the external world. It is the standard infrastructure in all vertebrate brains, while the conscious can be considered an optional feature. In fact, while most nonhuman species of animals can and do survive with little or no capacity for conscious symbolic thought, no animal can exist without an unconscious.

According to a textbook on human physiology, the human sensory system sends the brain about eleven million bits of information each second.<sup>9</sup> However, anyone who has ever taken care of a few children who are all trying to talk to you at once can testify that your conscious mind cannot process anywhere near that amount. The actual amount of information we can handle has been estimated to be somewhere between sixteen and fifty bits per second. So if your conscious mind were left to process all that incoming information, your brain would freeze like an overtaxed computer. Also, though we don't realize it, we are making many decisions each second. Should I spit out my mouthful of food because I detect a strange odor? How shall I adjust my muscles so that I remain standing and

don't tip over? What is the meaning of the words that person across the table from me is uttering? And what kind of person is he, anyway?

Evolution has provided us with an unconscious mind because our unconscious is what allows us to survive in a world requiring such massive information intake and processing. Our sensory perception, our memory recall, our everyday decisions, judgments, and activities all seem effortless—but that is only because the effort they demand is expended mainly in parts of the brain that function outside awareness.

Take speech. Most people who read the sentence “The cooking teacher said the children made good snacks” instantly understand a certain meaning for the word “made.” But if you read, “The cannibal said the children made good snacks,” you automatically interpret the word “made” in a more alarming sense. Though we think that making these distinctions is easy, the difficulty in making sense of even simple speech is well appreciated by computer scientists who struggle to create machines that can respond to natural language. Their frustration is illustrated by a possibly apocryphal story of the early computer that was given the task of translating the homily “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” into Russian and then back into English. According to the story, it came out: “The vodka is strong but the meat is rotten.” Luckily, our unconscious does a far better job, and handles language, sense perception, and a teeming multitude of other tasks with great speed and accuracy, leaving our deliberative conscious mind time to focus on more important things, like complaining to the person who programmed the translation software. Some scientists estimate that we are conscious of only about 5 percent of our cognitive function. The other 95 percent goes on beyond our awareness and exerts a huge influence on our lives—beginning with making our lives possible.

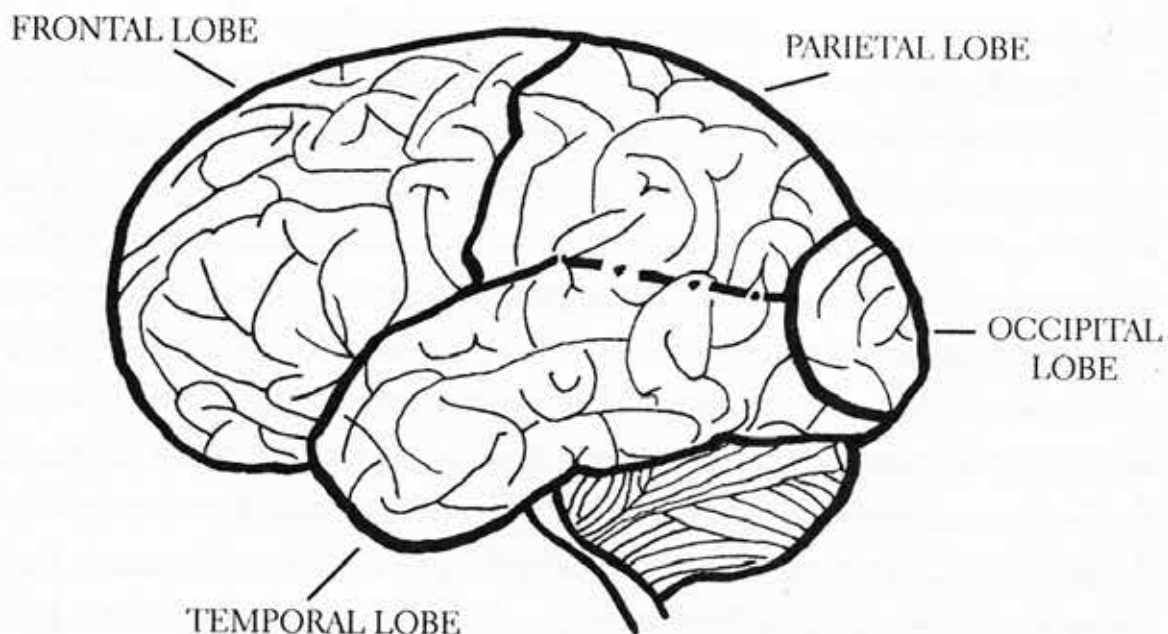
One sign that there is a lot of activity going on in our brains of which we are not aware comes from a simple analysis of energy consumption.<sup>10</sup> Imagine yourself sprawled on the couch watching television; you are subject to few demands on your body. Then imagine yourself doing something physically demanding—say, racing down a street. When you run fast, the energy consumption in your muscles is multiplied by a factor of one hundred compared to the energy you use as a couch potato. That's because, despite what you might tell your significant other, your body is working a lot harder—one hundred times so—when you're running than when you're

stretched out on the sofa. Let's contrast this energy multiplier with the multiplier that is applicable when you compare two forms of mental activity: vegging out, in which your conscious mind is basically idle, and playing chess. Assuming that you are a good player with an excellent knowledge of all the possible moves and strategies and are concentrating deeply, does all that conscious thought tax your conscious mind to the same degree that running taxed your muscles? No. Not remotely. Deep concentration causes the energy consumption in your brain to go up by only about 1 percent. No matter what you are doing with your conscious mind, it is your unconscious that dominates your mental activity—and therefore uses up most of the energy consumed by the brain. Regardless of whether your conscious mind is idle or engaged, your unconscious mind is hard at work doing the mental equivalent of push-ups, squats, and wind sprints.

ONE OF THE most important functions of your unconscious is the processing of data delivered by your eyes. That's because, whether hunting or gathering, an animal that sees better eats better and avoids danger more effectively, and hence lives longer. As a result, evolution has arranged it so that about a third of your brain is devoted to processing vision: to interpreting color, detecting edges and motion, perceiving depth and distance, deciding the identity of objects, recognizing faces, and many other tasks. Think of it—a third of your brain is busy doing all those things, yet you have little knowledge of or access to the processing. All that hard work proceeds outside your awareness, and then the result is offered to your conscious mind in a neat report, with the data digested and interpreted. As a result, you never have to bother figuring out what it means if these rods or those cones in your retinas absorb this or that number of photons, or to translate optic nerve data into a spatial distribution of light intensities and frequencies, and then into shapes, spatial positions, and meaning. Instead, while your unconscious mind is working feverishly to do all those things, you can relax in bed, recognizing, seemingly without effort, the lighting fixture on the ceiling—or the words in this book. Our visual system is not only one of the most important systems within our brain, it is also among the most studied areas in neuroscience. Understanding its workings can shed a lot of light on the way the two tiers of the human mind function together—and apart.

One of the most fascinating of the studies that neuroscientists have done on the visual system involved a fifty-two-year-old African man referred to in the literature as TN. A tall, strong-looking man, a doctor who, as fate would have it, was destined to become renowned as a patient, TN took the first step on his path to pain and fame one day in 2004 when, while living in Switzerland, he had a stroke that knocked out the left side of a part of his brain called the visual cortex.

The main part of the human brain is divided into two cerebral hemispheres, which are almost mirror images of each other. Each hemisphere is divided into four lobes, a division originally motivated by the bones of the skull that overlie them. The lobes, in turn, are covered by a convoluted outer layer about the thickness of a formal dinner napkin. In humans, this outer covering, the neocortex, forms the largest part of the brain. It consists of six thinner layers, five of which contain nerve cells, and the projections that connect the layers to one another. There are also input and output connections from the neocortex to other parts of the brain and nervous system. Though thin, the neocortex is folded in a manner that allows almost three square feet of neural tissue—about the size of a large pizza—to be packed into your skull.<sup>11</sup> Different parts of the neocortex perform different functions. The occipital lobe is located at the very back of your head, and its cortex—the visual cortex—contains the main visual processing center of the brain.





A lot of what we know about the function of the occipital lobe comes from creatures in which that lobe has been damaged. You might look askance at someone who seeks to understand the function of the brakes on a car by driving one that doesn't have any—but scientists selectively destroy parts of animals' brains on the theory that one can learn what those parts do by studying animals in which they no longer do it. Since university ethics committees would frown on killing off parts of the brain in human subjects, researchers also comb hospitals seeking unfortunate people whom nature or an accident has rendered suitable for their study. This can be a tedious search because Mother Nature doesn't care about the scientific usefulness of the injuries she inflicts. TN's stroke was noteworthy in that it pretty cleanly took out just the visual center of his brain. The only drawback—from the research point of view—was that it affected only the left side, meaning that TN could still see in half his field of vision. Unfortunately for TN, that situation lasted for just thirty-six days. Then a tragic second hemorrhage occurred, freakishly destroying what was almost the mirror image of the first region.

After the second stroke, doctors did tests to see whether it had rendered TN completely blind, for some of the blind have a small measure of residual sight. They can see light and dark, for example, or read a word if it covers the side of a barn. TN, though, could not even see the barn. The doctors who examined him after his second stroke noted that he could not discern shapes or detect movement or colors, or even the presence of an intense source of light. An exam confirmed that the visual areas in his occipital lobe were not functioning. Though the optical part of TN's visual system was still fully functional, meaning his eyes could gather and record light, his visual cortex lacked the ability to process the information that his retinas were sending it. Because of this state of affairs—an intact optical system, but a completely destroyed visual cortex—TN became a tempting subject for scientific research, and, sure enough, while he was still in the hospital a group of doctors and researchers recruited him.

There are many experiments one can imagine performing on a blind subject like TN. One could test for an enhanced sense of hearing, for example, or memory for past visual experiences. But of all possible questions, one that would probably not make your list would be whether a

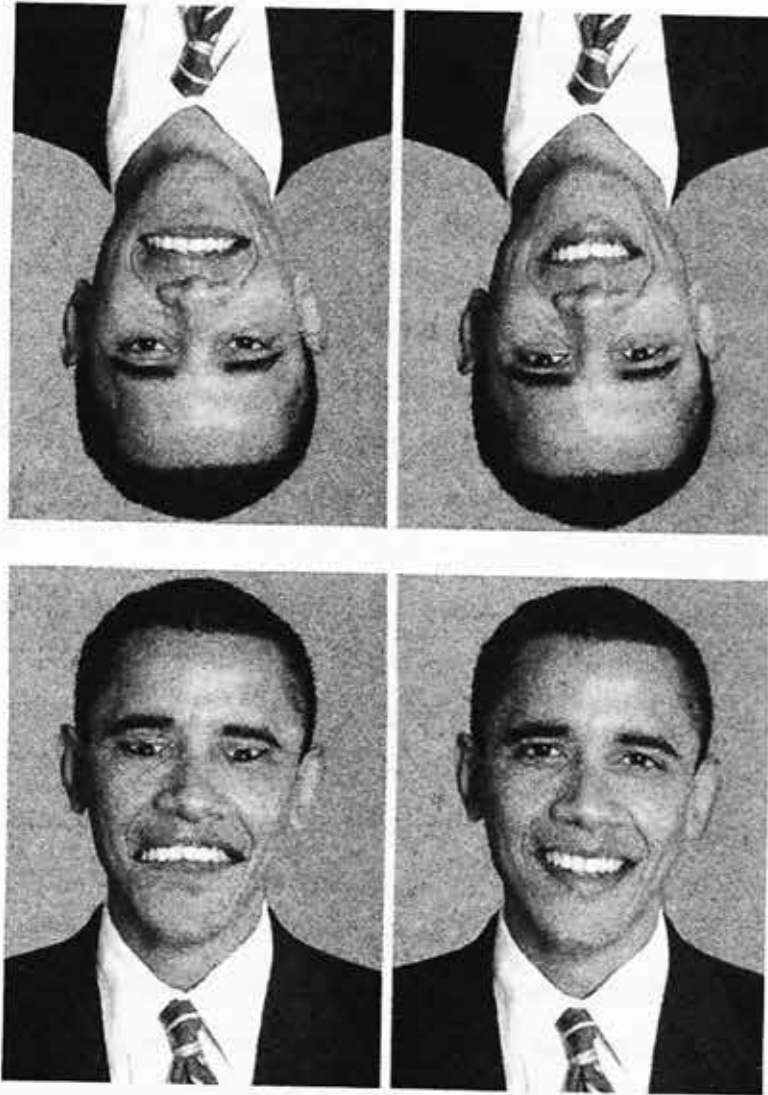
blind man can sense your mood by staring at your face. Yet that is what these researchers chose to study.<sup>12</sup>

They began by placing a laptop computer a couple feet in front of TN and showing him a series of black shapes—either circles or squares—presented on a white background. Then, in the tradition of Charles Sanders Peirce, they presented him with a forced choice: when each shape appeared, they asked him to identify it. Just take a stab at it, the researchers pleaded. TN obliged. He was correct about half the time, just what one would expect if he truly had no idea what he was seeing. Now comes the interesting part. The scientists displayed a new series of images—this time, a series of angry and happy faces. The game was essentially the same: to guess, when prompted, whether the face on the screen was angry or happy. But identifying a facial expression is a far different task from perceiving a geometric shape, because faces are much more important to us than black shapes.

Faces play a special role in human behavior.<sup>13</sup> That's why, despite men's usual preoccupation, Helen of Troy was said to have "the face that launched a thousand ships," not "the breasts that launched a thousand ships." And it's why, when you tell your dinner guests that the tasty dish they are savoring is cow pancreas, you pay attention to their faces and not their elbows—or their words—to get a quick and accurate report of their attitudes toward organ meat. We look to faces to quickly judge whether someone is happy or sad, content or dissatisfied, friendly or dangerous. And our honest reactions to events are reflected in facial expressions controlled in large part by our unconscious minds. Expressions, as we'll see in Chapter 5, are a key way we communicate and are difficult to suppress or fake, which is why great actors are hard to find. The importance of faces is reflected in the fact that, no matter how strongly men are drawn to the female form, or women to a man's physique, we know of no part of the human brain dedicated to analyzing the nuances of bulging biceps or the curves of firm buttocks or breasts. But there is a discrete part of the brain that is used to analyze faces. It is called the fusiform face area. To illustrate the brain's special treatment of faces, look at the photos of President Barack Obama on page 39.<sup>14</sup>

The photo on the left of the right-side-up pair looks horribly distorted, while the left member of the upside-down pair does not look very unusual.

*Senses Plus Mind Equals Reality*



*www.moillusions.com. Used with permission.*

In reality the bottom pair is identical to the top pair, except that the top photos have been flipped. I know because I flipped them, but if you don't trust me just rotate this book 180 degrees, and you'll see that what is now the top pair will appear to have the bad photo, and what is now the bottom pair will look pretty good. Your brain devotes a lot more attention (and neural real estate) to faces than to many other kinds of visual phenomena because faces are more important—but not upside-down faces, since we rarely encounter those, except when performing headstands in a yoga class. That's why we are far better at detecting the distortion on the face that is right side up than on the one that is flipped over.

The researchers studying TN chose faces as their second series of images in the belief that the brain's special and largely unconscious focus

on faces might allow TN to improve his performance, even though he'd have no conscious awareness of seeing anything. Whether he was looking at faces, geometric shapes, or ripe peaches ought to have been a moot point, given that TN was, after all, blind. But on this test TN identified the faces as happy or angry correctly almost two times out of three. Though the part of his brain responsible for the conscious sensation of vision had obviously been destroyed, his fusiform face area was receiving the images. It was influencing the conscious choices he made in the forced-choice experiment, but TN didn't know it.

Having heard about the first experiment involving TN, a few months later another group of researchers asked him if he would participate in a different test. Reading faces may be a special human talent, but not falling on your face is even more special. If you suddenly notice that you are about to trip over a sleeping cat, you don't consciously ponder strategies for stepping out of the way; you just do it.<sup>15</sup> That avoidance is governed by your unconscious, and it is the skill the researchers wanted to test in TN. They proposed to watch as he walked, without his cane, down a cluttered hallway.<sup>16</sup>

The idea excited all those involved except the person not guaranteed to remain vertical. TN refused to participate.<sup>17</sup> He may have had some success in the face test, but what blind man would consent to navigating an obstacle course? The researchers implored him, in effect, to just do it. And they kindly offered to have an escort trail him to make sure he didn't fall. After some prodding, he changed his mind. Then, to the amazement of everyone, including himself, he zigged and zagged his way perfectly down the corridor, sidestepping a garbage can, a stack of paper, and several boxes. He didn't stumble once, or even collide with any objects. When asked how he'd accomplished this, TN had no explanation and, one presumes, requested the return of his cane.

The phenomenon exhibited by TN—in which individuals with intact eyes have no conscious sensation of seeing but can nevertheless respond in some way to what their eyes register—is called “blindsight.” This important discovery “elicited disbelief and howls of derision” when first reported and has only recently come to be accepted.<sup>18</sup> But in a sense it shouldn't have been surprising: it makes perfect sense that blindsight would result when the conscious visual system is rendered nonfunctional but a per-



son's eyes and unconscious system remain intact. Blindsight is a strange syndrome—a particularly dramatic illustration of the two tiers of the brain operating independently of each other.

THE FIRST PHYSICAL indication that vision occurs through multiple pathways came from a British Army doctor named George Riddoch in 1917.<sup>19</sup> In the late nineteenth century, scientists had begun to study the importance of the occipital lobe in vision by creating lesions in dogs and monkeys. But data on humans was scarce. Then came World War I. Suddenly the Germans were turning British soldiers into promising research subjects at an alarming pace. This was partly because British helmets tended to dance atop the soldiers' heads, which might have looked fashionable but didn't cover them very well, especially in the back. Also, the standard in that conflict was trench warfare. As it was practiced, a soldier's job was to keep all of his body protected by the solid earth except for his head, which he was instructed to stick up into the line of fire. As a result, 25 percent of all penetrating wounds suffered by British soldiers were head wounds, especially of the lower occipital lobe and its neighbor the cerebellum.

The same path of bullet penetration today would turn a huge swath of the brain into sausage meat and almost certainly kill the victim. But in those days bullets were slower and more discrete in their effects. They tended to bore neat tunnels through the gray matter without disturbing the surrounding tissue very much. This left the victims alive and in better condition than you might imagine given that their heads now had the topology of a doughnut. One Japanese doctor who worked under similar conditions in the Russo-Japanese War saw so many patients injured in that manner that he devised a method for mapping the precise internal brain injury—and the deficits expected—based on the relation of the bullet holes to various external landmarks on the skull. (His official job had been to determine the size of the pension owed the brain-damaged soldiers.)<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Riddoch's most interesting patient was a Lieutenant Colonel T., who had a bullet sail through his right occipital lobe while he was leading his men into battle. After taking the hit he bravely brushed himself off and proceeded to continue leading his men. When asked how he felt, he reported being dazed but said he was otherwise just fine. He was wrong.

Fifteen minutes later, he collapsed. When he woke up it was eleven days later, and he was in a hospital in India.

Although he was now conscious again, one of the first signs that something was amiss came at dinner, when Lieutenant Colonel T. noted that he had a hard time seeing bits of meat residing on the left side of his plate. In humans, the eyes are wired to the brain in such a way that visual information from the left side of your field of vision is transmitted to the right side of your brain, and vice versa, no matter which eye that information comes from. In other words, if you stare straight ahead, everything to your left is transmitted to the right hemisphere of your brain, which is where Lieutenant Colonel T. took the bullet. After he was transferred to a hospital in England, it was established that Lieutenant Colonel T. was totally blind on the left side of his visual field, with one bizarre exception. He could detect motion there. That is, he couldn't see in the usual sense—the “moving things” had no shape or color—but he did know if something was moving. It was partial information, and of little use. In fact, it annoyed him, especially during train rides, when he would sense that things were moving past at his left but he couldn't see anything there.

Since Lieutenant Colonel T. was consciously aware of the motion he detected, his wasn't a case of true blindsight, as TN's was, but still, the case was groundbreaking for its suggestion that vision is the cumulative effect of information traveling along multiple pathways, both conscious and unconscious. George Riddoch published a paper on Lieutenant Colonel T. and others like him, but unfortunately another British Army doctor, one far better known, derided Riddoch's work. With that it virtually disappeared from the literature, not to resurface for many decades.

UNTIL RECENTLY, UNCONSCIOUS vision was difficult to investigate because patients with blindsight are exceedingly rare.<sup>21</sup> But in 2005, Antonio Rangel's Caltech colleague Christof Koch and a coworker came up with a powerful new way to explore unconscious vision in healthy subjects. Koch arrived at this discovery about the unconscious because of his interest in its flip side—the meaning of consciousness. If studying the unconscious was, until recently, not a good career move, Koch says that

studying consciousness was, at least until the 1990s, “considered a sign of cognitive decline.” Today, however, scientists study the two subjects hand in hand, and one of the advantages of research on the visual system is that it is in some sense simpler than, say, memory or social perception.

The technique Koch’s group discovered exploits a visual phenomenon called binocular rivalry. Under the right circumstances, if one image is presented to your left eye while a different image is presented to your right eye, you won’t see both of them, somehow superimposed. Instead, you’ll perceive just one of the two images. Then, after a while, you’ll see the other image, and then the first again. The two images will alternate in that manner indefinitely. What Koch’s group found, however, was that if they present a *changing* image to one eye and a static one to the other, people will see *only* the changing image, and never the static one.<sup>22</sup> In other words, if your right eye were exposed to a film of two monkeys playing Ping-Pong and your left to a photo of a hundred-dollar bill, you’d be unaware of the static photo even though your left eye had recorded the data and transmitted it to your brain. The technique provides a powerful tool for creating, in a sense, artificial blindsight—a new way to study unconscious vision without destroying any part of the brain.

Employing the new technique, another group of scientists performed an experiment on normal people analogous to the one the facial expression researchers performed on patient TN.<sup>23</sup> They exposed each subject’s right eye to a colorful and rapidly changing mosaic-like image, and each subject’s left eye to a static photograph that pictured an object. That object was positioned near either the right edge of the photograph or the left, and it was their subjects’ task to guess where the object was, even though they did not consciously perceive the static photo. The researchers expected that, as in the case of TN, the subjects’ unconscious cues would be powerful only if the object pictured was of vital interest to the human brain. This led to an obvious category. And so when the researchers performed this experiment, they selected, for one of the static images, pornography—or, in their scientific jargon, a “highly arousing erotic image.” You can get erotica at almost any newsstand, but where do you get scientifically controlled erotica? It turns out that psychologists have a database for that. It is called the International Affective Picture System, a collection of 480 images ranging from



sexually explicit material to mutilated bodies to pleasant images of children and wildlife, each categorized according to the level of arousal it produces.

As the researchers expected, when presented with unprovocative static images and asked whether the object was on the left- or the right-hand side of the photo, the subjects' answers were correct about half the time, which is what you would expect from completely random, uninformed guesses, a rate comparable to TN's when he was making guesses about circles versus squares. But when heterosexual male subjects were shown an image of a naked woman, they gained a significant ability to discern on which side of the image she was located, as did females who were shown images of naked men. That didn't happen when men were shown naked men, or when women were shown naked women—with one exception, of course. When the experiment was repeated on homosexual subjects, the results flipped in the manner you might expect. The results mirrored the subjects' sexual preferences.

Despite their successes, when asked afterward what they had seen, all the subjects described just the tedious progression of rapidly changing mosaic images the researchers had presented to their right eye. The subjects were clueless that while their conscious minds were looking at a series of snoozers, their unconscious minds were feasting on *Girls (or Boys) Gone Wild*. This means that while the processing of the erotic image was never delivered to the consciousness, it did register powerfully enough in the unconscious that the subjects had a subliminal awareness of it. We are reminded again of the lesson Peirce learned: We don't consciously perceive everything that registers in our brain, so our unconscious mind may notice things that our conscious mind doesn't. When that happens we may get a funny feeling about a business associate or a hunch about a stranger and, like Peirce, not know the source.

I learned long ago that it is often best to follow those hunches. I was twenty, in Israel just after the Yom Kippur War, and went up to visit the Golan Heights, in Israeli-occupied Syria. While hiking along a deserted road I spotted an interesting bird in a farmer's field, and being a bird-watcher, I resolved to get a closer look. The field was ringed by a fence, which doesn't normally deter bird-watchers, but this fence had a curious sign on it. I pondered what the sign might say. It was in Hebrew,

and my Hebrew wasn't quite good enough to decipher it. The usual message would have been "No Trespassing," but somehow this sign seemed different. Should I stay out? Something told me yes, a something I now imagine was very much like the something that told Peirce who had stolen his watch. But my intellect, my conscious deliberative mind, said, *Go ahead. Just be quick.* And so I climbed the fence and walked into the field, toward the bird. Soon I heard some yelling in Hebrew, and I turned to see a man down the road on a tractor, gesturing at me in a very animated fashion. I returned to the road. It was hard to understand the man's loud jabbering, but between my broken Hebrew and his hand gestures, I soon figured out the issue. I turned to the sign, and now realized that I did recognize those Hebrew words. The sign said, "Danger, Minefield!" My unconscious had gotten the message, but I had let my conscious mind overrule it.

It used to be difficult for me to trust my instincts when I couldn't produce a concrete, logical basis for them, but that experience cured me. We are all a bit like patient TN, blind to certain things, being advised by our unconscious to dodge to the left and right. That advice can often save us, if we are willing to open ourselves to the input.

PHILOSOPHERS HAVE FOR centuries debated the nature of "reality," and whether the world we experience is real or an illusion. But modern neuroscience teaches us that, in a way, all our perceptions must be considered illusions. That's because we perceive the world only indirectly, by processing and interpreting the raw data of our senses. That's what our unconscious processing does for us—it creates a model of the world. Or as Kant said, there is *Das Ding an sich*, a thing as it is, and there is *Das Ding für uns*, a thing as we know it. For example, when you look around, you have the feeling that you are looking into three-dimensional space. But you don't directly sense those three dimensions. Instead, your brain reads a flat, two-dimensional array of data from your retinas and creates the sensation of three dimensions. Your unconscious mind is so good at processing images that if you were fitted with glasses that turn the images in your eyes upside down, after a short while you would see things right side up again. If the glasses were then removed, you would see the world

upside down again, but just for a while.<sup>24</sup> Because of all that processing, when we say, “I see a chair,” what we really mean is that our brain has created a mental model of a chair.

Our unconscious doesn't just interpret sensory data, it enhances it. It has to, because the data our senses deliver is of rather poor quality and must be fixed up in order to be useful. For example, one flaw in the data your eyes supply comes from the so-called blind spot, a spot on the back of your eyeball where the wire connecting your retina and your brain is attached. This creates a dead region in each eye's field of vision. Normally you don't even notice it because your brain fills in the picture based on the data it gets from the surrounding area. But it is possible to design an artificial situation in which the hole becomes visible. For example, close your right eye, look at the number 1 on the right side of the line below, and move the book toward you (or away from you) until the sad face disappears—it will then be in your blind spot. Keeping your head still, now look at the 2, the 3, and so on, still with your left eye. The sad face will reappear, probably around the number 4.



9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To help compensate for their imperfections, your eyes change position a tiny bit several times each second. These jiggling motions are called microsaccades, to distinguish them from ordinary saccades, the larger, more rapid patterns your eyes ceaselessly follow when you study a scene. These happen to be the fastest movements executed by the human body, so rapid that they cannot be observed without special instruments. For example, as you read this text your eye is making a series of saccades along the line. And if I were talking to you, your gaze would bounce around my face, mostly near my eyes. All told, the six muscles controlling your eyeball move it some 100,000 times each day, about as many times as your heart beats.

If your eyes were a simple video camera, all that motion would make the video unwatchable. But your brain compensates by editing out the period during which your eye is in transit and filling in your perception in a way that you don't notice. You can illustrate that edit quite dramatically, but you'll need to enlist as your partner a good friend, or perhaps

an acquaintance who has had a few glasses of wine. Here is what you do: Stand facing your partner, with about four inches separating your noses, then ask your partner to fixate midway between your eyes. Next, have your partner look toward your left ear and back. Repeat this a couple of times. Meanwhile, your job is to observe your partner's eyes and note that you have no difficulty seeing them move back and forth. The question is, If you could stand nose to nose with yourself and repeat the procedure, would you see *your own* eyes move? If it is true that your brain edits out visual information received during eye movements, you would not. How can you perform this test? Stand facing a mirror, with your nose two inches from the mirror's surface (this corresponds to four inches from a real person). Look first right between your eyes, then at your left ear, then back. Repeat a couple of times. Miraculously, you get the two views but never see your eye move between them.

Another gap in the raw data delivered by your eyes has to do with your peripheral vision, which is quite poor. In fact, if you hold your arm out and gaze at your thumbnail, the only part of your field of vision with good resolution will be the area within, and perhaps just bordering, your nail. Even if you have twenty-twenty vision, your visual acuity outside that central region will be roughly comparable to that experienced by a person who needs thick glasses and doesn't have them. You can get a taste for that if you look at this page from a distance of a couple feet and stare at the central asterisk in the first line below (try not to cheat—it isn't easy!). The F's in that line are a thumbnail apart. You'll probably be able to recognize the A and F just fine, but not much of the other letters at all. Now go down to the second line. Here, the increasing size of the letters gives you some help. But if you're like me, you won't be able to clearly read all the letters

P Z L E F A \* A F E Q C A

G C D E F A \* A F E Z P O

P G L E F A \* A F E D C R



unless they are as large as they appear in the third line. The size of the magnification required for you to be able to see the letters at the periphery is an indication of the poor quality of your peripheral vision.

The blind spot, saccades, poor peripheral vision—all these issues should cause you severe problems. When you look at your boss, for example, the true retinal image would show a fuzzy, quivering person with a black hole in the middle of his or her face. However emotionally appropriate that may seem, it is not an image you'll ever perceive, because your brain automatically processes the data, combining the input from both eyes, removing the effects of the jiggling, and filling in gaps on the assumption that the visual properties of neighboring locations are similar. The images below illustrate some of the processing your brain does for you. On the left is the scene as recorded by a camera. On the right is the same image as it would appear if recorded by a human retina with no additional processing. Fortunately for you, that processing gets done in the unconscious, making the images you see as polished and refined as those picked up by the camera.

Our hearing works in an analogous manner. For example, we unconsciously fill in gaps in auditory data. To demonstrate this, in one study experimenters recorded the sentence “The state governors met with their respective legislatures convening in the capital city,” then erased the 120-millisecond portion of the sentence containing the first “s” sound in “legislatures” and replaced it with a cough. They told twenty experimental



*Original image, made by a camera. The same image seen by a retina (right eye, fixation at the X.)  
Courtesy of Laurent Itti.*



subjects that they would hear a recording containing a cough and would be given printed text so they could circle the exact position in the text at which the cough occurred. The subjects were also asked if the cough had masked any of the circled sounds. All of the volunteers reported hearing the cough, but nineteen of the twenty said that there was no missing text. The only subject who reported that the cough had obscured any phonemes named the wrong one.<sup>25</sup> What's more, in follow-up work the researchers found that even practiced listeners couldn't identify the missing sound. Not only could they not pinpoint the exact location of the cough—they couldn't even come close. The cough didn't seem to occur at any clear point within the sentence; rather, it seemed to coexist with the speech sounds without affecting their intelligibility.

Even when the entire syllable "gis" in "legislatures" was obliterated by the cough, subjects could not identify the missing sound.<sup>26</sup> The effect is called phonemic restoration, and it's conceptually analogous to the filling in that your brain does when it papers over your retinal blind spot, and enhances the low resolution in your peripheral vision—or fills holes in your knowledge of someone's character by employing clues based on their appearance, their ethnic group, or the fact that they remind you of your uncle Jerry. (About that, more later.)

Phonemic restoration has a striking property: because it is based on the context in which you hear words, what you think you heard at the beginning of a sentence can be affected by the words that come *at the end*. For example, letting an asterisk denote the cough, listeners in another famous study reported hearing the word "wheel" in the sentence "It was found that the \*eel was on the axle." But they heard "heel" when they listened to the sentence "It was found that the \*eel was on the shoe." Similarly, when the final word in the sentence was "orange" they heard "peel," and when it was "table," they heard "meal."<sup>27</sup> In each case the data provided to each subject's brain included the same sound, "\*eel." Each brain patiently held the information, awaiting more clues as to the context. Then, after hearing the word "axle," "shoe," "orange," or "table," the brain filled in the appropriate consonant. Only at that time did it pass to the subject's conscious mind, leaving the subject unaware of the alteration and quite confident of having accurately heard the word that the cough had partially obscured.

IN PHYSICS, SCIENTISTS invent models, or theories, to describe and predict the data we observe about the universe. Newton's theory of gravity is one example; Einstein's theory of gravity is another. Those theories, though they describe the same phenomenon, constitute very different versions of reality. Newton, for example, imagined that masses affect each other by exerting a force, while in Einstein's theory the effects occur through a bending of space and time and there is no concept of gravity as a force. Either theory could be employed to describe, with great accuracy, the falling of an apple, but Newton's would be much easier to use. On the other hand, for the calculations necessary for the satellite-based global positioning system (GPS) that helps you navigate while driving, Newton's theory would give the wrong answer, and so Einstein's must be used. Today we know that actually both theories are wrong, in the sense that both are only approximations of what really happens in nature. But they are also both correct, in that they each provide a very accurate and useful description of nature in the realms in which they do apply.

As I said, in a way, every human mind is a scientist, creating a model of the world around us, the everyday world that our brains detect through our senses. Like our theories of gravity, our model of the sensory world is only approximate and is based on concepts invented by our minds. And like our theories of gravity, though our mental models of our surroundings are not perfect, they usually work quite well.

The world we perceive is an artificially constructed environment whose character and properties are as much a result of unconscious mental processing as they are a product of real data. Nature helps us overcome gaps in information by supplying a brain that smooths over the imperfections, at an unconscious level, before we are even aware of any perception. Our brains do all of this without conscious effort, as we sit in a high chair enjoying a jar of strained peas or, later in life, on a couch, sipping a beer. We accept the visions concocted by our unconscious minds without question, and without realizing that they are only an interpretation, one constructed to maximize our overall chances of survival, but not one that is in all cases the most accurate picture possible.

## *Senses Plus Mind Equals Reality*

That brings up a question to which we will return again and again, in contexts ranging from vision to memory to the way we judge the people we meet: If a central function of the unconscious is to fill in the blanks when there is incomplete information in order to construct a useful picture of reality, how much of that picture is accurate? For example, suppose you meet someone new. You have a quick conversation, and on the basis of that person's looks, manner of dress, ethnicity, accent, gestures—and perhaps some wishful thinking on your part—you form an assessment. But how confident can you be that your picture is a true one?

In this chapter I focused on the realm of visual and auditory perception to illustrate the brain's two-tier system of data processing and the ways in which it supplies information that does not come directly from the raw data in front of it. But sensory perception is just one of many arenas of mental processing in which portions of the brain that operate at the unconscious level perform tricks to fill in missing data. Memory is another, for the unconscious mind is actively involved in shaping your memory. As we are about to see, the unconscious tricks that our brains employ to create memories of events—feats of imagination, really—are as drastic as the alterations they make to the raw data received by our eyes and ears. And the way the tricks conjured up by our imaginations supplement the rudiments of memory can have far-reaching—and not always positive—effects.

**Selected by Gabriel Kuri**

**Material from  
Daniel Tammet, *Thinking in Numbers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton,  
2012), 19–28.**

## Counting to Four in Icelandic

Ask an Icelander what comes after three and he will answer, 'Three of what?' Ignore the warm blood of annoyance as it fills your cheeks, and suggest something, or better still, point. 'Ah,' our Icelander replies. Ruffled by the wind, the four sheep stare blankly at your index finger. '*Fjórar*,' he says at last.

There is a further reason to be annoyed. When you take the phrasebook – presumably one of those handy, rain-resistant brands – from your pocket and turn to the numbers page, you find, marked beside the numeral 4, *fjórir*. This is not a printing error, nor did you hear the Icelander wrong. Both words are correct; both words mean 'four'. This should give you your first inkling of the sophistication with which these people count.

I first heard Icelandic several years ago during a trip to Reykjavík. No phrasebook in my pocket, thank God. I came with nothing more useful than a vague awareness of the shape and sounds of Old English, some secondary-school German, and plenty of curiosity. The curiosity had already seen service in France. Here in the North, too, I favoured conversation over textbooks.

I hate textbooks. I hate how they shoehorn even the most incongruous words – like 'cup' and 'bookcase,' or 'pencil' and 'ashtray' – onto the same page, and then call it 'vocabulary'. In a conversation, the language is always fluid, moving, and you have to move with it. You walk and talk and see where the



words come from, and where they should go. It was in this way that I learnt how to count like a Viking.

Icelanders, I learnt, have highly refined discrimination for the smallest quantities. 'Four' sheep differ in kind from 'four', the abstract counting word. No farmer in Hveragerði would ever dream of counting sheep in the abstract. Nor, for that matter, would his wife or son or priest or neighbour. To list both words together, as in a textbook, would make no sense to them whatsoever.

Do not think that this numerical diversity applies only to sheep. Naturally enough, the woolly mammals feature little in town dwellers' talk. Like you and me, my friends in Reykjavík talk about birthdays and buses and pairs of jeans but, unlike English, in Icelandic these things each require their own set of number words.

For example, a toddler who turns two is *tvéggja* years old. And yet the pocket phrasebook will inform you that 'two' is *tvær*. Age, abstract as counting to our way of thinking, becomes in Icelandic a tangible phenomenon. Perhaps you too sense the difference: the word *tvéggja* slows the voice, suggesting duration. We hear this possibly even more clearly in the word for a four-year-old: *ffögurra*. Interestingly, these sounds apply almost exclusively to the passage of years – the same words are hardly ever used to talk about months, days, or weeks. Clock time, on the other hand, renders the Icelandic almost terse as a tick: the hour after one o'clock is *tvö*.

What about buses? Here numbers refer to identity rather than quantity. In Britain or America, we say something like, 'the number three bus', turning the number into a name. Icelanders do something similar. Their most frequent buses are each known by a special number word. In Reykjavík, the number three bus is simply *þristur* (whereas to count to three the Icelandic says *þrír*). *Fjarki* is how to say 'four' when talking buses in Iceland.

A third example is pairs of something – whether jeans or shorts, socks or shoes. In this case, Icelanders consider ‘one’ as being plural: *einar* pair of jeans, instead of the phrasebook *einn*.

With time and practice, I have learned all these words, more words for the numbers one to four than has an Englishman to count all the way up to fifty. Why do Icelanders have so many words for so few numbers? Of course, we might just as well wonder: why in English are so many numbers spoken of in so few words? In English, I would suggest, numbers are considered more or less ethereal – as categories, not qualities. Not so the smallest numbers in Icelandic. We might, for instance, compare their varieties of one, two, three and four, to our varieties of colour. Where the English word ‘red’ is abstract, indifferent to its object, words like ‘crimson,’ ‘scarlet’ and ‘burgundy’ each possess their own particular shade of meaning and application.

So, Icelanders think of the smallest numbers with the nuance that we reserve for colour. We can only speculate as to the reason why they stop at the number five (for which, like every number thereafter, a single word exists). According to psychologists, humans can count in flashes only up to quantities of four. We see three buttons on a shirt and say ‘three’; we glance at four books on a table and say ‘four’. No conscious thought attends this process – it seems to us as effortless as the speech with which we pronounce the words. The same psychologists tell us that the smallest numbers loom largest in our minds. Asked to pick a number between one and fifty, we tend toward the shallow end of the scale (far fewer say ‘forty’ than ‘fourteen’). It is one possible explanation for why only the commonest quantities feel real to us, why most numbers we accept only on the word of a teacher or textbook. Forty, to us, is but a vague notion; fourteen, on the other hand, is a sensation within our reach. Four, we recognise as something

solid and definite. In Icelandic, you can give your baby the name 'Four'.

I do not know Chinese, but I have read that counting in this language rivals in its sophistication even that of the Icelanders. A shepherd in rural China says *sì zhī* when his flock numbers four, whereas a horseman – possessing the same quantity of horses – counts them as *sì pǐ*. This is because mounts are counted differently in Chinese to other animals. Domesticated animals, too. Asked how many cows he had milked that morning, a farmer would reply *sì tóu* (four). Fish are a further exception. *Sì tiáo* is how an angler would count his fourth catch of the day.

Unlike Icelandic, in Chinese these fine distinctions apply to all quantities. What saves its speakers from endless trouble of recall is generalisation. *Sì tiáo* means 'four' when counting fish, but also trousers, roads, rivers (and other long, slender and flexible objects). A locksmith might enumerate his keys as *qī bā* (seven), but so too would a housewife apropos her seven knives, or a tailor when adding up his seven pairs of scissors (or other handy items). Imagine that, with his scissors, the tailor snips a sheet of fabric in two. He would say he has *liǎng zhāng* (two) sheets of fabric, using the same number word as he would for paper, paintings, tickets, blankets and bed sheets. Now picture the tailor as he rolls the fabric into long inflexible tubes. This pair he counts as *liǎng juǎn* (two scrolls, or rolls of film would be counted in the same way). Scrunching the sheets into balls, the tailor counts them as *liǎng tuán*, insofar as they resemble other pairs of round things.

When counting people, the Chinese start from *yī ge* (one), though for villagers and family members they begin *yī kǒu*, and *yī míng* for lawyers, politicians and royals. Numbering a crowd thus depends on its composition. A hundred marchers would be counted as *yībǎi ge* if they consist, for example, of students, but as *yībǎi kǒu* if they hail from the villages.



So complex is this method of counting that, in some regions of China, the words for certain numbers have even taken on the varying properties of a dialect. *Wúshí li*, for example, a standard Mandarin word meaning 'fifty' (when counting small, round objects like grains of rice), sounds truly enormous to the speakers of southern Min, for whom it is used to count watermelons.

This profusion of Icelandic and Chinese words for the purpose of counting appears to be an exception to the rule. Many of the world's tribal languages, in contrast, make do with only a handful of names for numbers. The Veddas, an indigenous people of Sri Lanka, are reported to have only words for the numbers one (*ekkamai*) and two (*dekkamai*). For larger quantities, they continue: *otameekai*, *otameekai*, *otameekai* . . . ('and one more, and one more, and one more . . .'). Another example is the Caquintes of Peru, who count one (*aparo*) and two (*mavite*). Three they call 'it is another one'; four is 'the one that follows it'.

In Brazil, the Munduruku imitate quantity by according an extra syllable to each new number: one is *pug*, two is *xep xep*, three is *ebapug*, and four is *edadipdip*. They count, understandably, no higher than five. The imitative method, while transparent, has clear limitations. Just imagine a number word as many syllables long as the quantity of trees leading to a food source! The drawling, seemingly endless, chain of syllables would prove far too expensive to the tongue (not to say the listener's powers of concentration). It pains the head even to think about what it would be like to have to learn to recite the ten times tables in this way.

All this may sound almost incomprehensible for those brought up speaking languages that count to thousands, millions and beyond, but it does at least make the relationship between a quantity and its appointed word sound straightforward and conventional. Quite often though, it is not. In many

tribal languages, we find that the names for numbers are perfectly interchangeable, so that a word for 'three' will also sometimes mean 'two', and at other times 'four' or 'five'. A word meaning 'four' will have 'three' and 'five' – occasionally 'six' – as synonyms.

Few circumstances within these communities require any greater numerical precision. Any number beyond their fingertips is superfluous to their traditional way of life. In many of these places there are, after all, no legal documents that require dates, no bureaucracies that levy taxes, no clocks or calendars, no lawyers or accountants, no banks or banknotes, no thermometers or weather reports, no schools, no books, no playing cards, no queues, no shoes (and hence, no shoe sizes), no shops, no bills and no debt to settle. It would make as much sense to tell them, say, that a group of men amounts exactly to eleven, as for someone to inform us that this same group has precisely one hundred and ten fingers, and as many toes.

There is a tribe in the Amazon rainforest who know nothing whatsoever of numbers. Their name is the *Pirahã* or the *Hi'aiti'ihí*, meaning 'the straight ones'. The *Pirahã* show little interest in the outside world. Surrounded by throngs of trees, their small clusters of huts lie on the banks of the Maici River. Tumbling grey rain breaks green on the lush foliage and long grass. Days there are continuously hot and humid, inducing a perpetual look of embarrassment on the faces of visiting missionaries and linguists. Children race naked around the village, while their mothers wear light dresses obtained by bartering with the Brazilian traders. From the same source, the men display colourful T-shirts, the flotsam of past political campaigns, exhorting the observer to vote Lula.

Manioc (a tough and bland tuber), fresh fish and roasted anteater sustain the population. The work of gathering food is divided along lines of sex. At first light, women leave the huts to tend the manioc plants and collect firewood, while the men

go upriver or downriver to fish. They can spend the whole day there, bow and arrow in hand, watching water. For want of any means of storage, any catch is consumed quickly. The *Pirahã* apportion food in the following manner: members of the tribe haphazardly receive a generous serving until no more remains. Any who have not yet been served ask a neighbour, who has to share. This procedure only ends when everyone has eaten his fill.

The vast majority of what we know about the *Pirahã* is due to the work of Daniel Everett, a Californian linguist who has studied them at close quarters over a period of thirty years. With professional perseverance, his ears gradually soothed their cacophonous ejections into comprehensible words and phrases, becoming in the process the first outsider to embrace the tribe's way of life.

To the American's astonishment, the language he learned has no specific words for measuring time or quantity. Names for numbers like 'one' or 'two' are unheard of. Even the simplest numerical queries brought only confusion or indifference to the tribesmen's eyes. Of their children, parents are unable to say how many they have, though they remember all their names. Plans or schedules older than a single day have no purchase on the *Pirahã*'s minds. Bartering with foreign traders simply consists of handing over foraged nuts as payment until the trader says that the price has been met.

Nor do the *Pirahã* count with their bodies. Their fingers never point or curl: when indicating some amount they simply hold their hand palm down, using the space between their hand and the ground to suggest the height of the pile that such a quantity could reach.

It seems the *Pirahã* make no distinction between a man and a group of men, between a bird and a flock of birds, between a grain of manioc flour and a sack of manioc flour. Everything is either small (*hói*) or big (*ogii*). A solitary macaw is a small



flock; the flock, a big macaw. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle shows that counting requires some prior understanding of what 'one' is. To count five, or ten or twenty-three birds, we must first identify one bird, an idea of 'bird' that can apply to every possible kind. But such abstractions are entirely foreign to the tribe.

With abstraction, birds become numbers. Men and manioc, too. We can look at a scene and say, 'There are two men, three birds and four manioc' but also, 'There are nine things' (summing two and three and four). The *Pirahã* do not think this way. They ask, 'What are these things?' 'Where are they?', 'What do they do?' A bird flies, a man breathes and a manioc plant grows. It is meaningless to try to bring them together. Man is a small world. The world is a big manioc.

It is little surprise to learn that the *Pirahã* perceive drawings and photos only with great difficulty. They hold a photograph sideways or upside down, not seeing what the image is meant to represent. Drawing a picture is no easier for them, not even a straight line. They cannot copy simple shapes with any fidelity. Quite possibly, they have no interest in doing so. Instead their pencils (furnished by linguists or missionaries) produce only repeating circular marks on the researcher's sheet of paper, each mark a little different to the last.

Perhaps this also explains why the *Pirahã* tell no stories, possess no creation myths. Stories, at least as we understand them, have intervals: a beginning, a middle and an end. When we tell a story, we recount: naming each interval is equivalent to numbering it. Yet the *Pirahã* talk only of the immediate present: no past impinges on their actions; no future motivates their thoughts. History, they told their American companion, is 'where nothing happens, and everything is the same.'

Lest anyone should think tribes such as the *Pirahã* somehow lacking in capacity, allow me to mention the *Guugu Yimithirr*

of north Queensland in Australia. In common with most Aboriginal language speakers, the *Guugu Yimithirr* have only a handful of number words: *nubuun* (one), *gudhirra* (two) and *guunduu* (three or more). This same language, however, permits its speakers to navigate their landscape geometrically. A wide array of coordinate terms attune their minds intuitively to magnetic north, south, east and west, so that they develop an extraordinary sense of orientation. For instance, a *Guugu Yimithirr* man would not say something like, 'There is an ant on your right leg,' but rather 'There is an ant on your southeast leg.' Or, instead of saying, 'Move the book back a bit,' the man would say, 'Move the book to the north northwest a bit.'

We are tempted to say that a compass, for them, has no point. But at least one other interesting observation can be drawn from the *Guugu Yimithirrs'* ability. In the West, young children often struggle to grasp the concept of a negative number. The difference between the numbers two (2) and minus two (-2) often evades their imagination. Here the *Guugu Yimithirr* child has a definite advantage. For two, the child thinks of 'two steps east', while minus two becomes 'two steps west'. To a question like, 'What is minus two plus one?' the Western child might incorrectly offer, 'Minus three', whereas the *Guugu Yimithirr* simply takes a mental step eastward to arrive at the right answer of 'one step west' (-1).

A final example of culture's effect on how a person counts, from the *Kpelle* tribe of Liberia. The *Kpelle* have no word in their language corresponding to the abstract concept of 'number'. Counting words exist, but are rarely employed above thirty or forty. One young *Kpelle* man, when interviewed by a linguist, could not recall his language's term for seventy-three. A word meaning 'one hundred' frequently stands in for any large amount.

Numbers, the *Kpelle* believe, have power over people and animals and are to be traded only lightly and with a kind of reverence; village elders therefore often guard jealously the solutions to sums. From their teachers, the children acquire only the most basic numerical facts in piecemeal fashion, without learning any of the rhythm that constitutes arithmetic. The children learn, for example, that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and perhaps several weeks or months afterwards that  $4 + 4 = 8$ , but they are never required to connect the two sums and see that  $2 + 2 + 4 = 8$ .

Counting people directly is believed by the *Kpelle* to bring bad luck. In Africa, this taboo is both ancient and widespread. There exists as well the sentiment, shared by the authors of the Old Testament, that the counting of human beings is an exercise in poor taste. The simplicity of their numbers is not linguistic, or merely linguistic, but also ethical.

I read with pleasure a book of essays published several years ago by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe. In one, Achebe complained of the Westerners who asked him, 'How many children do you have?' Rebuking silence, he suggested, best answered such an impertinent question.

'But things are changing and changing fast with us . . . and so I have learned to answer questions that my father would not have touched with a bargepole.'

Achebe's children number *ano* (four). In Iceland, they would say, *ffögur*.





Material from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 289-99.

方话  
有接近  
最  
了者

总体性  
以结构  
其有体  
七

生存和  
殖民者

朱西奥内斯，现代性不在此  
性非，  
无此者公的，学地人持  
形相。

元法叙述，元法叙述  
禁于进行了的因因素。

帽汉鞋，脏兮兮的白色页雷帽翘在一只眼睛上方”。埃尔塞在酒精的  
作用下神经错乱，射中他唯一的女儿，认为她是一只硕鼠。这样的无节  
制，是他与一位独臂工程师卢瑟尔合作地实验失败的结果，卢瑟尔珍  
藏着两卷本的狄德罗《百科全书》。米西奥内斯是一种戏仿，其对象是  
处在边缘的世界主义，不过它也居于新殖民秩序的中心。

基罗加笔下的流放者，是新殖民地的征服者——被美洲世界吞  
噬其意志并被困在帝国范围的欧洲人。他们身上带有宗主国理  
代性的规范——工业化、自我实现的个人主义、革新、科学、医学、理性、  
官僚国家——但是他们无法使这些规范在那里开始运转。基罗加的  
叙述者称他们是“前一人”(ex-*hominibus*, ex-men)，一个连回他们的酗酒  
224 无度和受训身体一起，标志着流动性、帝国、男性、主体性、公民权关系  
之崩溃的术语，这些关系被假定构成现代化的国家秩序。热带打搅现  
代性本身的目的论；其从中心向边缘的自然扩散。他们从前一人抽取  
“沉重的贡税，仿佛用酒精耗去如此多外国人的活力，使之陷入无法停  
止的衰竭”。进入未知世界的旅行，沦为为夜间醉醺醺从当地酒吧回  
家的可悲(不过对于范·豪滕和里韦来说则是致命的)挑战。《流放者》  
的确包含一次英勇的旅行：当地一位市政职员决心按路上交他的记录。  
日夜兼程穿越暴雨和洪水，进行一场惊心动魄的马拉松赛跑。不过这  
首史诗也变成边缘现代性的一个寓言。虽然这位官僚英雄战胜了自然  
力，却因重视最后期限而被报以嘲弄。

基罗加笔下的前一人属于旅行者，他们像洪堡的同伴那普明一样，  
永远也不会靠写旅行书牟利。然而，我想在此考虑的，不是他们，而是  
基罗加与旅行书写的关系。《流放者》从欧洲旅行和旅行书写的接受  
端进行写作。从我在本书中称作“被旅行者”，也就是被旅行到的人和  
地点(people and places traveled to)的立场。基罗加的故事是从南美拼

述的，并且许多欧洲人前往那里，在这种微不足道的意义上，就是如此。  
但是，在一种更加重要的意义上，也是如此：欧洲旅行和旅行书写，是基  
罗加写作的直接规范的组成部分，是他用来进行创作的原材料的组成  
部分，是使得基罗加的叙述者成为他所是之人的组成部分。正如《流放  
者》这个标题所暗示的，米西奥内斯之被创造，不是作为一个场所，而是  
作为一个目的地、一个终点。它有能力打断产生旅行文学出发和返回  
循环的范式。它是一个流—返(ex-ile)之地，反—常(ex-centric)的前—  
人被仍出现代性的故事主线后，在那里耗尽生命。殖民秩序在那里是  
一种残余，存在于一个耶稣会传教的遗迹之中。《流放者》的叙述者，从  
接受需描写一种社会经济秩序，这种秩序由非连续性和即兴创作，不当  
行为和无私奉献以及盲目的开放性构建而成。现代性不能在此生根。  
这种情况日复一日被重演。无论卢瑟尔做什么，当地的骗子都不够甜，  
无法生产出满足城市市场标准的利口酒。尽管那位公证人愿意为国家  
献身，可是雨水却使得他不可能保存文件。没有人幸存到年老，没有女  
性。米西奥内斯是对进步的一种戏仿，是拉丁美洲理论家称之为边缘  
现代性的悲喜剧版。

20世纪最初几十年，常被视为现代性在拉丁美洲自身巩固之时。  
由于政治参与的民主化，伴随着消费市场、工业化、日常生活技术改造，  
以及包括工会制度、女性主义、共产主义、无政府主义在内的现代政治运  
225 动，城市中产阶级应运而生。独立国家常常依赖可怕的战争稳固边界，  
并通过公共教育系统和文化机构着手建设强大、世俗的民族文化。城  
市得到发展并从拥有土地的贵族手中夺取权力。在艺术方面，收音机、  
摄影、电影院、先锋派运动繁荣兴旺。知识分子成为现代性和都市价值  
观的承载者。与此同时，拉丁美洲的政治、经济关系在很大程度上是新  
殖民主义的。也就是说，拉丁美洲依然被固定在—一个国际体系之中，尽



Material from James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 4-5.

门是阅读有关东南亚研究的基本教科书,就像是知识分子的新兵训练营,我们谈的都是这方面的基础著作,也就是那些多数学者书架上有但却不好意思承认读过的书。最开始的著作是两卷本的《剑桥东南亚史》,让我们耳目一新。第二门课是关于缅甸的,也是从基础读物开始。

由此引出我要强调的第二点。我在这本书中所说的一切对“二战”以后的时期不适用。从1945年开始,或者甚至更早,国家动用消除距离的技术的能力,这些技术——包括铁路、全天候公路、电话、电报、空中战斗力、直升机,以及现在的信息技术——已经打破了那些自我管理的人民与民族国家之间权力的战略平衡,地形的阻力在减少,因此我的分析也基本没有用了。与此相反,居于统治地位的民族国家现在忙于把其权力伸展到最远的边界,将那些边缘或尚未被统治的区域清扫收编。由于需要“部落区域”的自然资源,并希望保障边境地区的安全与生产能力,促使各地形成了“吞并”的战略,在这个过程中,那些被认为忠诚并渴求土地的各地居民被移居到山地。如果我的分析不适用于20世纪后期的东南亚,别说我及早警告你们。

最后,我担心这里描述的有关族群形成的激进建构主义个案会被误解,就当成是在贬低甚至诋毁那些勇敢的人们为之奋斗和牺牲的民族认同。然而事实正好相反,无一例外,所有的认同都经由社会建构;不论是汉人,还是缅甸人、美洲人、成丹族人。这些认同,特别是少数民族民族的认同,经常首先是具有有力国家构造的,比如英国殖民者造出了克伦族(the Karen)和掸族(the Shan),法国人制造了加莱族(the Jarai)。不管是被生造还是被强加的,这些民族都选择了某种特性性

XVII

我经常被指责为是错误的,但很少被指责为含糊不清或晦涩难懂。这本书也不例外。不可否认,我对于东南亚大陆的山民所持的主张是非常大胆的,但是我相信,也许会有细节上的错误,总体来说我的主张是正确的。当然,对错的判断并非由我掌握,而是读者和评论人。但是对于书中的主张,这里我要强调三点:第一,这里没有原创的内容。就是说,这本书中的任何一个想法都不是来自于我,我所做的只是从我仔细阅读过的大量文献中看出了一种内在的规律和观点,把这个观点提炼出来,看它能把带到哪里。如果有任何有创造性的地方,那就是理解这种格式塔式整体形态的存在并将其融会贯通。我知道我引用的许多观点和推测,它们的原创者可能会认为我走得太过远了,有些人已经告诉了我,其他人好在大都会抱怨了。我在他们的意见基础上所得出的结论,他们无如负责,正像别人如何使用这本书内的观点与我无关。

我有些吃惊地发现我已经差不多成为历史学家——尽管不是特别好的,但的确是历史学家。而且是个老历史学家,老的两个含义都适用。我熟知历史学家的职业病,比如他们可能准备写作18世纪历史,但结果大多却写的是17世纪的事情,因为这对要讨论的问题极为重要。我也毫不例外。我在阅读有关山民的民族志和缅甸军队在少数民族地区侵犯人权的报告时,发现自己无可救药地为古代曼陀罗(mandala)\*王国运用强制手段的建国过程所吸引。我在有关东南亚的部落殖民和殖民时代的研究成果归功于两门不同的研究生阅读课。一

\* 曼陀罗一词来自梵文,意思是圆圈,佛教的艺术中经常采用圆形的形式,曼陀罗国家往往以中心权力向周边扩散的国家形式。——译者注

Material from Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet and Political Participation in China* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2012), 6-7.

Monster Complex 怪兽  
儿如互联网之政治活动中心  
架构也不在上下层内, 而是  
中心化的, 相互连接的。  
怪兽之, 其基础是  
却建立在传统帝国时代  
的架构之上。

怪兽之, 其基础是  
却建立在传统帝国时代  
的架构之上。

的本语, 以及这种转换如何影响人们对技术与社会关系的看法。首先需要解答的问题是: 为什么当今中国的互联网如此受人关注?

毫不夸张地说, 没有其他媒体曾这样吸引过全球中国观察者的眼球并被高度政治化。西方对互联网在中国的发展紧密关注, 定期报道日益增加的用户数字, 详细审视中国政府对互联网的规制, 并通过网络和传统媒介收集曝光众多互联网案件的细节。在新闻报道和激进组织引发的关注之外, 有关中国互联网的学术研究也日益增多, 使得这个新兴的学科分支一如它所关注的对象——网络空间——一样繁忙和活跃。<sup>④</sup>

在本书写作和研究过程中, 我在华盛顿的一个著名智库度过了2001-2002学年。在那里, 身边不仅有众多可以交流的学者, 我还有机会与政治家和新闻记者互动, 每当听我介绍研究课题, 在认可我的研究“非常有趣”之后, 他们会接着问我一个相同的问题: “互联网会改变中国吗?” 这是一个令我很难三言两语明确回答的问题, 因为这种提问带有明显的政治意味。提问者明显基于这个潜在假设提出问题, 即: 互联网将对中国社会的民主进程产生影响。由此可见, 互联网是否将改变中国, 既是一个政治问题也是一个学术问题, 并且, 正如我们将会看到的, 这两个方面在互联网的研究领域里越来越密不可分。

④ 例如, 一个有志于研究中国互联网的学者使用的列表服务册(一种自动管理讨论邮件列表的程序)于2000年11月设立(Chinainternetsociology@yhsongju.com)。它在2004年5月差不多有200名订阅者。与Bandy Klavner的私人通信, 2004年5月24日。

没有人会否认互联网已经并将继续对中国社会产生深远的影响, 这些影响同时体现在技术、经济、政治和社会文化层面。西方跨国公司正帮助中国修建庞大的网络基础设施并把设备生产, 甚至研发中心搬过来, 同时互联网在人们彼此沟通的方式、休闲方式、购买和消费方式、股票交易方式, 甚至犯罪方式以及电影和音乐欣赏方式上都创造出了新的行为模式, 问题是人们对其政治潜能的关注远远超过了对其经济、技术和社会文化层面的关注。

对中国互联网的这种态度反映了一种心态, 我称之为“巨兽情结”(monster complex), 很多中国问题的观察者都持有这个情结: 对公众来说互联网是一良善的巨兽, 能冲破束缚带来自由信息浪潮。同时, 互联网也会被政府看成一邪恶的巨兽, 如不加以全面控制和管理, 会带来麻烦。但是, 由于互联网既没有中心架构也不存在上下层级, 因此, 管理起来难度极大) 所以无论如何, 互联网都将改变中国社会。我称这种预期为政治算命 (political fortune telling)。当代中国政治研究者对其已司空见惯。实际上, 良性的巨兽并不如预想的那样无所不能, 特别是, 完全不同于清朝对电报一开始的抵制, 当今中国对互联网采取了积极主动政策。在过去的数年间, 中国成功地见证了互联网非同凡响的成长, 与此同时并没有对它失控。相应地, 一些观察家自此把他们的注意力转移到中国对互联网加强管理上。中国一再被描绘成一头意图摧毁互联网的巨兽, 这从诸如来自路透社的“中国对互联网公司施加的规制面面俱到”等新闻标题上。

**Selected by Ima-Abasi Okon**

**Material from  
Renée Green, *Other Planes of There* (Durham, NC: Duke University  
Press, 2014), 167.**



A Place of One's Own in a World of Inheritances: Dream? Folly?

We are all born into preexisting networks of meanings and actions. How is it that some are viewed as reshaping what exists and others are viewed as caught within the web of the past? To what degree do these differences in perception have to do with what is granted acceptance by those able to position themselves as spokespeople for what passes as significant? What meanings can be discerned if these questions were deeply probed?



**Selected by Laura Owens**

**Material from  
Jason E. Smith, *Smart Machines and Service Work: Automation in an Age of Stagnation* (London: Reaktion, 2020), 129–49.**

*seven*

## An Absolute Law

There is a passage that crops up in the midst of Marx's *Capital* that captures one of the key paradoxes of what he calls the specifically capitalist application of machinery. At first glance, the scenario Marx draws out seems far removed from our own time in its details. But closer inspection reveals a surprising continuity with the condition of many wage-laborers today, both in the rich nations of Europe and North America, and *a fortiori* for workers elsewhere across the globe. The paradox is this: in many situations when available labor-saving machinery can or should be used, it isn't. In a non-capitalist society, one can imagine labor-saving machinery would be used first and foremost to perform the most onerous and least desirable tasks considered socially necessary. These are jobs that in many cases put a special physical, mental, or emotional strain on workers; often, they are jobs that compromise the health of those compelled to perform them, leading over time to physical and emotional harm, eventually an inability to work at all. In advanced capitalist economies, these workers, now deprived of the ability to work, often find themselves reclassified as "disabled." Others will die before their time. But in the case of many such workers, in particular women, being unemployed and disabled does not mean a release from the burden of work. At home, there are often men, perhaps also disabled or out of work, to be looked after, along

with children (including adult children) who require attention. Sometimes parents or older relatives are present, requiring care. The invisible labor in the home must be done even if, in the eyes of the state, these workers are deemed unable to work. It is performed without compensation and almost always alone and in private, without the cooperation of others, and with minimal technological mediation (at best, a washing machine for the clothes, television for the children).

These sorts of activities, however necessary they may be for the reproduction of capitalist class relations, are always the last to be rationalized, that is, made more efficient, and less onerous, by means of labor-saving innovations. I have already discussed in detail the reasons for this. In some cases, the labor process itself is hard to reproduce mechanically. If you think robots have a hard time driving cars, imagine the calamities simple tasks like folding clothes or giving baths to the elderly would entail. But just as often, the pressure to automate activities is obviated by the sheer availability of human labor-power, which cheapens the cost of labor and therefore discourages business owners from investing capital in expensive machinery that often becomes obsolete well before it fully depreciates. An abundance of labor means a dearth of machines.

When Marx sketches out the many “contradictions and antagonisms inseparable from the capitalist application of machinery,” he is particularly sensitive to the claims made by business owners and their advocates, economists, regarding the blessings machines hold in store *for workers*, who in the first decades of the workers’ movement saw them as a threat to their livelihood. Citing John Stuart Mill, he begins his chapter on machinery by calling into question whether “all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day’s toil of any human being.”<sup>1</sup> Marx offers a litany of paradoxes generated by the contradictions that arise from innovation, which renders human labor more productive in material terms (things or services

produced per unit of labor) and less productive in money terms (since less value-producing labor-power is consumed in the labor process). One of the most poignant images he elaborates comes early on in the chapter, when he observes that in England, the home of the industrial revolution, wage-laborers are forced to perform particularly dreadful labors that are elsewhere carried out either by machines, or by beasts of burden. “In England,” he writes, women

are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling barges, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus population is beneath all calculation. Hence we nowhere find a more shameless squandering of human labour-power for despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery.<sup>2</sup>

Not only is machinery abundant and cheaply available in England, where much of it is invented and produced, it is also shipped across the seas to North America and Europe, where it performs tasks that the “women of the surplus population” perform in England. It is more rational for a business owner to pay unemployed women to haul barges than to hire horses or employ machines, since capitalists who compete with one another in a given sector must choose the cheapest combination of inputs (labor, raw materials, machinery, rents, and so on) possible relative to a given quantity of work performed. To do otherwise is to risk losing business to competitors and, eventually, face bankruptcy. The paradox outlined in this passage, however, is not simply that a surplus of available labor drives down wages, which in turn deters business owners from replacing certain types of laboring activities with machines. The excess of labor that prevents the mechanization or automation of one particular sector is itself the result of an “excess” of automation in another sector.



In highly industrialized economies, Marx observes, the use of efficient, labor-saving devices in one industry, for example in the textile factories, will often temporarily create such a redundancy of labor in that industry that a large number of workers will be displaced into other sectors of the economy, desperate for work. Because they need money to survive, they will perform whatever odd jobs present themselves, and do so for wages that are a fraction of what they were formerly paid in their previous job. Under these circumstances, wages will be pushed downward by the supply of labor, so much so that the wages received will fall below the established value of labor-power. When the price of labor-power dips below its value, the cost of labor is so low that it actively “*prevents* the use of machinery in [these] other branches and, from the standpoint of the capitalist, makes the use of machinery superfluous, and *often impossible*, because his profit comes from a reduction in the labor paid for, not in the labor employed.”<sup>3</sup> If what determines whether a capitalist employs machinery is whether the cost of the labor objectified in the machine is lower than the cost of the labor it displaces, then a precipitous drop in wages can effectively prevent a business owner from employing machinery, even should he or she want to do so. Yet this paradoxical condition, in which machines are left to idle, or shipped overseas where wages are higher, *is itself an effect of the capitalist application of machines*: a sudden surge in technological innovation in one sector will produce, ineluctably and in an uneven pattern, technological stagnation in another.

Marx’s chapter on “machinery and large-scale industry” is by far the longest chapter of *Capital*, and it is also the chapter richest in empirical data about contemporary British industry, much of it gathered from the reports of factory inspectors commissioned by parliament to examine the living and employment conditions of the English working class. The period in which Marx was writing was one marked by the rapid mechanization of certain industries. The textile industry was especially affected by this historical

process, bringing together a stream of innovations in technology and refinements of the labor process, reflecting advances in the natural sciences and engineering, and an enormous boom in raw materials, especially cotton, shipped from the slave plantations of the U.S. South to the docks of Liverpool, on their way to Manchester and the industrial heartlands. Marx notes throughout this chapter not only the increasing number of workers absorbed into the fast-growing textile industries but the equally prodigious growth of ancillary industries, which reflected the dynamism of England's manufacturing core. The explosion in labor productivity in the textile factories abetted a boom not only in raw materials produced overseas by slave labor, but in local industries as well: in machine production, in the extraction of coal, and in the expansion of the material infrastructure required to distribute these cheap commodities pumped out by the northern English factories. Marx underlines, for example, that whole new industries arose on the heels of the expanding textile industry, and with them new forms of work and new figures of the worker ("along with the machine, a new type of worker springs to life: the machine-maker"). The production of machinery would be supplemented by "entirely new branches of production, creating new fields of labor," in particular the construction of vast facilities capable of shuttling commodities across continents and seas ("canals, docks, tunnels, bridges, and so on"), not to mention new forms of media and communications, such as the telegraph, allowing industrialists and merchants to communicate in real time with suppliers and eventually consumers half a world away.

But in witnessing this prodigious expansion of capitalist economy, which by the time *Capital* was written was global in scale, Marx was particularly sensitive to what he saw as the limits to the expansion of English and, eventually, global industry, despite the fact that the number of workers absorbed into the industrial core (manufacturing, mining, construction) would continue to expand while producing ever more output for almost

a full century more. What was especially prescient about Marx's analysis of the arc of capitalist development is the way he measured the historically unprecedented economic growth he observed against what he called *an absolute law*. This law is expressed with the utmost simplicity, even though its ramifications would preoccupy Marx for the rest of his analysis of capitalism. Simply put, it states that "if the total quantity of the article produced by machinery is equal to the quantity of the article previously produced by a handicraft or a manufacture, then total labor expended is diminished."<sup>4</sup> Put this way, the law is almost tautological: provided the same amount of physical output is produced, machinery reduces the quantity of labor needed to produce that output. But Marx's argument is primarily about the effect automating one industry has on job growth in others. Generally speaking, he writes, though the mechanization of one industry "throws men out of work in those industries in which it is introduced," it often in turn "bring[s] about an increase in other employment in other industries." I have already detailed in what sense this is true: the automation of one industry means higher demand for labor in other industries like the production of machines, the cultivation, extraction, or processing of raw materials, and the building of infrastructure like ports and highways. The extent to which these ancillary sectors will expand depends on their degree of capital intensity. The surge in demand for coal (today, we might substitute lithium for electric batteries) to power factories increased the demand for coal miners; yet as coal mines became increasingly mechanized, the demand for miners diminished. But the absolute law of capitalist development posits a clear limit to the growth in demand for labor: it will grow only to the extent that total output of industry ("the total quantity of the article produced" in all industries) does, and necessarily at a slower rate. This applies to individual sectors as much as to the economy as a whole. The growing superfluity of labor in the economy is not simply a pattern that follows the rise and fall of

the business cycle; it is a secular and irrevocable trend that Marx elsewhere called the growing immiseration of the proletariat.

Where will these increasingly superfluous workers go, if they are not absorbed into ancillary industries like mining, construction or shipping, transport, and communications? Marx has already given us one image of the fate of such workers: the women of the surplus population, performing the work of horses. But he also points in another direction: an ever-growing “servant class.” In the period in which Marx was writing, he noted with irony and rage that the number of English workers employed as servants (“men-servants, women-servants, lackeys, etc.”) in the houses of the middle and upper classes exceeded the number of workers employed in the textile industries and mining (both coal and metal extraction), combined. Here, then, is perhaps the greatest contradiction or paradox of the automated factory, as Marx envisioned it:

the extraordinary increase in the productivity of large-scale industry, accompanied as it is by a more intensive and a more extensive exploitation of labor-power in all other spheres of production, permits a larger and larger part of the working class to be employed unproductively. Hence it is possible to reproduce the ancient domestic slaves, on a constantly expanding scale, under the name of a servant class.<sup>5</sup>

What Marx proposed in his formulation of an absolute law of capitalist development appears to fly in the face of many of the projections developed by socialists and labor-movement militants over the past two centuries. In those accounts, Marx’s contention that more and more of the working-age population of industrializing countries would become dependent on wage-labor for its own reproduction is confused with the idea that wage-earning activities will take the form of high-productivity, semi-skilled work in technologically progressive sectors

(“modern industry”) like manufacturing and mining. Such prognostications seemed, for a full century, to be on the mark, as capital-intensive goods-producing sectors of the economy drew in larger and larger numbers of workers; the manufacturing share of employment expanded in the U.S. and the UK for decades after Marx proposed his absolute law, well into the middle of the twentieth century. It peaked around 1955, that is, at precisely the moment when “automation” began to be implemented on a vast scale in the most productive industries of the global capitalist economy, such as automobiles, steel, mining, and petrochemicals.

A threshold was reached. The very “productiveness of modern industry” meant that fewer and fewer workers, relative to the total working population, were needed to carry out these activities. The productivity gains that meant larger output could be generated with fewer and fewer workers directly involved in its production required more and more workers to be employed in manufacturing-adjacent industries, many of them categorized by Marx as “circulation labor,” like transportation and warehousing, retail and sales, accounting and law, communications and infrastructure, and, in the twentieth century, advertising and marketing. But these fast-expanding parallel sectors could not grow rapidly enough to absorb all of the labor shed by productivity gains in the most dynamic sectors. Because these activities will not increase at a rate rapid enough to soak up labor market excess—and many of these activities will be subject to technological “progress” in their turn—a sizable fraction of the wage-earning class will find themselves performing domestic duties for the urban upper and middle classes. Here is a core contradiction of the capitalist use of machinery: the very productivity of capitalist industry consigns a larger and larger portion of humanity to low-productivity, and often unproductive in Marx’s sense of the term, laboring activities.

Many observers, primarily on the left, would argue that the picture I have drawn in these pages—a scenario that in my view

confirms Marx’s “absolute law” of capital development—is misleading at best, dispiriting at worst. In a 2016 essay sizing up the prospects for the U.S. working class, for example, Kim Moody sketched a portrait of the U.S. economy that appears to invert, point-by-point, the features I have tried to outline. Though he conceded the self-evident fact of a considerable reallocation of labor away from core industries, he suggested that this migration of workers has had little effect on the key indicators I have examined. The most salient feature of the U.S. economy since 1980, he argued, is the “large productivity gains” achieved by U.S. business, by means of “growing investment and work intensification.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, contrary to data I have marshalled in previous chapters regarding the rate of business investment, Moody claims, against the evidence,<sup>7</sup> that non-residential fixed investment as a share of GDP has soared since 1980, stabilizing at a rate higher than in the postwar boom, and has continued to do so *in the midst of a sustained near-depression*. This surge in investment in fixed capital, combined with a wave of mergers and acquisitions beginning in the 1980s, has resulted not only in impressive gains in labor productivity but in workplace conditions resembling those that prevailed in earlier phases of capitalist development: “more and more workers are employed in workplaces that are both more capital intensive and employ more workers on average.”

Moody is particularly interested in the growth of the so-called logistics sector, and the way that the reallocation of labor in the U.S. economy toward circulation activities requires the concentration of workers in a few dense “nodes” or clusters, within which working conditions resemble those of the old manufacturing centers of the 1930s–60s: large numbers of workers handling, valorizing, and potentially arresting, through workplace actions, enormous quantities of capital. But it is not only these transportation nodes—which in fact employ a tiny portion of the workforce, and which are expanding at a much slower rate than low-wage

service work—that in Moody’s estimation are re-creating conditions reminiscent of the heyday of the U.S. labor movement. Similar trajectories, he holds, can be observed in other sectors, including those traditionally considered “service” occupations. Moody singles out the healthcare sector in particular in his depiction of the trend toward concentrations of capital in larger firms and workplaces combined with rising capital intensity, but nowhere does he make mention of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ contention that job growth in this sector will most likely consist in adding more and more units of low-wage, low-skill labor. Whether he is considering transportation nodes, hospitals and healthcare centers, “Big Box retailers . . . hotels and call centers,” Moody sees not dispersed, labor-intensive, low-productivity occupations, but instead “the ‘factories’ of today,” from which a new epoch of “working class organization and action,” on a par with the industrial unionism of the 1930s, might once again arise.

Throughout this book, I have marshalled evidence contrary to such a vision. The advanced industrial economies of the world face significant, often mutually reinforcing, headwinds: low productivity growth, declining rates of business investment, stagnant wages, a larger and larger “overhang” of workers who produce no value, faltering profit rates, and so on. All of these conditions represent barriers to what Moody calls “working class organization and action,” at least in the form these assumed in the middle of the twentieth century. What must be undertaken today is a sober assessment of these conditions and their effect on the capacity of workers to organize themselves across a complex, fragmented economy, marked by increasing divergence among them, in terms of wage levels, notions of skill, labor processes, and so on.

A widely cited paper from the late 1990s on the causes of deindustrialization, written under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund, sizes up in its conclusion the potential effects of the growing concentration of employment

in the slow-growth, technologically stagnant service sector of the economy. The co-authors, Robert Rowthorn and Ramana Ramaswamy, emphasize how the fragmentation of this sector, riven by cleavages in skills and wage levels, combined with the material disparity of the concrete labor processes lumped together under this label, will undoubtedly pose insurmountable obstacles to rebuilding powerful trade unions like the UAW of the late 1930s sit-down strikes. “Trade unions,” they warn, “have traditionally derived their strength from industry, where the modes of production and the standardized nature of the work have made it easier to organize workers.”<sup>8</sup> The historical workers’ movement and the industrial unions of the mid-twentieth century endeavored, through the institution of collective-bargaining agreements, to reduce wage differentials across industries. This objective was formulated not simply on the basis of infra-class solidarity among workers, but on the tendency, driven by competitive pressures among firms, for technological innovations to spread across lines of production and eventually sectors. As firms across the economy adopt similar techniques, the different working conditions of various class segments are smoothed out and over. The rising ratio of machinery and raw materials to labor employed assures a tendential material density of the class. Comparable skill levels, wages, and working conditions prevail in massive plants bringing together thousands of workers at each individual site. The workers’ movement itself was at once the product and the reflection of this convergent material unity of the capitalist mode of production: if worker struggles of the nineteenth century (such as the conflicts over the length of the working day) in part spurred the development of the forces of production, the generalization of this development across lines of production in the early twentieth century shaped the class into a compact and often militant mass. This is what James Boggs, a militant auto worker writing in the early 1960s, had in mind when, echoing Marx, he spoke of the “embryo of a socialist



society” gestating within this one, “united, disciplined and organized by capitalist production itself.”<sup>9</sup>

In her magisterial history of the workers’ movement, *Forces of Labor*, Beverly Silver underlines the way the objective splintering of the service sector outlined by Rowthorn and Ramaswamy is reflected in the isolation of these workers from one another, and their distance from the strategic leverage points enjoyed by workers in fields as different as manufacturing and education. Those who work in the automotive industry are imbricated in a tightly articulated detail division of labor, so that a work stoppage at one point in the production sequence can bring the entire process to a halt. Teachers, on the other hand, operate with relative autonomy in their classrooms, less affected by a ramified technical division of labor. At the same time, a large-scale strike by educators might reveal their crucial place in the social division of labor, causing widespread disruption at least at the local level, as parents scramble to find someone to care for their children. Workers in the oil sector, however tiny it may be, are able to disrupt the entire functioning of the capitalist economy on at least the national level, as recent struggles in France (in 2010 and 2016) have shown. Workers who find themselves stranded in low-wage service occupations in retail or hospitality (together, one-fifth of the workforce) have no such leverage: their workplaces are often dispersed and small in comparison with the great industrial concentrations of the past, and they have little fixed capital to idle. Silver can point to important if modest recent victories by workers in these fields, but avers that such successes have come despite the distance of these workplaces—in the case of retail, restaurants, and similar types of work—from the levers of production and social reproduction. They have instead had to “follow a community-based organizing model rather than a model that relies on the positional power of workers at the point of production.”<sup>10</sup> It is, however, these pre-existing community ties—neighborhoods, languages, religion—that the

ever-expanding ambit of the personal services sector threatens. If these were the foundations of the old workers' movement, whose forms of mutuality and self-aid often relied on affinities derived from ethnic, cultural, and geographical proximity, they are today everywhere in tatters, as the social fabric is chewed through by the corrosive effects of money and markets, and communities dissipate into warring, atomized dysfunction.

By far the most militant section of the u.s. labor force in the recent past has been not workers in large industrial firms with high capital-to-labor ratios but public-sector workers in the “education industry.” The past few years have witnessed large-scale, even state-wide, strikes by teachers, especially in politically conservative American states, with deep support from the public, who are often parents directly affected by such work stoppages. (The 2019 strike by Los Angeles Unified School District employees shares many of the features of the strikes in rural, Republican states.) These strikes in most cases won modest gains for teachers, both in terms of direct and indirect wages—West Virginia teachers first organized, defensively, against dramatic increases in insurance premiums—and with regard to deteriorating working conditions, including rising class sizes, the lack of nurses in schools, and encroachment on public education from privately run “charter schools.” In most cases, the demands that triggered the strikes were formulated not by the leadership of the public sector unions, in the framework of traditional collective bargaining agreements, but by rank-and-file pressure, through the use of social media and novel tactics developed *in situ*. Above all, these strikes seemed to have a political content: they represented a spirited defense of the public sector as a cost necessary for the reproduction of society. Though teachers are subject to few of the constraints and pressures of private-sector employees in industries where technological change—and the broader search for efficiencies—drives individual employers in fierce competition with other firms for market share, they play a considerable part

in the production of a competent workforce able to supply the job market with fresh, semi-skilled and cheap labor-power. In addition to this longer-term objective, forming workers able to read, write, and learn new skills, teachers and educational personnel perform a perhaps even more important role in the day-to-day functioning of society: they watch over, care for, and manage tens of millions of children so that their parents, in particular women, can earn money through wage-labor elsewhere in the social division of labor.

We can underline here the stark contrast between the material situation of workers in the education industry, in particular teachers, and the private-sector workers in heavily capitalized industries whom Moody anticipates will be most agitated in the years to come. Workers in education are subject to few of the factors he cites as conditions for an epoch of renewed labor militancy. The “changes in the labor process” he claims are “embracing” more and more of the working class—technological change, concentration of industries, rising capital-to-labor ratios, just-in-time supply chains—do not affect this particular industry even indirectly, for the most part. The actual labor process required in the delivery of education services has changed very little over decades, or even longer, whatever enthusiasm administrators might have for introducing new technologies in the classroom. Indeed, despite the ever-expanding administrative stratum of the industry, and the corresponding oversight functions it carries out, classroom activities are marked by a high degree of autonomy relative to other kinds of work. Though some activities associated with teaching have been reassigned to teacher’s assistants, one of the fastest growing jobs in the post-crisis economy, the technical division of labor at the classroom level is almost non-existent, especially relative to the massive industrial concerns of the 1930s Moody sees as models for the “factories of today.” Educators remain relatively immune to the pressures of so-called automation. “Productivity”

gains can be wrung from teachers for the most part only by expanding classroom size, decreasing teacher-to-student ratios, and having some of their traditional functions carried out by less skilled assistants. It is against these cost-cutting measures, long the only recourse of administrators, that teachers have mobilized. And just as teachers are invulnerable to most forms of technological substitution, they are also not subject to offshoring or replacement by cheaper labor elsewhere. In contrast with those sectors of the private economy focused on producing tradable goods and services, the education industry cannot exploit wage differentials across geographical distances; by the same token, the services it provides cannot be concentrated in just a few regional “clusters,” as with the logistics industry. In *Forces of Labor*, written well before the current upsurge, Beverly Silver suggests that “the imperviousness of the education industry to spatial and technological fixes (in particular, geographical relocation and automation) may be at the root of a great deal of teacher bargaining power.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand why the movement of teachers has been as powerful as it has been, we should employ a crucial distinction between two forms of the division of labor. Specialization is a feature of modern, industrial societies: individual units of production tend to focus on making a single product or related group of products (Nike, for example, does not make frozen yogurt), while workers are generally given skill-specific tasks within these units. The segmentation of production tasks within a given unit of production is generally referred to as the detail, or technical, division of labor; the specialization of production, with individual firms focused on a narrow range of products, across the economy as a whole is called the social division of labor.

In conceptual terms, we can say that the detail division of labor within a given unit of production (a single company, for example) requires both the segmentation of the labor process into discrete tasks, and the coordination of these separated

activities by managers who plan and oversee this unified process. In the case of the social division of labor, the distribution and coordination of specialized activities is organized not through deliberate planning but by means of the market. Within a given company, individual segments of the labor process are not coordinated through exchange; one workshop in a car factory does not purchase inputs from another workshop within the same factory. In advanced economies, however, particularly in a context of globalized trade relations and wage differentials across geographical distances, even the production of relatively simple products can incorporate components from a wide variety of producers often separated by both large distances and national borders. A production process that might, decades ago, have been largely done in-house, today is turned outward, mobilizing intricate supply chains punctuated by acts of buying and selling, with the final product assembled from any number of produced inputs. In such a scenario, the distinction between the detail and social divisions of labor becomes tenuous, entwining internal planning and exchange between distinct producers. By the same token, in an economy in which the principles of planning predominate, an altogether different relation between these two forms prevails: rather than market relations intervening within the production of a single commodity, the planning process extends beyond the unit of production to society as a whole.

Moody's mapping of the "new terrain" of class struggle in an era of globalized production emphasizes the way transnational supply chains create an extended technical division of labor, in which workers involved in the transportation, handling, and storing of products performed by the so-called "logistics" industry can be said to "perform final steps in actual production," and to be "engaged in goods production despite being classified as something else by the Bureau of Labor Statistics." The same cannot be said, however, for the material situation in which workers in the education industry find themselves. As I have

spelled out already, the efficiencies typical of the technical division of labor are almost entirely absent in the classroom, or in the school system as a whole. A labor stoppage in one workshop at a large factory can bring the entire production process to a halt; a labor stoppage in one classroom in one school will have little effect on the activities of other classrooms, nor will a labor stoppage at one school affect the rest of the school district. But should the teachers and educational laborers of an entire school district go on strike, or otherwise interrupt their labor, the effect will be massive and radiate through the entire economy, as workers in other sectors scramble to find daycare for their children. The power of these workers is attributable not to their place in a technical division of labor but to their place within the social division of labor, since the withdrawal of their labor compels the interruption of work across a given locale. This material leverage, combined with the fact that educational services are only with difficulty replaced by “automation” or threats of relocation, gives these workers a power almost unequaled elsewhere in the economy.

What about the rest of the service sector, given that the workers in the largely public education sector, though in a highly strategic position within the social division of labor, still make up a small fraction of the total workforce? What of those workers who find themselves condemned to the circumstances of isolation and atomization characteristic of the servant economy? The conditions these workers share with teachers is that their jobs remain largely invulnerable to both automation and offshoring. In the first case this is because the tasks performed do not admit replacement by even the most advanced technological innovations; in the second, because these are in-person services performed on site, and so cannot be performed remotely. In contrast with Moody’s image of workers concentrated in larger and larger workplaces, in conditions approximating the factories of the great industrial epoch, the growing personal services

sector is by its very nature fragmented into small workplaces, and their in-person nature requires these workplaces to be spatially dispersed, rather than being concentrated in a few huge hubs, clusters, or facilities. Here the contrast with teachers is especially important, since those who deliver education services, though their particular place of work might employ a small number of people, invariably work for a single employer encompassing a unified district or territory. These conditions, though hardly factory-like, nevertheless offer workers in this industry opportunities for action not found elsewhere in the workforce. Indeed, in this specific sense, the workplace conditions encountered by teachers do resemble those of the large factories of the 1930s, in which tens of thousands of workers could conduct large-scale and sometimes economically crippling actions against their employers. But the parallel stops there. Workers in technologically progressive industries have power through their place in a technical division of labor; teachers, owing to their position within the social division of labor. In the case of workers consigned to jobs in retail, restaurants, and nursing homes, none of these conditions favoring a “coming upsurge” prevail.

France in early 2020 was the site of an enormous and powerful mobilization of workers revolting against changes, proposed by the Macron administration, to the system of retirement benefits. This mobilization not only brought about large and frequent union-led demonstrations, but involved a particularly effective transport strike, in which unionized workers employed by national and regional rail services immobilized entire cities and regions for weeks on end, preventing many workers from using public services to get to and from work. Like the case of the teachers discussed above, here is an instance of a workplace action that, because of the sensitive and strategic place occupied by these public services personnel in the social division of labor, has the potential to quickly set off a widespread, if not total, immobilization of economic activity.

Yet these demonstrations must be seen in relation to another, apparently unrelated, form of class struggle that recently emerged in France. This time, the protagonists were primarily workers living outside of dense urban areas, in regions where there is a relative absence of public services, or where those services have recently been cut back dramatically. The revolt of the *gilets jaunes*, so named because of the yellow safety vests those who took part in these struggles wore as a sign of solidarity, was triggered by a proposed tax on diesel fuel that would inordinately affect those workers, many of whom participate in the low-wage “servant” sector, who must drive to and from work owing to the dearth or withdrawal of state-provided transportation networks. What is specific and new about these struggles is that those who undertook them, unlike the striking rail workers, are not unionized and are unable to undertake workplace actions that would contribute to a broader slowing or shutting down of economic activity. Even if they could, the types of work they do are for the most part not located at key points in the social division of labor, as is the case for transport workers or teachers. It is true that many of those who took part were truck drivers, whose labor is embedded in the extended detail division of labor articulated by the just-in-time production model and its logistics infrastructure. But most of the workers involved find they are “excluded” from the economy in more than one sense: they are paid low wages, forced out of cities, denied public services, are not unionized, and do not perform activities that are located at strategic points in the economy. It is for this reason that their struggle was restricted primarily to Saturdays, when workers have the day off, and that it had little direct effect on workplaces. As a movement, however, it was especially significant insofar as it mobilized workers who are not represented by the traditional institutions of the labor movement. Most had never been to a demonstration before deciding to participate in the movement. The contrast between the struggle undertaken by French public



service workers and those who are most affected by the absence of transportation services in the French hinterlands is a telling one, reflecting in the arena of class struggle a deep polarization internal to contemporary capitalist labor markets.

In the early 1960s, Boggs foresaw a day when a large number of those expelled from the factories of northern industry would have “nowhere to go”: these were the “surplus people,” “the expendables of automation.” Today the children and grandchildren of these surplus people remain trapped in collapsing cities, far-flung suburbs, and rural ruins. They scrape by on part-time precarious work and tenuous lines of extortionate credit, commuting to and from work an hour each way, surveilled by heavily armed cops as they make their way home from bus stops. Some run rackets and hustles, while others sink into depression or drugs. Prison is always near.

Boggs foresaw a world of outsiders on the margins of the wage relation, whose every move was hounded by money. To those who imagined rebuilding the AFL-CIO of two decades prior, he could only say, dream on. The union was lost, he wrote with *sangfroid*, the moment the bosses brought in the computer-controlled machines. The cause of unionism was lost before that: never setting out to attack the bases of capitalist society, it became part of it. “Historically, workers move ahead,” Boggs wrote, in imaginary retort to those who want to reactivate older figures of organization. “*That is, they bypass existing organizations and form new ones uncorrupted by past habits and customs.*” Boggs was careful not to venture details about what shapes these organs might take; he did not promise they would reconcile the class fractions churned out by changes in the composition of capital. American workers (a term ample enough to envelop his “surplus people”) would, should they take command again over their own lives, have to launch a “revolt powerful enough to smash the union, the company, and the state.” But Boggs’s accent was less on negation than discovery. Surrounded by “labor leaders

and well-meaning liberals” proposing gimmick upon gimmick in hopes of saving the reigning social order, Boggs wagered on these “outsiders,” who will have to compose, and soon, a “new way to live.” What he said then is just as true now: “*The means to live without having to work are all around them, before their very eyes. The only question, the trick, is how to take them.*”<sup>12</sup>

**Selected by Trevor Paglen**

**Material from  
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# How Britain Exported Next-Generation Surveillance

Thousands of cameras, millions of photographs, terabytes of data. You're tracked, wherever you go.



James Bridle Follow

Dec 18, 2013 · 29 min read ★

**IT WAS A COOL, QUIET MONDAY EVENING** in northeast England when the computer first told them about Peter Chapman. The clock read a little after five, and two officers from Cleveland police were cruising in their patrol car. A screen lit up next to them: the on-board computer was flashing an alert from the local police network. The message told them the target was a blue Ford Mondeo and gave them its registration number.

It was only a few minutes before they came across the car and pulled it over with a sounding of their siren. Inside was Chapman, a 33-year-old convict wanted for questioning in connection with a string of offences, including arson and theft. The officers verified his identity and took him to a station just a few miles away.

At 5:07 p.m. on October 26, 2009, just 20 minutes before he was arrested, Chapman had driven past an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera stationed next to the road. As his car passed, the camera recorded its registration number, together with the time and location, and sent the information to Cleveland Police's internal computer network, where it was checked against a hotlist downloaded from Britain's central police database.

There was a hit: a request to detain anyone driving Chapman's car had been entered into the system three days earlier. Once the computers had processed their search — a matter of fractions of a second — the command to apprehend the driver was broadcast to local officers, who stopped and arrested Chapman as soon as they were able.

This feat was made possible by the continuous operation of a vast automated surveillance network that sits astride Britain's roads. The technology — known as License Plate Recognition (LPR) in the US, where it is also used — captures and stores data on up to 15 million journeys in the UK each day.

**It is the most extensive system of its kind in the world.**

Yet the true extent of the network, the areas it covers, and the locations of the cameras, is a matter of secrecy. In order to function fully, say the police, such details cannot be revealed. As a result, we do not know precisely how the technology is used, nor how it is

abused.

It is only in cases like Peter Chapman's that this secret system becomes visible.

**WHEN CHAPMAN'S CAR** triggered that alert on the evening of October 26, it took the police just 20 minutes to find and stop him. But, as a later investigation discovered, it was not the first warning that had been issued. In fact, a total of 16 ANPR alerts had been put out over the previous three days — including four on the day he was arrested.



Three police forces spotted Peter Chapman. Between them they cover a combined area of more than 10,000 square km.

The combined area covered by Cleveland, Durham, and North Yorkshire police forces is over 10,000 square kilometers. It is policed by close to 5,000 officers and home to almost two million people — similar in size to Houston, Texas, but spread across an area 10 times greater. The report for Chapman's vehicle said the driver was “to be immediately stopped”, but it was only graded as medium priority. In truth, the alerts were just a tiny handful of those that tumble onto police computers in a never-ending avalanche of data: in Cleveland alone, roadside cameras generate around 2,500 alerts every day. Officers were sent to find his car six times, but for four days attempts had proved futile. After all, knowing where a vehicle had been 10

minutes earlier is not necessarily enough to find it on Britain's crowded road network.



In the space of three days, 16 alerts were generated by Chapman's car. Each one urged police to arrest the driver.

There is a reason so much is known about Chapman's arrest: it was the subject of an extensive investigation by Britain's law enforcement watchdog, the Independent Police Complaints Commission. The reason for their inquiry was that Chapman's capture, rather than being a striking model of efficient police work, was a disaster.

Chapman had been wanted for arson and theft, but he was also a convicted rapist. And after his arrest he made a startling confession: he had murdered Ashleigh Hall, a 17-year-old student from the nearby town of Darlington. Chapman had met her on Facebook, posing as a teenager in order to win her trust. On Sunday evening, two days and eight alerts after the request to apprehend Chapman had been made, Hall told her mother she was spending the night at a friend's house.

On Tuesday, Chapman led police officers to her body, hidden in a field by the roadside just a few miles away from where they had pulled him over.



**ANPR IS A BRITISH INVENTION:** created, developed, and tested in the UK. Its first major outing was in 1984, when police scientists set themselves up in a small, unmarked cabin on a bridge overlooking the busy M1 motorway.

The road is one of the country's most important north-south arteries, running 193 miles between London and Leeds. Inside the cabin, video cameras were trained on every lane of traffic. As cars passed beneath, the cameras captured their registration numbers and sent the data along a cable to a hut hidden a hundred meters away and out of sight of the road, where a computer checked a list of stolen vehicles. This was Britain's first fully functioning ANPR installation.

“At the moment there is no intention of using it for anything other than detecting stolen cars”, a police spokesperson noted at the time.

Scientists had been working on the system for eight years, but the M1 set-up was the



most advanced deployment to date: not only was it capable of tracking moving cars but, using infrared, it could read plates at night.

Concerns about the new technology were raised immediately, including from within the government. A 1984 report for the Greater London Council Police Committee warned that the system made every car a potential suspect and handed policy on mass surveillance to the police. “This possibility in a democracy is unacceptable,” it concluded.

Democratically unacceptable or not, the development of networked ANPR continued.

**DURING THE 1990s**, thousands of cameras, including plate readers, were installed to form a so-called “ring of steel” around the City of London, a massive operation aimed at ending the string of Irish Republican bombings in the financial district. Laws were changed to make the technology more effective: legislation enacted in 2001 required characters used on plates to be displayed in a font that made them easier for ANPR cameras to recognize.

In the same year, the government decided to deploy “spectrum vans” — mobile units with multiple ANPR cameras, connected by radio to local control stations — across every police force in England and Wales. The success of the scheme led to Project Laser, a 2005 plan to deploy more than 2,000 fixed cameras nationwide, and to the creation of the National ANPR Data Centre, which is tasked with handling the information collected.

Since that time, the system has been continually, if largely invisibly, expanded throughout the UK. In 2012 the Metropolitan Police, which patrols Greater London, announced its own ANPR bureau, and rolled out a new fleet of dedicated “ANPR interceptors”: at least 110 police vehicles on London’s roads, each equipped with mobile camera equipment and a live link to the central computer.

Meanwhile, local governments and private businesses have been installing their own ANPR systems for parking security, fuel station payments and to catch speeding drivers. Some of these systems, too, have been absorbed into the police network. By 2005, more than 50 local authorities — almost one sixth of the country — had agreed to use their traffic cameras for monitoring purposes.

Many of these systems were sold to local residents using promises that were quickly broken.

One example is the London Congestion Charge, which was introduced in 2003 as a traffic-reduction scheme. The charge zone, which covers 20 square kilometers of the capital, is monitored by a ring of almost 700 cameras that are trained on every road in and out. As vehicles drive in, their plates are read and checked against the payment records; those that have paid are deleted from the system's database the following day. Data on those with outstanding fees may be retained for no longer than 13 months. These restrictions were designed in part to assure the public that the congestion cameras were not going to become a system for spying on Londoners.

In 2007, however, the government signed a certificate of exemption that granted the Metropolitan Police full, real-time access to the zone's cameras. The certificate gives the Met all the data they can gather, where that data relates to "the safeguarding of national security".

We have made repeated requests for more information on how their system works, but a Met spokesman would only say that the service "manages ANPR data in accordance with the Data Protection Act and all relevant ACPO [Association of Chief Police Officers] policies".

This is despite the fact that the data in question is specifically exempted from these laws. He refused to comment further on the specific details of how these records are kept separate from the police's own network of ANPR camera data, or even whether they are kept separate at all.

**BRITAIN IS ONE OF THE MOST** surveilled countries in the world. Studies put the number of operational CCTV cameras at between two and four million, for a population of 60 million people. The country's national DNA database holds records on six million people. Telecoms companies are mandated to store logs of all mobile-phone calls and text messages for 12 months, and to make the data available to government at all levels.

In many cities, closed-circuit cameras have built-in loudspeakers that allow operators — mainly local government employees — to speak directly to those they see live on-screen and suspect of foul behavior. As a result, British people are accustomed to the sight of

cameras fixed to the outside of buildings, and on poles by the side of the road.

These are mostly of two kinds: standard CCTV cameras, in various sizes, perched like inquisitive birds on lamp posts and shopfronts; and speed cameras: boxy, painted yellow, which flash brightly when triggered by a speeding motorist.

At first glance, ANPR cameras resemble CCTV: indeed, many systems, such as the London Congestion Zone, run on repurposed standard cameras. Newer systems often incorporate two or three distinct lenses — “multiple eyes” — to capture wider areas at greater resolution, for better license plate recognition. But ultimately, the cameras are of many makes and many designs; there’s no way to tell what they’re being used for unless the operators choose to divulge that information. And the British police, the largest users of ANPR in the country, are reluctant to do so.

In 2009, a House of Lords report described the explosion of surveillance technologies as one of the most significant changes to Britain since the Second World War. It noted:

**“Mass surveillance has the potential to erode privacy. As privacy is an essential pre-requisite to the exercise of individual freedom, its erosion weakens the constitutional foundations on which democracy and good governance have traditionally been based in this country.”**

This has been described as an acceptable price to pay for greater security, but studies of surveillance technology fail to support that argument.

One review of 44 separate CCTV studies, published the same year as the House of Lords report, showed that the more than £500 million (\$780 million) spent on CCTV in Britain in the decade up to 2006 had produced only modest benefits. The report’s most damning conclusion found that where CCTV was at its most effective — preventing vehicle crime in car parks — the same results could be achieved simply by improving lighting in the parking area.



Advocates of surveillance technology also highlight the legal safeguards that govern its use, but this argument is open to criticism too. It is true that some data logs are subject to strict restrictions: security video from rail stations, for example, is kept for just 14 days. But police data procedures are very different. The National ANPR Data Centre stores a full two years of vehicle records, which are accessible to anyone with ANPR authorization for 90 days. This is possible because Britain's privacy laws do not consider vehicle records to be personal data, a bizarre stance given that the vast majority of vehicles are registered to individuals.

Even when the privacy safeguards designed to prevent the abuse of surveillance technology kick in, the systems can still survive.

In July 2013, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which is responsible for overseeing Britain's privacy laws, issued an enforcement notice regarding Hertfordshire Police's use of ANPR around the small town of Royston.

Despite having a population of just 15,000 and a relatively low crime rate, the town was encircled in 2011 by ANPR cameras that record every vehicle that enters and leaves, 24 hours a day. Following a complaint by privacy groups, the ICO ruled that the system had not taken privacy into account, making it a violation of the Data Protection Act. The town's police force reacted by saying that while they will work with the commissioner, they would continue using the cameras, and monitoring the citizens of Royston, for the foreseeable future.

**BY 2010, THE NATIONAL ANPR** system was capturing up to 12 million records per day, using over 5,000 cameras. Internal police figures show that increasing to 15 million

reads in 2011, while access to private camera data doubled the size of the network. What is not known is how many of the UK's 34 million registered vehicles are captured, and at what rate. Also unknown is the true reach of the system, which areas it covers and what the distribution of cameras is. This opacity, it turns out, is entirely deliberate: the police have repeatedly and forcefully rejected efforts to understand the true magnitude of the network.

In August 2009, MATTER's SA Mathieson filed a Freedom of Information request on behalf of *The Guardian*, asking for the locations of ANPR cameras used by police in Devon and Cornwall, two large but sparsely populated counties that make up much of England's south-west peninsula. The idea was to explore how the force had configured its cameras to cover such a large area.

But instead of being processed as normal, the request became the subject of a tug of war that lasted three years.

First the application was turned down by Devon and Cornwall Police, and then by the Information Commissioner's Office. That decision was taken to the Information Rights Tribunal, where it was appealed and the earlier decision subsequently overturned. However, the police counter-appealed and had the reversal struck down. In June 2012, a final tribunal conclusively dismissed the application: the attempt to force the disclosure of camera locations had failed.

Despite the extensive, convoluted efforts by the police to keep the data out of the public domain, their push for secrecy was not entirely successful. While they kept camera locations under wraps in order to make their case, the police were forced to disclose hundreds of pages of evidence on the workings of ANPR. These included information on how some criminals were avoiding and sabotaging the very system the police were trying so hard to protect.

In the evidence, the police detailed how professional criminals were aware of the location of many ANPR installations, and had developed ways to avoid detection. These include changing the way they drive "a properly trained driver can adopt a particular driving style that will greatly reduce the chance of the vehicle being detected by ANPR," said one statement, "and modifying plates so that they are harder to read." These sections of the documents were blacked out until their redaction was successfully challenged in court.

Meanwhile, a statement from the Police Service of Northern Ireland — operators of an extensive camera network which is not counted among the estimates for England and Wales — provided even more evidence that camera positions are widely known by those who take a direct interest in finding them.

“There has been a concentrated effort by criminals to damage a number of our sites,” it said. “One such site has been damaged and rendered non-effective three times in the past few months, the cost to repair, apply counter measures and re-install has amounted to over £12,000. Another site has been set on fire and completely destroyed; the cost to repair and apply counter measures has amounted to over £24,000.”

Despite evidence that criminals are already familiar with the system and its weaknesses, the police contend that knowledge of ANPR locations decreases the efficacy of the whole system. But the physical locations, and their obscurity, stand in for a wider obfuscation of the system, as well as the often-mistaken public perceptions of it.

In their deposition to the Freedom of Information case, Devon and Cornwall police referred to a burglary case that was dropped because it would have required them to divulge the location of an ANPR camera. Instead, they said, it was preferable to withdraw the prosecution “so that the integrity of that camera could be maintained for future use.” In this case, and an unknowable number of others, the covert operation that is apparently required for the system to function to its full potential is in direct conflict with that potential.

Thus a system shrouded in secrecy is compelled to prioritize that secrecy over the full exercise of the law, degrading justice in the same manner in which secret courts and secret intelligence have led to the gradual erosion of ancient legal rights, among them habeas corpus.

This culture of secrecy surrounding technology-led policing is corrosive in other ways.

In 2010, Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Police announced Project Champion, an initiative to combat anti-social behavior and street crime. Over 150 ANPR cameras and almost 50 CCTV cameras were installed in and around the neighbourhoods of Washwood Heath and Sparkbrook. Forty were classified as covert, most likely hidden in trees and walls. The result was another version of the ring of steel, preventing local

residents from entering or leaving the area without their cars being tracked.

Washwood Heath and Sparkbrook both have large Muslim populations, and Birmingham councillors were concerned that the program would unfairly target their Muslim constituents and damage community relations. Their misgivings were dismissed by West Midlands Police, who repeatedly said the scheme was in place for public “reassurance” and “crime prevention.”

But in June 2010, an investigation revealed that the £3 million (\$4.6 million) camera network had actually been funded entirely by a national anti-terrorism initiative. The object was not to protect local residents: it was to create a “vehicle movement net” that would allow operators to covertly watch potential terrorism suspects.

It was a public relations disaster, and West Midlands Police and the city council were forced to apologize for masking the true intentions of the system. Residents voiced their anger at public meetings, graffiti on local walls declared “you are now entering a police state” and bags were placed over the cameras to prevent them from being used.

**THE NATIONAL NETWORK DOES NOT** just observe in real time: it can be used to look back through history, too. Take one routine traffic stop in June 2012 as an example.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and a South Yorkshire police officer pulled over an ageing Renault Laguna on the M1. When the man at the wheel gave conflicting answers to the officer’s questions, the registration details were run through the police computer; the car, it emerged, was not insured. According to procedure, the vehicle was impounded, and the occupants, two young men named Omar Khan and Jewel Uddin, were sent to the nearest train station to get home.

The following Monday, the police received a call from the pound: inside the car, workers had discovered an arsenal that included knives, swords and shotguns, as well as a homemade explosive device adapted from a firework that contained 350 nails and almost 100 ball bearings. Officers were shocked by the discovery, and a massive counter-terrorism operation swung into action. The aim was to track down not just Khan, 27, and Uddin, 26, but anyone who might have been associated with whatever plot they were involved in before they could destroy evidence or leave the country.

Earlier on the day they were stopped, it emerged, Khan and Uddin had travelled from

Birmingham to Dewsbury, where they planned to attack a rally by the English Defence League, a controversial far-right group. They had prepared carefully, building their stash of weapons, purchasing the Laguna at short notice and leaving their mobile phones at home to avoid leaving a trail of data. But the trip did not go as planned: the EDL march, lacking speakers, finished early, and the group's supporters had dispersed by the time the men arrived. Instead of launching an attack, they dropped into a local shop for fish and chips, before getting back into their car for the trip home.

When the police used ANPR data to study Khan and Uddin's movements, they uncovered another surprise: the duo hadn't travelled alone. Officers dug into the national database using a technique called "convoy analysis." First, every record of Khan and Uddin's car trip was recalled from the system. Then another set of plate numbers was generated: those of every car that had passed by those same cameras within a few seconds or minutes of the pair. By comparing this set with those at the next camera site, and the next, and the next, the police identified a second car that had travelled in convoy with them from Birmingham to Dewsbury. Within 48 hours, police arrested not only Khan and Uddin, but four further members of the group from the second car. All six men later plead guilty to preparing an act of terrorism, and were sentenced to a total of 111 years in prison.



Mohammed Hasseen, Jewel Uddin, Anzal Hussain, Zohaid Ahmed, Omar Khan and Mohammed Saud were convicted for a total of 111 years

Convoy analysis is not the only advanced technique made possible by the ANPR database. One common criminal tactic for avoiding insurance, speeding tickets, or having a car identified in any way, is to clone the plate of a vehicle that is registered to a different owner. (Most European countries mandate a single national supplier for license plates, but the UK has 40,000 suppliers and virtually no oversight of production quality, or security.)



So, in addition to looking for vehicles already under suspicion, the ANPR system seeks out “impossible journeys” records in the database that should simply not be achievable, such as a car apparently passing two cameras, hundreds of miles apart, in the space of a few minutes. Data like that suggests a cloned plate, and an alert can be issued to find out which vehicle is using the plate illegally.

Other types of algorithmic investigation are being developed all the time. The police now use pattern analysis not just to see where a car has been, but to predict where it might be in the future. Sometimes this is used to re-establish human surveillance of a target who has slipped the net. It is also used to build a list of potential witnesses to an incident by finding those who regularly travel past the spot in question at a specific time. And then, sometimes, it helps law enforcement decide where to wait if they want to stop a car that has produced a hit on the hotlist.

These techniques show the real key to the power of the ANPR network. It is not merely a group of roadside cameras, and it does not just react to what it sees immediately: it is a vast database of historical movements. Every vehicle it captures is saved, analyzed and reviewed. This is what transforms the network from a simple, real-time identification tool into a system of pervasive and algorithmic surveillance.

It's easy to think that automated, networked surveillance methods such as ANPR, CCTV and internet monitoring could not truly be useful because there is simply too much information to be adequately processed and comprehended. As the Chapman case shows, this can be true. Nobody can watch all of the monitors all of the time or follow up every lead as soon as it is generated. In a great number of cases, ANPR will fail to provide a basis for real-time action.

But the technology is advancing fast enough to push many of these concerns to the side. Thanks to the falling cost of data storage, and the increased sophistication of algorithmic analysis, far more complex operations are becoming possible. And this is the real outcome of ANPR and all other contemporary surveillance technologies. They have the potential to create a comprehensive database of peoples' activity, that, over time, can be stored, searched, analyzed, and exploited.

**OVER THE PAST DECADE**, countries all around the world have started to employ the same technologies Britain has been building for 30 years. Australia began fitting mobile

ANPR units to its highway patrol vehicles in 2009. The small Belgian city of Mechelen was selected to trial the system in 2011: by the following year, the city was already monitoring a quarter of a million vehicles every month. The results of the program, including the discovery of 224 stolen vehicles, are now being used to justify the installation of high-definition CCTV and facial recognition systems throughout the city center.

Italy, the Netherlands, Ukraine and Turkey: all are among the ever-expanding list of countries now rolling out plate-reading systems at scale.

In the United States, implementations have multiplied many times over in recent years. Thanks to lobbying and financial support from insurance companies, Oklahoma and Arizona, among other states, have introduced extensive ANPR networks aimed at catching uninsured drivers. Other deployments, meanwhile, have a more familiar feeling.

When the city of San Leandro, California, purchased ANPR cameras for its police force in 2009, local resident Michael Katz-Lacabe, using a Freedom of Information request, discovered that his car had been captured by the system more than 100 times in a matter of months. The report generated by the local police department included a photograph of him and his daughters getting out of their car in their own driveway.



The photograph of Michael Katz-Lacabe and his daughters from the local police report

Up and down California, cities are using the ring of steel model to surveil citizens. Just a few miles to the north of San Leandro, another adopter is the upmarket enclave of Piedmont: a tiny city of some 10,000 well-heeled residents that is completely encircled by the larger, poorer and more crime-ridden city of Oakland. Piedmont residents, concerned about a spate of burglaries and robberies in their area, recently voted to install 36 cameras, enough to cover every road into or out of the city.

On the other side of the country, New York state, flush with homeland security funding in the years after 9/11, has installed more than 100 cameras, with no limits to how long the data they collect may be retained. In December 2013, Boston Police halted its license plate collection after it inadvertently released more than 68,000 detailed vehicle records to the public, including plate numbers and GPS locations. Every single police department in the Boston region uses ANPR.

The unregulated nature of ANPR in the United States means that the information

regularly leaks out, and can be acquired by third parties — or even sold. Among the vendors is a Texas-based company called TLO, which provides so-called data solutions to law enforcement agencies, lawyers, and private investigators. These “solutions” include individuals’ personal information, addresses, employment, relatives and assets. TLO maintains a vehicle sightings database containing, it claims, one billion location records, with an additional 50 million added each month. For \$10, anyone can look up a vehicle’s log to see when and where it has been seen, and even obtain the sort of photographic evidence uncovered by Katz-Lacabe.



In 2013, the American Civil Liberties Union mapped the data retention policies of American police departments.

Not every nation is so enthusiastic about the technology. In Germany, the federal court ruled in 2008 that ANPR systems that keep data without a predetermined reason — such as to track suspected terrorists — violated privacy laws. But this is an isolated position. Complex analysis requires the routine storage of sightings of all vehicles, not just those under immediate suspicion. Indeed, convoy analysis is so powerful that it now comes as a built-in feature of many ANPR systems.

In one of the less-discussed revelations from the recent National Security Agency congressional hearings in Washington DC, the agency revealed that it routinely looks at a network “two or three hops” from any given suspect when analysing the data it picks up. That means it observes not just a person’s direct associates, but associates’ of those

associates, and the associates of the associates of the associates.

When dealing with data, it is easy to make connections, which then justifies making further connections. This, in turn, encourages the retention of data for longer and longer periods. The ease of technological analysis makes retention, not deletion, the default option: a subtle twist on the old argument that if you have done nothing wrong, you have nothing to hide.

Today, the legal basis for such searches often lives in the gray areas of existing law. The UK's privacy legislation, for example, was passed at a time when the focus was on individual access to data, not algorithmic searches. The legal principles around accessing stored data concern who has the right to request particular kinds of information from the database and how far back those searches can go.

What is not considered is how such information may be reviewed automatically, algorithmically, and retrospectively. This failure results in a huge swathe of personal information, supposedly protected information, constantly being accessed by the system itself.

The computerized nature of these searches can make them appear irreproachable: it's not people looking at the data, just machines. But this is a dangerous assumption, and you do not have to look far to see why: the commissioner who oversees Britain's warrant-based surveillance recently revealed that six people were wrongfully detained and falsely accused of crimes last year after police and security services incorrectly analyzed their internet use.

**DESPITE THE ARGUMENTS** made in favor of algorithmic collection and analysis, ANPR's track record is poor. Unlike many other surveillance systems, no major study of its efficiency has yet been conducted, leaving those who support it with a handful of highly-publicised cases where technological intervention was deemed a success.

Yet even in these instances, ANPR's success is often nothing of the sort. Peter Chapman may have plead guilty to murdering Ashleigh Hall and received a 35 year minimum sentence for his crime, but it wasn't murder that the police wanted to stop him for. And it wasn't ANPR that prevented a tragedy in Dewsbury: it was the incompetence of the would-be attackers. They were arrested after their planned strike, not before — and it was because the group missed their target rally, not because law enforcement had

intervened. Likewise, their motives were discovered only because their car was impounded for not being insured. This, it turns out, was because they had entered their details incorrectly when buying insurance online.

In fact, Dewsbury was in many ways a failure of surveillance, not a success: Jewel Uddin had actually been under observation by the West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit, a joint team of detectives and MI5 intelligence staff. Just five days before the failed attack, a surveillance officer watched him and Khan enter a home store in Birmingham, where they bought the knives they stashed in the back of the Laguna. But nobody was watching earlier in the month, on the day when Uddin and another plotter, their 22-year-old friend Mohammed Hasseen, went on a reconnaissance trip to Dewsbury, nor when they returned to carry out their grisly mission. Internal enquiries by West Midlands Police concluded that everything that could have been done was done... and yet uncovering the intent of Uddin and his conspirators relied on a daisy chain of good luck and coincidence.

In 2005, Frank Whiteley, then chief constable of Hertfordshire and the man responsible for nationwide implementation of ANPR, was asked what the technology's long-term effects on policing might be, and whether it might be as important as the forensic use of fingerprints or DNA profiling.

Whiteley replied: "It has the capability to be as revolutionary. I would describe it as a ubiquitous policing tool. You can use it in all sorts of different ways."

In fact, both the Dewsbury case and that of Peter Chapman would appear to show that ANPR is neither as ubiquitous, nor as effective, as it is presented by the police. Instead it works best as an adjunct to other investigatory techniques, many of which do not require widespread surveillance of millions of innocent people.

**JOHN AND LINDA CATT** were driving into central London early one Sunday morning when they were stopped and searched by police officers. At the time of the stop, in July 2005, Linda was 45, and John, her father, was an 80-year-old with a shock of white hair. Officers told them they were being searched under the Terrorism Act. The Catts, who had no criminal convictions, were threatened with arrest if they refused to answer police questions.

Although they didn't know it at the time, minutes before they were stopped their van

had been captured by the ANPR network, which had triggered an alert: “Of interest to Public Order Unit, Sussex police.”

This is why most ANPR stops occur: on the basis of a single, non-specific alert among a flood of thousands issued each day. But the Catts weren’t terrorists or drug dealers or armed robbers. After they filed a complaint about the incident, they discovered what had made them of interest to law enforcement: they had attended a series of legal and peaceful protests against the EDO Corporation, an American arms manufacturer that used to supply weapons systems to the United States and Israel.

Police had spotted their vehicle at protests and decided that it should be tracked, tagging them as “domestic extremists”.



John Catt

Notes disclosed as a result of John Catt’s complaint showed exactly how extreme he had been: at one protest he had been wearing a T-shirt urging the United States to free Omar Khadr, a 15-year-old boy who had been captured and imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay since 2002, making him the first child to be prosecuted by a military tribunal since the Second World War. Catt, the police file said, was “very quiet” and was “holding up a board with orange people on it”.

In the eight years since they were stopped, Linda and John have tried to get their lawful activities removed from the police databases that track them. Along the way, the police watchdog has said that Sussex Police acted unlawfully by marking his vehicle, and some

of the country's most senior judges have ruled that the Metropolitan Police wrongly interfered with his right to a private life. But the police have fought back every step of the way, and the case is ongoing.

The Catts are not alone. Another man, who spoke to journalists but chose to remain anonymous to prevent further harassment, says he was stopped more than 25 times by police under a variety of pretences after he had attended a peaceful local protest against duck and pheasant shooting. He finally made a formal complaint after police armed with machine guns pulled him over during an evening out with his wife.



government and corporate surveillance. ~~Matters, of course, the symmetrical nature of, say, the ANPR network and a private social network like Foursquare — a service that~~  
~~FOLLOWING THE LONDON RIOTS, the Metropolitan Police helped both the BBC~~  
~~distribute a system devised to track individual movements, store data potentially~~  
~~indefinitely and mine it for useful information.~~ The New York Police Department's Facial Recognition Unit, meanwhile, routinely downloads photos from Facebook and  
In contrast to the ANPR database, the social database — one of Facebook connections,



Instagram tags, chains and its database of owned parse hash. And, as he does in much a any hundreds of secret ovens is the. It expects and the that have capability to the public domain, the security services regularly access vast amounts of our data, either by requesting it from information providers, or by tapping directly into the cables that carry it.

A service like Foursquare differs from ANPR in that it has the formal, individual consent of those it tracks, but what is common to both is that the intangibility of contemporary networks conceals the true extent of their operation. This is particularly obvious in the case of ANPR, a system that the police insist must remain partially secret in order to function correctly, even as that secrecy corrodes the laws and social contracts the technology is supposed to uphold. Members of the public, so the argument goes, cannot be allowed to know when and where they are being monitored, while the law cannot be framed in a way that accounts sufficiently for potential future data-mining techniques based on the information gathered.

This invisibility extends through physical, virtual, and legal spaces. British guidelines stipulate that under most circumstances video surveillance must be accompanied by notification: usually visible signage stating the presence of surveillance and the details of who operates it. In practice, such rules are frequently ignored — and even when followed to the letter, they are insufficient. What is required is not only a notice about the ownership of such information, but the ways in which it is used: not just “surveillance is in operation here,” but “data storage and analysis is in operation here, and elsewhere, and will be for some time”.

The failure to adequately explain and signpost these technologies is why the police and intelligence agencies must fight a constant public relations battle over surveillance. It’s also why the public reacts with such shock to revelations about the true nature of the rings of steel around Royston and Birmingham, and of the far more intrusive operations of the NSA and the British equivalent, GCHQ.

## This shock stems from a breakdown of consent.

Consent, the bedrock on which the agreement to be policed is based, is meaningless without comprehension, and comprehension is impossible without visibility. It is only when people are brought face-to-face with the reality of surveillance — as the Catts

were, and as the people of Washwood Heath and Sparkbrook were — that they see how their privacy, and their right to be presumed innocent, have been affected.

Yet the retention of data by the current ANPR system, and by similar technologies, is not inevitable. Many decisions were made during its implementation, and many can be remade without affecting its primary function. In the United States, where there is no national oversight of license plate scanners, a number of states have proposed laws that would severely curtail data storage. The UK could follow. It has now created a new code of conduct and appointed another watchdog, known as the Surveillance Camera Commissioner, although it has yet to be seen what the results will be.

Technology is a tool: it is a process by which political and human desires are instantiated in the world. What is significant about that instantiation is that it must take a visible form. It may be a written, readable code, or a physical infrastructure in the landscape: servers in data centres, cameras on poles by the roadside, rusting signs on forecourt walls declaring the owner's intentions.

When there is pressure to obscure that infrastructure — camouflaging cameras, closing down networks, or blocking freedom of information requests — a corresponding pressure is exerted on the very democracy it purports to uphold.

The arguments about privacy and public consent that ANPR stimulates are crucial and necessary, and of concern to us all. They are not abstract, but instead rooted in the environment around us: on street corners, road bridges and city centers, in the everyday.



*This story was written by **James Bridle**, edited by **Bobbie Johnson** with assistance from **SA Mathieson**, fact-checked by **Lewis Scrafton** and copy-edited by **Georgia Cool**. **Penny Scott-Andrews** narrated the audio version.*

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Surveillance   Cars   Big Stories Matter

**Selected by Sondra Perry**

**Material from**

**Arthur Jafa, “My Black Death,” in *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 244–57.**

ting) had become trapped by the limitations (and distortions) of Western Renaissance perspective (single "fixed" vantage/vanishing point), itself a conflation of the logic of Western egocentricism (the sun revolves around the Earth) into a system of ordering space and time. African artifacts provided an alternative system with which to order space and time.

Cubism's utilization of multiple "fixed" vantages, rather than the single "fixed" vantage of Western Renaissance perspective, betrays a limited comprehension of the logic of multiple "dynamic" vantages apparent in the forms of African artifacts, a logic shared by post-Einsteinian views of space/time. Robert Farris Thompson has described in *African Art in Motion* how many of the artifacts in the possession of European artists like Picasso were never intended to be (i.e., were not designed to be) seen on a pedestal, in a fixed position. These sculptural artifacts moved around the viewer, as much as, if not more than, the viewer moved around the artifact. This is a radical alternative to the Western paradigm in which the subject has agency while the object has none.

Picasso, as quoted by André Malraux, said:

"People are always talking about the influence the Negroes had on me. What about it? We all loved the fetishes. Van Gogh said his generation had Japanese art—we have the Negroes. Their forms have no more influence on me than on Matisse, or on Derain. But for Matisse and Derain, the masks were sculpture—no more than that. When Matisse showed me his first Negro head, he talked about Egyptian art. But when I went to the Musée de l'Homme, the masks were not just sculpture. They were magical objects. . . . I understand what their sculptures did for the Negroes. . . . They were weapons—to keep people from being ruled by spirits, to help them free themselves. Tools. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have come that day, not because of the forms, but because it was my first canvas of exorcism!"

Another crucial aspect of Picasso's confrontation with black aesthetics has only recently come to light. Ostensibly an investigation of Picasso's

## 18. My Black Death

BY ARTHUR JAJA

THERE WERE TWO MAJOR INSTANCES IN which black aesthetics radically redirected Western art practice in the twentieth century. The first is the advent of African "art" in Europe. Europeans were confronted with artifacts that were essentially alien, i.e., they were the products of radically different assumptions about how one apprehends and responds to the world. There was little understanding of the cultural context that generated these artifacts, how their forms were arrived at or how their structures of meaning operated, what they might mean to their makers.

The second instance occurred with the emergence of jazz, yet another alien artifact but one decidedly more familiar (due to its domestic origins). In the first instance—the arrival of African sculptural artifacts in Europe—you get the artifact without its creators in tow. But with the arrival of jazz, the impact isn't solely the result of the music, the artifact in this instance, but it also results from the manifest being of its creators, the way they spoke and behaved, the way they dressed, their idiomatic manner of occupying (and penetrating) space, their individual styles and philosophies, and the consensual articulations of the aesthetic and generative processes of the music. The repercussions of these two instances of cultural insurgency are near unquantifiable in magnitude, but a few things seem clear.

Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (and hence modernism) is the direct result of his confrontation with African artifacts. His invention of Cubism was provoked by his inquiry into the spacial implications of these artifacts. This is a commonly accepted line. To be more precise, Cubism is the direct transposition of these spacial implications onto the practice of Western painting. At the time Western painting (despite Cézanne's violent cage rat-

utilization of photography, one can only smile in wonder at the publication of *Picasso and Photography: The Dark Mirror* (Baldasari, 1998). The book reveals that Picasso possessed some forty photographs taken by Edmond Fortier, a Dakar-based photographer who was the most prolific publisher of postcards from French West Africa beginning in 1900–01. The photographs, supposedly “studies,” are of African women, generally bare-breasted and often with arms raised over the head or folded behind the back. (I suspect the appearance of these clearly suppressed materials is a result of the Picasso Museum’s desperate need to feed its publishing wing.)

This book reveals, in rather explicit comparative detail, how Picasso used these photographs as the basis for the development of *Les Femmes d’Alger*. The standard argument is that *Demoiselles* represented “the invention of colored forms that no longer intended to imitate the external world but only to signify it. The canvas ceased to be a mirror—however defining—of the visible, in order to become a plastic language (*écriture*).” In fact, as these materials make evident, Picasso’s work imitates not only the African artifacts to which he had access, but the very bodies, by way of Fortier’s “objective” representations, from which these embodiments of black being were derived. Picasso’s combined access to African artifacts and Fortier’s photographs made explicit the presence of the highly conceptual formal system employed by these artifacts. The implications of this would seem to demand some major reconsiderations of the conceptual origins and parameters of modernism: how black bodies activate space, or the volumetric intensity of black bodies, of cities; and the attraction of the entropic; modernism as a substrand of black aesthetics; the black body as the premier anti-entropic figure of the twentieth century. The trauma provoked by the introduction of the black body into white space is profound.

Our notion of the “abstract” arises from a simple refusal of, or resistance to, the ontological fact of black being (and its material dimension, the black body), what I’ve described as “the inconceivability of the black body to the white imagination.” Simply put, representations of the black body, as rendered by traditional African artifacts, were rejected (by whites) as instances of verisimilitude and instead received as “highly stylized” or “abstract.” Eu-

ropeans preferred to understand these artifacts as creative distortions rather than accept the existence of human beings that looked so radically different in appearance from them. This radical difference of appearance functions, in the Western mind-set, as the sign of a radically different (alien) ontology, which of course threatened the Eurocentric belief in itself as the defining model of humanity. This, in turn, has provoked the ongoing struggle against the acceptance of the “other,” and its full humanity.

Duchamp was initially as content as Picasso, and others, to explore the space/time implications of African artifacts. But inevitably, Duchamp, smarter than anyone else around, became deeply interested in how African artifacts *behaved* rather than simply how they looked (their gaze). Duchamp peeped that these artifacts were, in fact, not art but instruments whose functionality had been arrested, and that much of their power was derived from their radically alienated, and *de facto* transgressive, relationship to the context in which they found themselves. Consequently, Duchamp’s urinal was engendered by his desire to model a work after the contextual dissonance provoked by the placement of these (black) artifacts in (white) museums. And it’s no accident that Duchamp chose the urinal, a white artifact which contains and channels dark matter, or shit, the stuff of black being. Surrealism can be understood as an investigation of the psychic frisson produced by the juxtaposition of incongruent objects (a cow and an ironing board), the paradigmatic example being “the black body in white space.”

In similar fashion, Jackson Pollock (’s practice) couldn’t have been without jazz. It’s indisputable that Pollock was very good at what he did, but the problem arose, inevitably, because he didn’t know what he was doing. His genius, and I think it was genius, resided in his ability to transpose jazz’s improvisational flow and trajectory, an essentially alien aesthetic methodology, onto the practice of painting. Western painting, which up until the twentieth century had been primarily mimetic, i.e., primarily preoccupied with capturing the appearance of the physical universe, realized with Pollock a radically new, and fully implemented, paradigm. This new paradigm privileged the performance of processional formations, and constituent significations, at the expense of the mimetic impulse.

Pollock's method, often spoken of in terms of gesture and choreography, consists largely of improvised dance as a means of getting paint down onto the canvas. Lee Krasner has related that Pollock would listen to jazz continually, and obsessively, while he painted. This is particularly significant given the absence of a mimetic subject in Pollock's work. (The works to which I am referring, clearly those on which his reputation lies, are those which dispense with even the vestiges of, generally psychoanalytically read, iconographies.) Were Pollock painting a mountain or an apple, the music to which he painted would be of questionable relevance or significance, but because Pollock's paintings are pictures of his process of getting the paint onto the canvas, of the physically located rhythmic perturbations of the paint's application, the music which animated his movements while simultaneously providing the aesthetic model for his action becomes extremely significant.

Why black music? It's clear that one of the defining factors which contributed to the development and power of black American music, and other musics of the *Diafra* (the black Diaspora), was a sort of contextual displacement equivalent to HIV's leap of the species barrier. By this I'm suggesting that with the Middle Passage, African music, like HIV (which hypothetically existed for some time in a species of monkey found in Central Africa), found itself freed from its natal ecology—with its attendant checks and balances, its natural predation—and thus freed, expanded exponentially, in the process mutating from African music(s) into black music(s).

(In the 1930s the USDA, in an effort to combat soil erosion, introduced kudzu, a Japanese vine, to Mississippi. By 1955, having escaped its original planting, kudzu had become "the vine that ate the South." Today, it infests over 250,000 acres of land in Mississippi, costing over \$20 million a year to combat. Similarly, "Plague of Europeans" David Killingray '73)

It's somewhat paradoxical that in a context which radically circumscribed the mobility of the black body, black musical expressivity found itself both formally unbound and pressed into service in a manner which, classically, it would not have had to serve. Black musical expressivity not only survived the Middle Passage but, free of the class structures of its natal

context (which had limited its avenues of articulation and calcified its content) and unconstrained by a need to speak the experiences of a ruling class, evolved new forms with which to embody new experiences. A black music evolved equal to the unprecedented existential drama and complexity of the circumstance in which black people (Africans) found themselves. Is it an accident that Mondrian was the first major European artist to recognize Pollock's work as some new shit?

(Vinyl recordings became black in sublimated response to the separation of the black voice from the black body, a separation which solved the conundrum of how to bring black music into white spaces minus the black bodies, i.e. black beings, which, by their very nature as musically productive entities, were assertive and thus troubling to whites.)

Pollock's crisis was precipitated by his inability to access the significance inherent in the methodology (jazz improvisational flow and trajectory) he had so powerfully appropriated and implemented in his work. Classically, jazz improvisation is first and foremost signified self-determination. This actually precedes its function as musical gesture. For the black artist to stand before an audience, often white, and to publicly demonstrate her decision-making capacity, her agency, rather than the replication of another's agency, i.e., the composers, was a profoundly radical and dissonant gesture (akin in contemporary terms to the catalytic effect of hip-hop sampling and/or Sherrie Levine's practice in their respective discourses). This signification of one's "self-determination" is in turn premised on one's "self-possession." There is no "self-determination" without "self-possession." And, "self-possession" is *the* existential issue for black Americans.

For Pollock—a white man and as such assumed to be self-determined and self-possessed—the demonstration of such reads as little more than ubiquitous white masculinist privilege (jacking off, the primary critique of the following generations of abstract expressivists). Pollock, unable to access his work's signification, its structures of meaning, found himself vulnerable to critiques that the work was essentially without meaning. It's significant that Pollock's last productive period, and certainly his healthiest, ends, so the story goes, with the first viewing of Hans Namuth's famous film of



Pollock painting, projected in the kitchen for Pollock and his friends. Apparently Pollock got up when the film ended, walked over to the liquor cabinet, and proceeded to drink himself into a violent stupor, thus ending over two years of sobriety, a sobriety which he never recovered.

"When I am painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing." Pollock saw himself dancing around, a white being behaving, embarrassingly, like a black being (like a nigger), thus destroying the fragile state of grace, of embodied (white) being, under which he'd created his most powerful works.

(The classic cartoons showing monkeys making abstract paintings spoke to the sublimated realization that Pollock's practice was in large measure black.)

Pollock, feeling like a charlatan, reintroduces figuration in his late works. This pathetic attempt to inject the work with meaning, a meaning which he himself could access, signals a total aesthetic collapse. So tragically, having failed at legitimately investing the work with meaning, Pollock kills himself.

Was Jackson Pollock white trash? Pollock's particular genius was possible precisely because of his alienation. In that his alienation allowed him an atypical relationship to the culture of black America. This is similar to the relationship which Elvis had to black American music, and which Picasso, in a much more covert fashion, had to African art. (Elvis's black saturation and white trash status is mirrored by Picasso's status as a Spaniard, un/moored, in Paris.) In each of these instances, and despite the seemingly inevitable denial that occurred once influence became an issue, the breakthrough nature of the work achieved was made possible by an initially humble, and thus by definition nonsupremacist, relationship to the catalytic artifact at hand. Just as Beethoven was humble in the face of the body of work that had preceded him, these artists were each students of the work under whose influence they had fallen, students in a fashion which white supremacy would typically make unlikely.

(John Cage spent his entire career avoiding the term "improvisation," saturated as it was with black meaning.)

This is a story I've told a number of times. I worked on Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* as second unit director of photography for approximately a year and a half. We'd occasionally receive calls from Stanley while we were shooting. Lisa, the second unit director, would relay his instructions and add, typically, that Stanley said to "keep up the good work." A couple of times Lisa tried to hand me the phone so that Stanley could speak to me. Each time I waved her away, saying I'd speak to him later, ostensibly because I was too involved in shooting.

A little before the film was set for release, I'm hanging out in Germany and I get a call from Lisa. She asks if I'm available to shoot in New York the following week. We agree on a date and I make arrangements to return to New York. A few days later, I'm boarding a plane for New York, I look over and see the cover of *USA Today*: "Filmmaker Stanley Kubrick dead at 70." I'd spoken to Lisa not five hours earlier. I figure it to be a hoax, but I get to New York and it's confirmed: Stanley had passed suddenly and the shoot was canceled.

Over the next several days, I got extremely depressed. I'd never spoken to Kubrick. I wondered why, in over a year of working on the film, I'd never been available to speak to him. I realized that there'd been too much that I'd wanted to say. I'd, unconsciously, been waiting for the film's completion in the hope that I'd be able to have a real conversation with him. I'd wanted to tell him that he'd changed my life, and that I'd surely been, as a black, preadolescent inhabitant of the Mississippi Delta, the farthest thing imagined when he'd envisioned who the audience for *2001: A Space Odyssey* might be.

Two years after its initial release in '68, the film finally reached my hometown, Clarksdale, Mississippi. It played a drive-in theater on the outskirts of town, three nights only, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I barely slept that week. My father had promised to take me but by Sunday something had come up. So, a year later, I'm ten, the film finally plays at a movie

theater proper. Recently opened, the West End Cinema is located in a part of town that's exclusively white. Clarksdale was essentially segregated at this point.

That Saturday my parents dropped me off at the twelve-thirty matinee. There's clearly no big demand, over two years after its release, for *2001: A Space Odyssey* in Clarksdale, Mississippi. The theater's empty except for me and two couples, both white. The lights go down, the movie begins, and it's like being buried alive. I'd never experienced anything like it before. It quite literally blew my mind. And to say that I couldn't make heads or tails of the movie is an understatement. (And even now, I'm still searching for an art experience capable of matching the effect this film had on me, its ability to simultaneously alienate and ravish. And in this fashion, the film had provided me with a model for how powerful art could be.)

There's no dialogue for the first twenty-five minutes of the film. There's little exposition. When people finally speak, they speak in hypnotic, sedated tones. And dramatically speaking, very little seems to happen during the first two thirds of the movie. The disembodied computer, HAL, displays decidedly more emotion than any of the flesh-and-blood characters. The few dispassionate exchanges between characters are punctuated by extended sequences containing little or no additional dialogue.

By the time the film reaches its intermission, I'm alone in the theater, the other moviegoers having abandoned it at some earlier point.

After the intermission, the film becomes, relatively speaking, more narratively compelling, in that things happen, yet the characters display the same narcotized, somnambulistic tone, now completely at odds with the dire circumstances in which they find themselves. (Anyone familiar with psychoanalysis will recognize the mute, vaguely conspiratorial affect of the analyst.) By the time the spaceship reaches its destination, Jupiter, only a single crew member has survived. He proceeds to launch himself down to the planet's surface in pursuit of the origin of the enigmatic black monolith uncovered on the moon's surface earlier. From this point onward, the film ceases to be narrative in any conventional Hollywood sense. Whereas the preceding parts of the film are characterized by various lacks—lack of color,

lack of action, lack of apparent emotional consequence (save HAL's mournful end)—and whereas before we were stuck in a universe of arrested causality, an addict's nod, the film's finale, the descent and its aftermath, seems to dispense with causality altogether, except in the most primal sense, cinema's persistence of vision. The descent is a headlong rush composed of an extended, and unprecedented, barrage of chromatically oversaturated, spacially distorted, and elliptically sequenced imagery, all interspersed with shots of the astronaut's increasingly hysterical and emotionally overwrought grimaces (a bad trip, the result of some nightmarishly potent, and unexpected, combination of LSD and speed). This is all abruptly terminated by a shift to a very European, very white hotel room in which Bowman, still in spacesuit, observes himself aging progressively 'til the point of death (attended only by the black monolith), and his rebirth as the luminously white starchild, at which point the film ends.

There's of course an inescapably troubling, particularly for a young black kid in the early seventies, racial dimension of the film. First, there is the absolute whiteness of the context (both figuratively and literally). All of the characters are Caucasian and they are, in their demeanor, both archetypically and atavistically white. This is a whiteness that's sterile, creepy, and ultimately seductive (I'd guess Kubrick's background, a Bronx Jew, is relevant here). The interiors they occupy seem devoid of any artifacts that might be read as anything other than the products of an extremely Eurocentric worldview. And second, there is the absence of both black people and/or any apparent sign of blackness. This absence is misleading. Ultimately, I came to recognize the film's highly repressed and anxiety-ridden preoccupation with blackness. And given the times, how could it have been otherwise?

*2001's* obsession with/suppression of blackness is atypical of the genre only with respect to the elegance of its construction. And who could possibly fully disentangle the clusterfuck of racism (and sexism) that's typical of classic science fiction and its retarded offspring, science fiction films? *2001* is about fear of genetic annihilation, fear of blackness. (Black rage, Black Power, Black Panthers, black planet, black dick, etc.) White phallic objects



(starships) move through all-encompassing blackness (space) from one white point (stars) to another. This fear of space, this horror vacui, is a fear of contamination, a contamination of white being by black being which, by the very nature of the self-imposed fragile ontological construction of white being, equals the annihilation of white being.

2001 begins in Africa. The black monolith functions as a catalytic artifact in that it provokes man's evolutionary leap forward from its earlier, primitive (apelike) state. (The initial design of the monolith was in the form of a black pyramid, a clear sign of black civilization.) There's the implication that the monolith generates man's increased capacity rather than simply stimulates some latent ability. This evolutionary leap sets in motion developments which culminate with man's discovery of a second black monolith on the moon's surface. 2001's astronauts travel through space in pursuit of (in fact at the directive of) a signal which issues forth from this advanced and clearly more evolved black sentient entity.

(Have you noticed that 2001's monolith, Darth Vader's uniform/flesh, and H. R. Giger's alien are all composed of the same black substance?)

2001's white/star child is engendered by a black sentient body, subliminally, and desperately, positing the possibility of pure white being issuing forth from all-encompassing dark matter. A manifestation of white fear of genetic annihilation by the (black) other. This anxiety is played out over and over in numerous science fiction films. For example, in *Alien* all the characters (excepting the white-blooded science officer), male and female alike, are sexually assaulted by the alien and impregnated with black beings. The alien is in fact a six-foot-eight Sudanese, "Bolaji" (never, to my knowledge, given a last name), wearing H. R. Giger's Esu-Elegba-derived jet-black monster suit with penis-tipped head. Yaphet Kotto (ur-Negro signifier if there ever were one) plays the only black member of the doomed crew. And during the initial confrontation, coming face-to-face with the alien, he recognizes it as the bad nigger it clearly is. His pragmatism suggests that he stands the best chance of surviving this encounter, but predictably, he meets his end attempting to prevent the alien from ravaging the helpless white woman. Coming to her rescue, he tells her to move away, but she's

frozen (by the alien's magnificence), so, his pragmatism (one could say his sanity) having abandoned him, he moves to get between them. The alien swats him away with his big black tail, grabs him (bringing him face-to-face), and pokes a hole in his head with his chops (teeth). Casting him aside, the alien shifts its attention back to his victim of choice. She stands, breathing heavily, transfixed as the alien slides its tail between her legs. We cut away (but continue to hear her suspiciously ecstatic moans).

In *Star Wars*, Darth Vader/Darth Vader (black body/black voice, in fact the voice of Jack Johnson, James Earl Jones, clearly a blood despite subsequent revisions) is transformed by the Force's "Darkside" (black body engenders a white child, a Skywalker no less). And the film's finale, a rush down the Death Star's corridors, to destroy the engendering black womb, Vader's crib, is a diminished and more overtly nihilistic replay of Bowman's Jupiter fall down the corridors of light, a rush to Death. Star. Child.

Why had I been so attracted to 2001? Apollo generation, the first moon landing had just gone down a few years prior, and I was fairly obsessed with spaceships. I'd followed the progress of the film in magazines like *Popular Mechanics*. 2001 was the first novel I'd ever bought, though I confess not to having read it until after seeing the film. That got me in the theater.

The film's slow, glacial pageantry impressed the altarboy in me, exposing me to what I'd identify now as a minimalist sensibility, a sensibility to which, I believe, I was predisposed by the flatness and austerity of the Delta, by the landscape's beauty and trance dimensions. This exposure dovetailed with a number of other things.

There was my then nascent melancholy and the beginning recognition of a certain sort of categorical constraint, dictated by my blackness, and yet completely at odds with (1) the boundless possibility conveyed to those of my generation by television, and (2) the emancipatory fallout of the Black Power movement. My family's move from the moderately progressive Tupelo to the essentially segregated Clarksdale, situated at the Delta's epicenter, had a cathartic impact, as did a continual and enmeshing confrontation with the extreme deprivations of the region and its abject pleasures. An exposure to the transfixing, and for me unprecedented, blackness of its

inhabitants, their arresting beauty and dense corporeal being, the inescapable duality of absence and presence, the inevitable embrace, as a nascent black man, of a certain temperamental cool (a flattened affect), simply put, the dark matter of black being. These all begged certain questions, at the time inarticulate and unformed, to which years later my introduction to Miles Davis provided an answer. Where do I/we enter into these discourses on beauty and being (the answer of course being wherever and however we choose to).

The film ends, I get up in a daze and walk out into the lobby. And even now, thirty years later, I remember exactly, in crystalline detail, what the lobby looked like, the angle the sun shafted through the space, the lint hovering overhead, the drag of the carpet. I looked over and saw the manager, white and older, quietly reading his paper in the otherwise empty lobby. And the thing is, at this point in my life I didn't have unchaperoned interactions with white people, young or old. He was sitting in the ticket booth with the door open so I walked over to him and said, "Excuse me, sir, I've just come out of the movie, could you tell me what it was about?" He looked down at me over his paper, paused a moment, and said, "Son, I've been looking at it all week and haven't got a clue." And that's the last thing I remember. I don't remember how I got home, what other conversations I might have had, nothing. But that brief interaction I've never forgotten. The film had completely leveled our differences, race, class, age. So that for that moment, in the presence of this monumental work, we were equal.

a black hagakure.

a dream of death and the continual dissipation of dense black being (power and consciousness) osiris dismembered (diafra) and a part can't come together (can't remember) though the parts no longer fit, and this not fitting, this growth after dismemberment, keeps us (men and women) harder coming strong (anti entropic beasts) falling together even as we fall apart

would limit the number of blacks that can gather, a boon for Christ, one a bitch two a threat three an insurrection, no getting together coming together no drums rising up so churches, funerals, simple gatherings and places become reunions become remembrance be luciferian (fire, light) be revolution.

to the central conundrum of black being (the double bind of our ontological existence) lie in the fact that common misery both defines and limits who we are. such that our efforts to eliminate those forces which constrain also functions to dissipate much of which gives us our specificity, our uniqueness, our flavor and that by destroying the binds that define we will cease to be, but this is the good death (cachoeira) and to be embraced.

**Selected by Cameron Rowland**

**Material from  
Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North  
Carolina Press, 1944), 85–107.**

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# Capitalism & Slavery

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*Eric Williams*



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*Chapel Hill*

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## THE WEST INDIA INTEREST

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“OUR TOBACCO COLONIES,” wrote Adam Smith, “send us home no such wealthy planters as we see frequently arrive from our sugar islands.”<sup>1</sup> The sugar planter ranked among the biggest capitalists of the mercantilist epoch. A very popular play, “The West Indian,” was produced in London in 1771. It opens with a tremendous reception being prepared for a planter coming to England, as if it were the Lord Mayor who was expected. The servant philosophized: “He’s very rich, and that’s sufficient. They say he has rum and sugar enough belonging to him, to make all the water in the Thames into punch.”<sup>2</sup>

The West Indian planter was a familiar figure in English society in the eighteenth century. The explanation lies in the absentee landlordism which has always been the curse of the Caribbean and is still one of its major problems today.

One absentee planter once argued that “the climate of our sugar colonies is so inconvenient for an English constitution, that no man will chuse to live there, much less will any man chuse to settle there, without the hopes at least of supporting his family in a more handsome manner, or saving more money, than he can do by any business he can expect in England, or in our plantations upon the continent of America.”<sup>3</sup> But the West Indian climate is not disagreeable, and, his fortune once made, the slave owner returned to Britain. Writing in 1689 the agent for Barbados stated that “by a kind of magnetic force England draws to it all that is good in the plantations. It is the center to which all things tend. Nothing but England can we relish or

fancy: our hearts are here, wherever our bodies be. . . . All that we can rap and rend is brought to England.”<sup>4</sup> In 1698 the West Indies were sending back annually to England about three hundred children to be educated, the difference being, according to Davenant, that the fathers went out poor and the children came back rich.<sup>5</sup> “Well,” says Mr. Belcour, the planter, in the comedy “The West Indian,” “for the first time in my life here am I in England, at the fountain-head of pleasure, in the land of beauty, of arts, of elegancies. My happy stars have given me a good estate, and the conspiring winds have blown me hither to spend it.”<sup>6</sup> Returned to England, the planters’ fondest wish was to acquire an estate, blend with the aristocracy, and remove the marks of their origin. Their presence in England, as Brougham pointed out, had a frequently deleterious effect on English character and morals; where they were numerous and had acquired land, they commonly introduced a bad state of manners into the locality.<sup>7</sup> Their colossal wealth permitted lavish expenditures which smacked of vulgarity and excited the envy and disapproval of the less opulent English aristocracy.

The political economist, Merivale, later in the nineteenth century argued that the change from residence to absenteeism was a credit rather than a disgrace to the English character, as evincing a distaste for the deep-rooted hard-heartedness and profligacy of life in the slave colonies. But that peculiar fastidiousness which shrank from contact with slavery whilst it had no objection to enjoying the profits of slavery, Merivale could explain only by “the general apology of the inconsistency of human nature.”<sup>8</sup>

Absenteeism, however, had serious consequences in the islands. Plantations were left to be mismanaged by overseers and attorneys. On occasions governors found it difficult to obtain a quorum for the councils. Many offices were held by a single individual, and the disproportion between white and black population was increased, aggravating the danger of slave rebellions. The Deficiency Laws failed to restrain the practice of absenteeism, so the local assemblies tried to confiscate the large tracts of land lying idle and owned by absentees, and proposed their redivision among small farms. Both measures were opposed

by the British government at the insistence of the absentee planters.<sup>9</sup>

Of the sugar planters resident in England the most prominent were the Beckfords, an old Gloucestershire family dating back to the twelfth century. One died fighting for his king on Bosworth Field in 1483, another found in the English conquest of Jamaica a means of retrieving the family fortunes. In 1670 Alderman Sir Thomas Beckford, one of the first of absentee proprietors, was getting £2,000 per annum from his Jamaican property clear of all charges. Peter Beckford became the most distinguished of the new colonists. He held in the course of time all the most important military and civil positions in the island, became President of the Council and later Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief. At his death in 1710 he "was in possession of the largest property real and personal of any subject in Europe." In 1737 his grandson, William, inherited the family wealth and became the most powerful West Indian planter in England.<sup>10</sup>

Beckford, on his Wiltshire estate, built Fonthill Mansion, long regarded as the most attractive and splendid seat in the West of England.

"It was a handsome, uniform edifice, consisting of a centre of four stories, and two wings of two stories, connected by corridors, built of fine stone, and adorned with a bold portico, resting on a rustic basement, with two sweeping flights of steps: its apartments were numerous, and splendidly furnished. They displayed the riches and luxury of the east; and on particular occasions were superbly brilliant and dazzling. Whilst its walls were adorned with the most costly works of art, its sideboards and cabinets presented a gorgeous combination of gold, silver, precious metals, and precious stones, arranged and worked by the most tasteful artists and artisans. Added to these splendours, these dazzling objects, apparently augmented and multiplied by large costly mirrors, was a vast, choice, and valuable library. . . . Some idea may be formed of the extent, etc., of the house by the measurement of its great entrance hall, in the basement story, which was eighty-five feet ten inches in length, by thirty-eight feet six inches in breadth. Its roof was vaulted, and



supported by large stone piers. One apartment was fitted up in the Turkish style, with large mirrors, ottomans, etc., whilst others were enriched with fine sculptured marble chimney-pieces."<sup>11</sup>

Beckford, Junior, was not to be outdone. Possessed of a vivid fancy and a vast fortune which, according to the family historian, could not be satisfied with anything commonplace, he desired novelty, grandeur, complexity and even sublimity. The result was Fonthill Abbey, the construction of which provided employment for a vast number of mechanics and laborers, even a new village being built to accomodate some of the settlers. The abbey grounds were in one section planted with every species of American flowering shrub and tree, growing in all their native wildness.<sup>12</sup> In 1837 Beckford was awarded £15,160 by way of compensation for 770 slaves he owned in Jamaica.<sup>13</sup>

The Hibberts were West Indian planters as well as merchants, who, as we have seen, supplied cotton and linen checks for Africa and the plantations. Robert Hibbert lived in Bedfordshire off the income from his West Indian property. His plantation was one of the finest in Jamaica; "though he was always an eminently kind master," his biographer assures us, "he had no repugnance to this kind of property on moral grounds." On his death he left in trust a fund yielding about one thousand pounds per annum for three or more divinity scholarships to encourage the spread of Christianity in its simplest and most intelligible form and the unfettered exercise of private judgment in matters of religion.<sup>14</sup> A relative, George, was partner in an opulent trading firm in London, and was for many years agent of Jamaica in England. George Hibbert took the lead in the construction of the West India Docks. He was elected first chairman of the board of directors, and today his portrait, painted by Lawrence, hangs in the board room of the Port of London Authority. A great collector of books, the sale of his library lasted forty-two days.<sup>15</sup> The Hibberts received £31,120 in compensation for their 1,618 slaves.<sup>16</sup> The family mansion in Kingston, one of the oldest houses in Jamaica, still stands today, while the family name is perpetuated in the Hibbert Journal,

the celebrated quarterly journal devoted to religion, theology and philosophy. First published in October, 1902, the Journal had "the sanction and support of the Hibbert Trustees," who, however, disclaimed responsibility for the opinions expressed in its pages.<sup>17</sup>

Also connected with Jamaica were the Longs. Charles Long, at his death, left property in Suffolk, a house in Bloomsbury, London, and total property in Jamaica comprising 14,000 acres. He enjoyed a very great income, by far the largest of any Jamaican proprietor of that period, and was accordingly entitled to live in splendor.<sup>18</sup> His grandson, a Jamaican planter, wrote a well-known history of the island. A relative, Beeston Long, Jr., was chairman of the London Dock Company and a Bank director, and his family mansion in Bishopsgate Street, London, was justly famous.<sup>19</sup> Another member of the family, Lord Farnborough, built Bromley Hill Place in Kent, one of the most famous mansions of England, noted for its wonderful ornamental gardens.<sup>20</sup>

Not content with his partnership in the Liverpool business house of Corrie and Company engaged in the grain trade, John Gladstone was indirectly concerned in the slave traffic as a slave owner in the West Indies. "Like many more merchants of reputed probity and honesty, (he) was able to satisfy his conscience by arguing it to be a necessity." Gladstone, through foreclosures, acquired large plantations in British Guiana and Jamaica, while at the same time he was extensively engaged in the West Indian trade. The sugar and other produce which he sold on the Liverpool Exchange were grown on his own plantations and imported in his own ships. The fortune amassed by this means permitted him to open up trade connections with Russia, India and China and to make large and fortunate investments in land and house property in Liverpool. He contributed largely to the charities of Liverpool, built and endowed churches, and was an eloquent champion in the town of the Greeks in their struggle for independence. When his famous son, William Ewart, was electioneering in Newark in 1832, a public journal, accurately if not in good taste, reminded the electors that the candidate was "the son of Gladstone of Liver-

pool, a person who had amassed a large fortune by West India dealings. In other words, a great part of his gold has sprung from the blood of black slaves.”<sup>21</sup> During the greater part of the agitation for emancipation John Gladstone was chairman of the West India Association, and on one occasion conducted a memorable controversy in one of the Liverpool journals with James Cropper, a Liverpool abolitionist, on the question of West Indian slavery.<sup>22</sup> The compensation paid to Gladstone in 1837, in accordance with the Act of 1833, amounted to £85,600 for 2,183 slaves.<sup>23</sup>

The Codringtons were another well-known family which owed its wealth and status to its slave and sugar plantations. Christopher Codrington was governor of Barbados during the seventeenth century, and his plantations in Barbados and Barbuda were worth £100,000 in modern money. He founded a college there which still bears his name, and on his death left £10,000, most of it for a library, and his valuable collection of books worth £6,000 to All Souls College, Oxford, where they formed the nucleus of the famous Codrington Library. One of his descendants was hero of the naval victory of Navarino in the cause of Greek Independence in the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

The Warner family was dispersed over the Leeward Islands, some in Antigua, some in Dominica, some in St. Vincent, some in Trinidad. Thomas Warner was a pioneer among British colonists in the Caribbean. Joseph, one of the family, rose to be one of the three leading surgeons of his day, surgeon at Guy’s Hospital, and first member of the College of Surgeons founded in 1750. His picture by Samuel Medley is in the possession of the Royal College of Surgeons. In the nineteenth century another Warner was President of the Council of Antigua, while yet another, as Attorney-General of Trinidad, was the great advocate of East Indian immigration. Perhaps the best known of this West Indian family is Pelham Warner, famous English cricketer and acknowledged authority on the great English game.<sup>25</sup>

Other names, less spectacular, recall the glory that was sugar. Bryan Edwards, historian of the British West Indies at the end of the eighteenth century, would, by his own confession, have

lived and died in oblivion on the small paternal estate in the decayed town of Westbury in Wiltshire, but for his two opulent uncles engaged in sugar cultivation in the West Indies.<sup>26</sup> The Pinneys, well-known in Bristol, owned sugar plantations in Nevis.<sup>27</sup> Joseph Marryat's son was Captain Frederick Marryat, the famous novelist of sea life, and the inventor of a code of signals for the merchant marine not abandoned until 1857.<sup>28</sup> Colonel William Macdowall was the most notable figure in Glasgow. "Owner of a noble mansion in the country and a rich estate in the West-Indies, with ships on the seas and cargoes of sugar and rum constantly coming home, he had also the social prestige of his army rank and his long family descent, and must have held the regard of everyone as he stepped, with his tall goldheaded cane, along the causeway."<sup>29</sup>

Bryan Edwards indignantly denied the charge that his fellow planters were remarkable for gigantic opulence or an ostentatious display of it. The available evidence points to the contrary. The wealth of the West Indians became proverbial. Communities of opulent West Indians were to be found in London and Bristol, and the memorial plaques in All Saints' Church, Southampton, speak eloquently of the social position they once enjoyed.<sup>30</sup> The public schools of Eton, Westminster, Harrow, and Winchester, were full of the sons of West Indians.<sup>31</sup> The carriages of the planters were so numerous, that, when they gathered, Londoners complained that the streets were for some distance blocked. The story is told of how, on a visit to Weymouth, George III and Pitt encountered a wealthy Jamaican with an imposing equipage, including out-riders and livery. George III, much displeased, is reported to have said, "Sugar, sugar, eh? all *that* sugar! How are the duties, eh, Pitt, how are the duties?"<sup>32</sup> West Indian planters were familiar visitors at the resorts of Epsom and Cheltenham,<sup>33</sup> their children mingled on terms of equality with the elegant throngs at the Assembly Rooms and the Hot Wells of Bristol.<sup>34</sup> A West Indian heiress was a desirable plum, and Charles James Fox almost decided that the £80,000 fortune of Miss Phipps was the solution to his heavy gambling debts.<sup>35</sup> One might speculate on what effect such a marriage would have had on Fox's career as an abolitionist.

Many a humble individual in England rose to wealth and affluence from some chance legacy of a West Indian plantation. The time came when such a legacy was considered gall and wormwood,<sup>36</sup> but it was not so in the eighteenth century. George Colman's play, "Africans," portrays in Young Mr. Marrowbone, the butcher, a situation that must have been very familiar to the audience. The butcher was left a West Indian plantation, and "now barter for blacks, instead of bargaining for bullocks."<sup>37</sup>

The strength of the planters was increased, too, by the large number of West Indian merchants who drew vast profits from the West Indian trade. According to Professor Namier, "there were comparatively few big merchants in Great Britain in 1761 who, in one connection or another, did not trade with the West Indies, and a considerable number of gentry families had interests in the Sugar Islands, just as vast numbers of Englishmen now hold shares in Asiatic rubber or tea plantations or oil fields."<sup>38</sup> The two groups did not always see eye to eye. At the outset planters and merchants represented distinct organizations, and the bond between them—credit—did not always make for harmony. But this in itself would not have been a basic cause for conflict, as the merchant could always have recourse to foreclosure. More important than the factor of debt was the planters' determination to maintain monopoly prices, and in the struggle for the grant of a direct trade to Europe in 1739 ill-feeling between the two groups increased considerably.<sup>39</sup> But by and large the identity of interests was greater and more important than the clash, and planters and merchants finally coalesced about 1780, when all the strength they could jointly muster was soon to be needed to strengthen the dykes of monopoly against the gathering torrent of free trade.

The combination of these two forces, planters and merchants, coupled with colonial agents in England, constituted the powerful West India interest of the eighteenth century. In the classic age of parliamentary corruption and electoral venality, their money talked. They bought votes and rotten boroughs and so got into Parliament. Their competition forced up the

price of seats. The Earl of Chesterfield was laughed to scorn in 1767 when he offered £2,500 for a seat for which a West Indian would offer double.<sup>40</sup> No private hereditary English fortune could resist this torrent of colonial gold and corruption. The English landed aristocracy were indignant, "vexed, put to great expenses, and even baffled" by the West Indians at elections.<sup>41</sup> There is an unmistakable note of this concern in the warning issued by Cumberland in his drama to the West Indian ostentatiously flaunting his wealth and boasting of his plans to spend it. "To use it, not to waste it, I should hope; to treat it, Mr. Belcour, not as a vassal, over whom you have a wanton and a despotic power; but as a subject, which you are bound to govern with a temperate and restrained authority."<sup>42</sup> In the elections of 1830 a West Indian planter successfully spent £18,000 getting himself elected in Bristol.<sup>43</sup> The election expenses of the unsuccessful West Indian candidate in Liverpool in the same year cost nearly £50,000, of which a rich West Indian merchant, slave trader and slaveowner, John Bolton, supplied one-fifth.<sup>44</sup>

The Beckford dynasty was fittingly represented in Parliament in accordance with its wealth. King William was M.P. for Shaftesbury from 1747-1754, and for the metropolis from 1754-1770. Another brother represented Bristol, a third Salisbury, while a fourth was intended for a Wiltshire borough.<sup>45</sup> Richard Pennant at one time represented Liverpool.<sup>46</sup> One of the Codringtons was a member of Parliament in 1737.<sup>47</sup> George Hibbert represented Seaford from 1806 to 1812.<sup>48</sup> Edward Colston, the Cunard of the seventeenth century, sat for Bristol from 1710 to 1713.<sup>49</sup> The West India interest established a monopoly, in all but name, of one Bristol seat. John Gladstone sat first for Woodstock and then for Lancaster; it was his pleasure to listen in May, 1833, to the maiden speech of his son, M.P. for Newark, in defence of slavery on the family estates in Guiana.<sup>50</sup> The great statesman found all his filial feelings involved in the question of slavery, and his family connections with West Indian sugar plantations brought out all his eloquence.<sup>51</sup> One of the Lascelles sat in Parliament in 1757.<sup>52</sup> To the bitter end Henry Goulburn fought the West Indian battle.

In 1833 he was still asking Parliament to mark the impulse given to trade and agriculture, and to look at the hamlets that had sprung into towns, in consequence of the connection with the colonies.<sup>53</sup> Parliament paid no heed, and Goulburn had to be content with nearly £5,000 compensation for his 242 slaves.<sup>54</sup> Joseph Marryat of Trinidad, Henry Bright of Bristol, Keith Douglas, Charles Ellis, all were West Indians. Ten out of fifteen members of one of the most important committees of the Society of Planters and Merchants held seats in the English Parliament.<sup>55</sup>

To make assurance doubly sure the West Indians, like the slave traders, were entrenched not only in the lower house but also in the House of Lords, to defend their plantations and the social structure on which they rested. Passage from one house to another was easy, peerages were readily conferred in return for political support. There are few, if any, noble houses in England, according to a modern writer, without a West Indian strain.<sup>56</sup> Richard Pennant became Lord Penrhyn. The Lascelles, an old Barbadian family, were ennobled and became Harewoods; one of their descendants is at present married to the sister of the reigning King of England. The Marquis of Chandos, sponsor of the "Chandos Clause" in the Reform Bill of 1832, owned West Indian plantations and was a spokesman of the West India interest, though he lived to see the day when it was almost hopeless to advocate the cause of the West Indies.<sup>57</sup> The Earl of Balcarres possessed sugar plantations in Jamaica. Emancipation found him owner of 640 slaves, for whom he received nearly £12,300 compensation.<sup>58</sup> This explains his hysterical opposition, as governor of the island, to the convention made by General Maitland with the slave leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, for the evacuation of Saint Domingue after Britain's abortive effort to conquer the French colony. "It would be thought somewhat odd," he wrote home, "if the City of London should send over an immense quantity of provisions and clothing for the use of the *sans culotte* army assembled for the purpose of invading England!"<sup>59</sup> Lord Hawkesbury, né Jenkinson, was a West Indian proprietor,<sup>60</sup> and, as President of the Privy Council for Trade, he lent consistent support to the

cause of the slave owners and slave traders. For this devotion tracts in favor of the slave trade were dedicated to him,<sup>61</sup> and Liverpool conferred on him the freedom of the city in gratitude for the essential services rendered to the town by his exertions in Parliament in support of the slave trade.<sup>62</sup> Hawkesbury symbolized the connection by assuming the title Earl of Liverpool when raised to the peerage and accepting the Corporation's offer to quarter its arms with his own.<sup>63</sup>

It was not only the mother of parliaments that the slave-owners dominated. Like their allies, the sugar merchants and slave traders, they were in evidence everywhere, as aldermen, mayors and councillors. William Beckford was alderman of the city of London and twice Lord Mayor. Contemporaries laughed at his faulty Latin and loud voice; they were forced to respect his wealth, position and political influence. As mayor his civic entertainments were magnificent. On one occasion, at a sumptuous banquet, six dukes, two marquises, twenty-three earls, four viscounts, and fourteen barons of the Upper House joined the members of the Commons and went in procession to the city to honor him. He remains famous, this slaveowner, for his defence of Wilkes and liberty of speech, indifferent to royal displeasure.<sup>64</sup> In the London Guildhall there stands a splendid monument erected in his honor, with the famous speech, graven in letters of gold on the pedestal, which made George III blush.<sup>65</sup> His brother Richard was also an alderman of the city of London. William Miles lived to become an alderman of Bristol. George Hibbert became an alderman of London.<sup>66</sup>

The West India interest had powerful friends. Chatham was the consistent defender of West Indian claims, right or wrong, and was a close friend of Beckford. "He should ever consider the sugar colonies as the landed interest of this kingdom, and it was a barbarism to consider them otherwise."<sup>67</sup> John Gladstone and John Bolton were vigorous supporters of Canning, who always harped on the fearfulness and delicacy and "most awful importance" of the West Indian question.<sup>68</sup> Huskisson and Wellington were very cordially disposed to the planters, the latter refusing to "plunder the proprietors in the West Indies in order to acquire for themselves a little popularity in



England,"<sup>69</sup> the former considering emancipation unattainable by legislative interposition or statutory enactment.<sup>70</sup> But the recalcitrance of the planters and their wilful refusal to make concessions to the anti-slavery sentiment of England later alienated these friends. Canning found West Indian slavery an unpalatable topic;<sup>71</sup> slave questions nearly drove Huskisson mad and the planters seemed to him insane;<sup>72</sup> Wellington, before the final word was said on British slavery, subjected a West Indian deputation in London to some rough treatment.<sup>73</sup>

Allied with the other great monopolists of the eighteenth century, the landed aristocracy, and the commercial bourgeoisie of the seaport towns, this powerful West India interest exerted in the unreformed Parliament an influence sufficient to make every statesman pause, and represented a solid phalanx "of whose support in emergency every administration in turn has experienced the value."<sup>74</sup> They put up a determined resistance to abolition, emancipation, and the abrogation of their monopoly. They were always on the warpath to oppose any increase of the duties on sugar, which Beckford once described as "a *coup-de-grace* to our sugar colonies and sugar trade."<sup>75</sup> The West India interest was the *enfant terrible* of English politics until American Independence struck the first great blow at mercantilism and monopoly.

In 1685 the governor of Jamaica protested that any additional duty proposed on sugar would discourage planting, throw new plantations out of cultivation and prevent the enlargement of others. By the proposal "Virginia receives a mortal stab, Barbados and the Islands fall into a hectic fever, and Jamaica into a consumption."<sup>76</sup> In 1744 the planters sent their case to every member of Parliament in an attempt to encourage popular clamor against another proposal to increase the sugar duties. The proposal was carried by a majority of twenty-three. "Nor was the smallness of it matter of surprize to those who considered how many were either by themselves or their friends, deeply concerned in one part or another of the sugar trade, and that the cause itself was always popular in the House of Commons."<sup>77</sup> The West Indians, however, succeeded in transferring

the extra duty proposed on sugar to foreign linens. The whole episode merely illustrated "the difficulties which attended the laying a further duty upon sugar from the number and influence of those concerned directly or indirectly in that extensive branch of trade."<sup>78</sup>

The issue came up again when it was necessary to finance the Seven Years' War. The landed aristocrat of England was usually the supporter of his brother in the colonies, but when it came to choosing between himself and his distant relative he took the view that "his shirt was near him but his skin was nearer." Beckford, in defence of his fellows, was interrupted by horse-laughs every time he uttered the word "sugar."<sup>79</sup> The magic finger was writing. The agent for Massachusetts reported in 1764 that there were fifty or sixty West Indian voters who could turn the balance any side they pleased.<sup>80</sup> It was the hey-day of the power of the West India sugar interest. But in the new century and in the Reformed Parliament there appeared another combination of fifty or sixty voters. It was the Lancashire cotton interest, and its slogan was not monopoly but *laissez faire*.

BRITISH INDUSTRY  
AND THE  
TRIANGULAR TRADE

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BRITAIN WAS ACCUMULATING great wealth from the triangular trade. The increase of consumption goods called forth by that trade inevitably drew in its train the development of the productive power of the country. This industrial expansion required finance. What man in the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century was better able to afford the ready capital than a West Indian sugar planter or a Liverpool slave trader? We have already noticed the readiness with which absentee planters purchased land in England, where they were able to use their wealth to finance the great developments associated with the Agricultural Revolution. We must now trace the investment of profits from the triangular trade in British industry, where they supplied part of the huge outlay for the construction of the vast plants to meet the needs of the new productive process and the new markets.

A. THE INVESTMENT OF PROFITS FROM THE  
TRIANGULAR TRADE

1. *Banking*

Many of the eighteenth century banks established in Liverpool and Manchester, the slaving metropolis and the cotton

capital respectively, were directly associated with the triangular trade. Here large sums were needed for the cotton factories and for the canals which improved the means of communication between the two towns.

Typical of the eighteenth century banker is the transition from tradesman to merchant and then the further progression from merchant to banker. The term "merchant," in the eighteenth century context, not infrequently involved the gradations of slaver captain, privateer captain, privateer owner, before settling down on shore to the respectable business of commerce. The varied activities of a Liverpool businessman include: brewer, liquor merchant, grocer, spirit dealer, bill-broker, banker, etc. Writes the historian: "One wonders what was covered by that 'etc.'"<sup>1</sup> Like the song the sirens sang, that "etc." is not beyond all conjecture. It included, at some time or other, some one or more aspects of the triangular trade.

The Heywood Bank was founded in Liverpool in 1773 and endured as a private bank until 1883, when it was purchased by the Bank of Liverpool. Its founders were successful merchants later elected to the Chamber of Commerce. "They had their experience," the historian writes, "of the African trade," besides privateering. Both appear in the list of merchants trading to Africa in 1752 and their African interests survived up to 1807. The senior partner of one of the branches of the firm was Thomas Parke, of the banking firm of William Gregson, Sons, Parke and Morland, whose grandfather was a successful captain in the West Indian trade. Typical of the commercial interrelationships of the period, the daughter of one of the partners of the Heywoods later married Robertson, son of John Gladstone, and their son, Robertson Gladstone, obtained a partnership in the bank. In 1788 the firm set up a branch in Manchester, at the suggestion of some of the town's leading merchants. The Manchester branch, called the "Manchester Bank," was well known for many years. Eleven of fourteen Heywood descendants up to 1815 became merchants or bankers.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of Thomas Leyland on the banking scene was delayed until the early years of the nineteenth century, but his investments in the African slave trade dated back to the

last quarter of the eighteenth. Leyland, with his partners, was one of the most active slave traders in Liverpool and his profits were immense. In 1802 he became senior partner in the banking firm of Clarkes and Roscoe. Leyland and Roscoe: curious combination! Strange union of the successful slaver and the consistent opponent of slavery! Leyland struck off on his own in 1807, in a more consistent partnership with his slave partner Bullins, and the title of Leyland and Bullins was borne proudly and unsmirched for ninety-four years until the amalgamation of the bank, in 1901, with the North and South Wales Bank Limited.<sup>3</sup>

The Heywoods and Leylands are only the outstanding examples of the general rule in the banking history of eighteenth century Liverpool. William Gregson, banker, was also slave trader, shipowner, privateer, underwriter, and owner of a ropewalk. Francis Ingram was a slave trader, member of the African Company in 1777, while he also had a share in a ropery business, and embarked on a privateering enterprise in partnership with Thomas Leyland and the Earles. The latter themselves had amassed a huge fortune in the slave trade, and remained slave traders right up to 1807. The founder of Hanly's bank was Captain Richard Hanly, slave trader, whose sister was herself married to a slave trader. Hanly was a prominent member of the "Liverpool Fireside," a society composed almost entirely of captains of vessels, slavers, and privateers, with a sprinkling of superior tradesmen. Robert Fairweather, like Hanly, was slave trader, member of the Liverpool Fireside, merchant and banker.

Jonas Bold combined both slave and West Indian trades. One of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa from 1777 up to 1807, Bold was a sugar refiner, and became a partner in Ingram's bank. Thomas Fletcher began his career as apprentice to a merchant banker who carried on an extensive trade with Jamaica. Raised to a partnership, Fletcher later became successively Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Liverpool West India Association, and at his death his assets included interests in mortgages on a coffee and sugar plantation, with the slaves thereon, in Jamaica. Charles Caldwell, of the banking firm of

Charles Caldwell and Co., was a partner in Oldham, Caldwell, and Co., whose transactions were principally in sugar. Isaac Hartman, another banker, owned West Indian plantations; while James Moss, banker and prominent citizen in the eighteenth century, had some very large sugar plantations in British Guiana.<sup>4</sup>

What has been said of Liverpool is equally true of Bristol, London and Glasgow. Presiding over the meeting of the influential committee set up in Bristol in 1789 to oppose abolition was William Miles. Among the members of the committee were Alderman Daubeny, Richard Bright, Richard Vaughan, John Cave and Philip Protheroe. All six were bankers in Bristol. Cave, Bright and Daubeny were partners in the "New Bank" established in 1786. Protheroe was partner in the Bristol City Bank. William Miles bought a leading partnership in the old banking house of Vaughan, Barker and Company; two of his sons were mentioned in 1794, and "Miles's Bank," as it was popularly called, had a lengthy and prosperous career.<sup>5</sup>

For London only one name need be mentioned, when that name is Barclay. Two members of this Quaker family, David and Alexander, were engaged in the slave trade in 1756. David began his career in American and West Indian commerce and became one of the most influential merchants of his day. His father's house in Cheapside was one of the finest in the city of London, and was often visited by royalty. He was not merely a slave trader but actually owned a great plantation in Jamaica where, we are told, he freed his slaves, and lived to find that "the black skin enclosed hearts full of gratitude and minds as capable of improvement as the proudest white." The Barclays married into the banking families of Gurney and Freame, like so many other intermarriages in other branches of industry which kept Quaker wealth in Quaker hands. From the combination sprang Barclay's Bank whose expansion and progress are beyond the scope of this study.<sup>6</sup>

The rise of banking in Glasgow was intimately connected with the triangular trade. The first regular bank began business in 1750. Known as the Ship Bank, one of the original partners was Andrew Buchanan, a tobacco lord of the city.

Another was the same William Macdowall whose meeting with the sugar heiresses of St. Kitts had established both the fortunes of his house and those of the city. A third was Alexander Houston, one of the greatest West Indian merchants of the city, whose firm, Alexander Houston and Company, was one of the leading West Indian houses in the kingdom. This firm itself only grew out of the return of the two Scotch officers and their island brides to the city. For three-quarters of the century the firm carried on an immense trade, owning many ships and vast sugar plantations. Anticipating the abolition of the slave trade, it speculated on a grand scale in the purchase of slaves. The bill, however, failed to pass. The slaves had to be fed and clothed, their price fell heavily, disease carried them off by the hundreds. The firm consequently crashed in 1795, and this was the greatest financial disaster Glasgow had ever seen.

The success of the Ship Bank stimulated the formation of other banks. The Arms Bank was founded in the same year, with one of the leading partners Andrew Cochrane, another tobacco lord. The Thistle Bank followed in 1761, an aristocratic bank, whose business lay largely among the rich West Indian merchants. One of the chief partners was John Glassford, who carried on business on a large scale. At one time he owned twenty-five ships and their cargoes on the sea, and his annual turnover was more than half a million sterling.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. *Heavy Industry*

Heavy industry played an important role in the progress of the Industrial Revolution and the development of the triangular trade. Some of the capital which financed the growth of the metallurgical industries was supplied directly by the triangular trade.

It was the capital accumulated from the West Indian trade that financed James Watt and the steam engine. Boulton and Watt received advances from Lowe, Vere, Williams and Jennings—later the Williams Deacons Bank. Watt had some anxious moments in 1778 during the American Revolution when the West Indian fleet was threatened with capture by

the French. "Even in this emergency," wrote Boulton to him hopefully, "Lowe, Vere and Company may yet be saved, if ye West Indian fleet arrives safe from ye French fleet . . . as many of their securities depend on it."<sup>8</sup>

The bank pulled through and the precious invention was safe. The sugar planters were among the first to realize its importance. Boulton wrote to Watt in 1783: ". . . Mr. Pennant, who is a very amiable man, with ten or twelve thousand pounds a year, has the largest estate in Jamaica; there was also Mr. Gale and Mr. Beeston Long, who have some very large sugar plantations there, who wish to see steam answer in lieu of horses."<sup>9</sup>

One of the leading ironmongers of the eighteenth century, Antony Bacon, was intimately connected with the triangular trade. His partner was Gilbert Francklyn, a West Indian planter, who later wrote many letters to the Lord President of the Committee of Privy Council emphasizing the importance of taking over the French sugar colony of Saint Domingue in the war with revolutionary France.<sup>10</sup> Bacon, like so many others, ventured into the African trade. He began a lucrative commerce in first victualling troops on the coast and then supplying seasoned and able Negroes for government contracts in the West Indies. During the years 1768-1776 he received almost £67,000 under this latter heading. In 1765 he set up his iron works at Merthyr Tydfill which expanded rapidly owing to government contracts during the American war; in 1776 he set up another furnace at Cyfartha. The iron ore for his furnaces was exported from Whitehaven, and as early as 1740 Bacon took a part in improving its harbor.

Bacon made a fortune out of his artillery contracts with the British government. He retired in 1782 having acquired a veritable mineral kingdom. His ironworks at Cyfartha he leased to Crawshay, reserving for himself a clear annuity of £10,000, and out of Cyfartha Crawshay himself made a fortune. He sold Penydaren to Homfray, the man who perfected the puddling process; Dowlais went to Lewis and the Plymouth works to Hill. The ordinance contract had already been transferred to Carron, Roebuck's successor. No wonder that it was



stated that Bacon considered himself as "moving in a superior orbit."<sup>11</sup>

William Beckford became a master ironmonger in 1753.<sup>12</sup> Part of the capital supplied for the Thorncliffe ironworks, begun in 1792, came from a razor-maker, Henry Longden, who received a bequest of some fifteen thousand pounds from a wealthy uncle, a West Indian merchant of Sheffield.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *Insurance*

In the eighteenth century, when the slave trade was the most valuable trade and West Indian property among the most valuable property in the British Empire, the triangular trade occupied an important position in the eyes of the rising insurance companies. In the early years, when Lloyd's was a coffee house and nothing more, many advertisements in the London Gazette about runaway slaves listed Lloyd's as the place where they should be returned.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest extant advertisement referring to Lloyd's, dated 1692, deals with the sale of three ships by auction. The ships were cleared for Barbados and Virginia. The only project listed at Lloyd's in the bubbles of 1720 concerned trade to Barbary and Africa. Relton, the historian of fire insurance, states that insurance against fires in the West Indies had been done at Lloyd's "from a very early date." Lloyd's, like other insurance companies, insured slaves and slave ships, and was vitally interested in legal decisions as to what constituted "natural death" and "perils of the sea." Among their subscriptions to public heroes and merchant captains is one of 1804 to a Liverpool captain who, on passage from Africa to British Guiana, successfully beat off a French corvette and saved his valuable cargo. The third son of their first secretary, John Bennett, was agent for Lloyd's in Antigua in 1833, and the only known portrait of his father was recently discovered in the West Indies. One of the most distinguished chairmen of Lloyd's in its long history was Joseph Marryat, a West Indian planter, who successfully and brilliantly fought to maintain Lloyd's monopoly of marine insurance against a rival company in the House of Commons in 1810, where he was opposed by another West

Indian, father of the famous Cardinal Manning.<sup>15</sup> Marryat was awarded £15,000 compensation in 1837 for 391 slaves in Trinidad and Jamaica.<sup>16</sup>

In 1782 the West Indian sugar interest took the lead in starting another insurance company, the Phoenix, one of the first companies to establish a branch overseas—in the West Indies.<sup>17</sup> The Liverpool Underwriters' Association was formed in 1802. Chairman of the meeting was the prominent West Indian merchant, John Gladstone.<sup>18</sup>

### B. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH INDUSTRY TO 1783

Thus it was that the Abbé Raynal, one of the most progressive spirits of his day, a man of wide learning in close touch with the French bourgeoisie, was able to see that the labors of the people in the West Indies “may be considered as the principal cause of the rapid motion which now agitates the universe.”<sup>19</sup> The triangular trade made an enormous contribution to Britain's industrial development. The profits from this trade fertilized the entire productive system of the country. Three instances must suffice. The slate industry in Wales, which provided material for roofing, was revolutionized by the new methods adopted on his Carnarvonshire estate by Lord Penrhyn,<sup>20</sup> who, as we have seen, owned sugar plantations in Jamaica and was chairman of the West India Committee at the end of the eighteenth century. The leading figure in the first great railway project in England, which linked Liverpool and Manchester, was Joseph Sandars, of whom little is known. But his withdrawal in 1824 from the Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society is of great importance, as at least showing a reluctance to press the sugar planters.<sup>21</sup> Three other men prominently identified with the undertaking had close connections with the triangular trade—General Gascoyne of Liverpool, a stalwart champion of the West India interest, John Gladstone and John Moss.<sup>22</sup> The Bristol West India interest also played a prominent part in the construction of the Great Western Railway.<sup>23</sup>

But it must not be inferred that the triangular trade was

solely and entirely responsible for the economic development. The growth of the internal market in England, the ploughing-in of the profits from industry to generate still further capital and achieve still greater expansion, played a large part. But this industrial development, stimulated by mercantilism, later outgrew mercantilism and destroyed it.

In 1783 the shape of things to come was clearly visible. The steam engine's potentialities were not an academic question. Sixty-six engines were in operation, two-thirds of these in mines and foundries.<sup>24</sup> Improved methods of coal mining, combined with the influence of steam, resulted in a great expansion of the iron industry. Production increased four times between 1740 and 1788, the number of furnaces rose by one-half.<sup>25</sup> The iron bridge and the iron railroad had appeared; the Carron Works had been founded; and Wilkinson was already famous as "the father of the iron trade." Cotton, the queen of the Industrial Revolution, responded readily to the new inventions, unhindered as it was by the traditions and guild restrictions which impeded its older rival, wool. Laissez faire became a practice in the new industry long before it penetrated the text books as orthodox economic theory. The spinning jenny, the water frame, the mule, revolutionized the industry, which, as a result, showed a continuous upward trend. Between 1700 and 1780 imports of raw cotton increased more than three times, exports of cotton goods fifteen times.<sup>26</sup> The population of Manchester increased by nearly one-half between 1757 and 1773,<sup>27</sup> the numbers engaged in the cotton industry quadrupled between 1750 and 1785.<sup>28</sup> Not only heavy industry, cotton, too—the two industries that were to dominate the period 1783-1850—was gathering strength for the assault on the system of monopoly which had for so long been deemed essential to the existence and prosperity of both.

The entire economy of England was stimulated by this beneficent breath of increased production. The output of the Staffordshire potteries increased fivefold in value between 1725 and 1777.<sup>29</sup> The tonnage of shipping leaving English ports more than doubled between 1700 and 1781. English imports increased fourfold between 1715 and 1775, exports trebled be-

tween 1700 and 1771.<sup>30</sup> English industry in 1783 was like Gulliver, tied down by the Lilliputian restrictions of mercantilism.

Two outstanding figures of the eighteenth century saw and, what was more, appreciated the irrepressible conflict: Adam Smith from his professorial chair, Thomas Jefferson on his plantation.

Adam Smith denounced the folly and injustice which had first directed the project of establishing colonies in the New World. He opposed the whole system of monopoly, the keystone of the colonial arch, on the ground that it restricted the productive power of England as well as the colonies. If British industry had advanced, it had done so not because of the monopoly but in spite of it, and the monopoly represented nothing but the sacrifice of the general good to the interests of a few, the sacrifice of the interest of the home consumer to that of the colonial producer. In the colonies themselves the ban on colonial manufactures seemed to him "a manifest violation of the most sacred rights of mankind . . . impertinent badges of slavery imposed upon them, without any sufficient reason, by the groundless jealousy of the merchants and manufacturers of the mother country." British capital had been forced from trade with neighboring countries to trade with more distant countries; money that could have been used to improve the lands, increase the manufactures, and extend the commerce of Great Britain had been expended in fostering a trade with distant areas from which Britain derived nothing but loss (!) and frequent wars. It was a fit system for a nation whose government was influenced by shopkeepers.<sup>31</sup>

The *Wealth of Nations* was the philosophical antecedent of the American Revolution. Both were twin products of the same cause, the brake applied by the mercantile system on the development of the productive power of England and her colonies. Adam Smith's role was to berate intellectually "the mean and malignant expedients"<sup>32</sup> of a system which the armies of George Washington dealt a mortal wound on the battlefields of America.

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1

## The Dynamics of Evil and Administrative Evil

We see through a glass darkly when we seek to understand the cause and nature of evil.... But we see more profoundly when we know it is through a dark glass that we see, than if we pretend to have clear light on this profound problem.

—*Reinhold Niebuhr*, 1986 (246)

We begin with the premise that evil is an essential concept for understanding the human condition. As one examines the sweep of human history, clearly there have been many great and good deeds and achievements, and real progress in the quality of at least many humans' lives. We also see century after century of mind-numbing, human-initiated violence, betrayal, and tragedy. We name as evil the actions of human beings that unjustly or needlessly inflict pain and suffering and death on other human beings. However, evil is one of those phenomena in human life that defies easy definition and understanding (Adams and Merrihew, 1990; Formosa, 2006, 2008; Garrard, 2002; Hammer, 2000; Kahn, 2007; Katz, 1988; Mathewes, 2000; McGinn, 1997; Parkin, 1985; Russell, 1988; Sanford, 1981; Steiner, 2002; Zimbardo, 2007; Zycinski, 2000).

Those readers who can look at human history and see no evil may find little interest in this book. Others who acknowledge negative interaction and tragedy in human affairs, but prefer more modern terminology, say, "dysfunctional behavior," may find our use of a very old word—evil—uncomfortable or even misguided. Still others may readily acknowledge evil in human affairs and find our argument—that evil occurs in a new and dangerous form

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4 WHAT IS ADMINISTRATIVE EVIL?  
 in the modern age—fairly easy to follow, but will also be cautioned by the counsel of Aldous Huxley (1952, 192):

The effects which follow too constant and intense a concentration upon evil are always disastrous. Those who crusade not for God in themselves, but against the devil in others, never succeed in making the world better, but leave it either as it was, or sometimes even perceptibly worse than it was, before the crusade began. By thinking primarily of evil we tend, however excellent our intentions, to create occasions for evil to manifest itself.

**Modernity, Technical Rationality, and Administrative Evil**

The modern age, especially in the last century and a half, has had as its hallmark what we call *technical rationality*. Technical rationality underlies a way of thinking and living (a culture) that emphasizes the scientific-analytic mindset and the belief in technological progress (Adams, 1992). We explain this notion and its historical evolution at greater length in Chapter 2. For our purposes here, the culture of technical rationality enables a new and bewildering form of evil that we call *administrative evil*. As our title implies, administrative evil is different because its appearance is masked. Administrative evil may be masked in many different ways, but the common characteristic is that people can engage in acts of evil unaware that they are in fact doing anything at all wrong. Indeed, ordinary people may simply act appropriately in their organizational role—in essence, just doing what those around them would agree they should be doing—and at the same time, participate in what a critical and reasonable observer, usually well after the fact, would call evil. Even worse, under conditions of what we call *moral inversion*, in which something evil has been redefined convincingly as good, ordinary people can all too easily engage in acts of administrative evil while believing that what they are doing is not only correct, but in fact, good.

The basic difference between evil as it has appeared throughout human history, and administrative evil, a fundamentally modern phenomenon, is that the latter is less easily recognized as evil. People have always been able to delude themselves into thinking that their evil acts are not really so bad, and we have certainly had moral inversions in times past. But there are three very important differences in administrative evil. One is our modern inclination to *un-name* evil, an old concept that does not lend itself well to the scientific-analytic mindset (Bernstein, 2002; Neiman, 2002). The second difference is found in the structure of the modern, complex organization, which diffuses individual responsibility and requires the compartmentalized accomplishment of role expectations in order to perform work on a daily

basis (Staub, 1992, 84). The third difference is the way in which the culture of technical rationality has analytically narrowed the processes by which public policy is formulated and implemented, so that moral inversions are now more likely. Our goal in this book is to illuminate at least some of the dynamics in organizations and in public policy that can lead to administrative evil.

Our understanding of administrative evil has its roots in the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany during World War II. While the evil—the pain and suffering and death—that was inflicted on millions of “others” in the Holocaust (Glass, 1997) was so horrific as to almost defy our comprehension, it was also clearly an instance of administrative evil. Here we refer to administrative evil as unmasked (although much of it was masked at the time), and we suggest that identifying administrative evil is easier today because the Holocaust was perpetrated by the Nazis (and others complicit with them) and because it occurred well over half a century ago.

The Holocaust occurred in modern times in a culture suffused with technical rationality, and most of its activity was accomplished within organizational roles and within legitimated public policy. While the results of the Holocaust were horrific and arguably without precedent in human history, ordinary Germans fulfilling ordinary organizational roles assisted in and supported extraordinary destruction in ways that had been successfully packaged as socially normal and appropriate (Arendt, 1963). Nothing else in human history really compares with this event, and certainly all else in modern times pales before its example. Although the Holocaust provides the lens through which we can unmask contemporary examples of administrative evil, we are concerned to point out most emphatically that we do not equate our American examples of administrative evil with the Holocaust.

**Evil in the Modern Age**

Evil remains only a barely accepted entry in the lexicon of the social sciences. Social scientists much prefer to *describe* behavior while avoiding ethically loaded or judgmental rubrics—to say nothing of what is often considered religious phraseology (Miller, Gordon, and Buddie, 1999). Yet, evil reverberates down through the centuries of human history, showing little sign of weakening in the first decades of the twenty-first century and the apex of modernity (Lang, 1991). As Claudia Card (2002, 28) notes:

The denial of evil has become an important strand of twentieth century secular Western culture. Some critics find evil a chimera, like Santa Claus or the tooth fairy, but a dangerous one that calls forth disturbing emotions, such as hatred, and leads to such disturbing projects as revenge.... Many reject the idea of

evil because, like Nietzsche, they find it a *bad idea*.... Nietzsche's critique has helped engineer a shift from questions of what to do to prevent, reduce or redress evils to skeptical psychological questions about what inclines people to make judgments of evil in the first place, what functions such judgments have served.

In the modern age, we are greatly enamoured with the notion of progress, of the belief that civilization develops in a positive direction, with the present age at the pinnacle of human achievement. These beliefs, along with the denial of evil, constrain us from acknowledging the implications of the fact that the twentieth century was one of the bloodiest, both in absolute and relative terms, in human history, and that we continue to develop the capacity for even greater mass destruction (Rummel, 1994).

Nearly 200 million human beings were slaughtered or otherwise killed as a direct or indirect consequence of the epidemic of wars and state-sponsored violence in the twentieth century (Bauman, 1989; Eliot, 1972; Glover, 1999; Rummel, 1994). Administrative mass murder and genocide have become a demonstrated capacity within the human social repertoire (Rubenstein, 1975, 1983), and simply because such events have occurred, new instances of genocide and dehumanization become more likely (Arendt, 1963). As Benstein (2002, iv) states:

Looking back over the horrendous twentieth century, few of us would hesitate to speak of evil. Many people believe that the evils witnessed in the twentieth century exceed anything that has ever been recorded in past history. Most of us do not hesitate to speak about these extreme events—genocides, massacres, torture, terrorist attacks, the infliction of gratuitous suffering—as evil.

If we are to have any realistic hope for ameliorating this trajectory in the twenty-first century, administrative evil needs to be unmasked and better understood, especially by those likely to participate in any future acts of mass destruction—professionals and citizens who are active in public affairs.

Despite its enormous scale and tragic result, it took more than twenty-five years for the Holocaust to emerge as the major topic of study and public discussion that we know it as today. But knowing more about the Holocaust does not necessarily mean that we really understand it, or that future genocides will be prevented (Power, 2002). As we move into Chapters 3 through 7 progressively to examples that occur within our own culture, closer to our own time, and eventually into the present, the dynamics of administrative evil become more subtle and opaque. Here we refer to administrative evil as masked. This is one of the central points of our argument; that administrative

evil is not easily recognized as such because its appearance is masked; moreover, in our ordinary roles with our taken-for-granted assumptions about the modern world, we wear the mask.

### *Is Administrative Evil Public or Private?*

While our own academic home is in public policy and administration, and the arguments and examples in the book are largely from the public sector, we believe the arguments hold for all professions and disciplines involved in public life most generally. In other words, as a phenomenon of the modern world, administrative evil is confined to neither the public nor the private sector. Rather, it is a social phenomenon, and its occurrence in private or public organizations is likely to vary according to the political and economic arrangements of particular countries. Further, we believe a similar argument about administrative evil could be made from the perspective of the private sector (Hills, 1987; Mintz, 1985). An obvious starting point could be the American tobacco industry (Hurt and Robertson, 1998), or, more recently, the role of Facebook in the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar (Mozur, 2018). We are convinced that administrative evil is a phenomenon of the culture of technical rationality, and as such is socially ubiquitous and certainly not confined to the public sector.

Nevertheless, we argue and present evidence that the tendency toward administrative evil, as manifested primarily in acts of dehumanization and genocide, is deeply woven into the identity of public affairs (and also in other fields and professions in public life). The reality of evil has been suppressed and masked despite, or perhaps because of, its profound and far-reaching implications for the future of both public and private organizations.

Despite what may initially seem to be a negative treatment of the public service, it is not our intention to somehow diminish public service, engage in "bureaucrat-bashing," or give credence to misguided arguments that governments and their agents are necessarily or inherently evil. In fact, our aim is quite the opposite: to get beyond the superficial critiques and lay the groundwork for a more ethical and democratic public life, one that recognizes its potential for evil and thereby creates greater possibilities for avoiding the many pathways toward state-sponsored dehumanization and destruction (see Chapter 8). Nonetheless, this approach (as with any attempt to rethink aspects of the field) is bound to bring us into conflict with conventional wisdom. A passage from Hirsch (1995, 75–76) conveys one aspect of this issue:

Genocide is a controversial topic that may very well pit the researcher against the state. If the nation-state has been the major perpetrator of genocide or



some other form of atrocity, then any researcher investigating this topic must begin to ask critical questions about the nature of the state in general and his or her state in particular. Social scientists are sometimes reluctant to raise critical questions because serious contemplation of them may force the scientists to evaluate or re-evaluate their principles or their connection to their government.

Substituting "torture" for "genocide" in the quotation above demonstrates its contemporary relevance, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Our critical stance toward public affairs aims not so much at any particular formulation of public life, but more at what has not been addressed—the failure to recognize administrative evil as part and parcel of its identity. Administrative evil should be as much a part of public policy and administration as other well-worn concepts such as efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and productivity.

#### *Administrative Evil and Public Affairs*

Likewise, public affairs cannot, in light of this realization, be described only in terms of progress in the "art, science, and profession" of public policy and administration (see, for example, Lynn, 1996) without recognizing that acts of administrative evil consist of something other than uncontrolled, sporadic deviations from the norms of technical-rational public policy and administrative practice, which are often simply assumed to be ethical (Denhardt, 1981). Practitioners and scholars of public affairs, as well as other related fields and professions, should recognize that the pathways to administrative evil, while sometimes built from the outside by seductive leaders, most often emanate from within, ready to coax and nudge any professional down a surprisingly familiar route: first toward moral inversion, then to complicity in crimes against humanity.

Efficient and legitimate institutions can be used for constructive or destructive purposes. The fundamental problem for public affairs, given the ubiquity of administrative evil, is to develop and nurture a critical, reflexive attitude toward public institutions, the exercise of authority, and the culture at large. And as difficult as this may be to imagine, much less to accomplish, even this offers no final guarantee against administrative evil. Responsibility for the prevention of future acts of administrative evil rests, in part, with both theorists and practitioners who understand their role and identity in such a way that they can resist seductive and cunning temptations within moral inversions to apply expedient or ideological solutions to the many difficult issues that confront contemporary public life.

In this view, public administration certainly encompasses, but needs to shift its focus away from the use of sophisticated organizational and management techniques in the implementation of public policy. Public administration must also, and primarily, cultivate a historical consciousness aware of the fearsome potential for evil on the part of the state and its agents, and a societal role and identity infused not just with personal and professional ethics, but also with a social and political consciousness—a public ethics—that can recognize the masks of administrative evil and refuse to act as its accomplice.

Based on the premise that the concept of evil remains relevant and essential for understanding the human condition in the twenty-first century, we make several key arguments in this book:

- 1 The modern age, with its scientific-analytic mindset and technical-rational approach to social and political problems, enables a new and bewildering form of evil—administrative evil. It is bewildering because it wears many masks, making it easy for ordinary people to do evil, even when they do not intend to do so.
- 2 Because administrative evil wears a mask, no one has to accept an overt invitation to commit an evil act; because such overt invitations are very rarely issued. Rather, the invitation may come in the form of an expert or technical role that develops in stages, couched in the appropriate language, or it may even come packaged as a good and worthy project, representing what we call a *moral inversion*, in which something evil or destructive has been redefined as good and worthy.
- 3 We examine closely two of administrative evil's most favoured masks. First, within modern organizations (both public and private), because so much of what occurs is *underneath* our awareness of it, we find people engaged in patterns and activities that can—and sometimes do—culminate in evil, without recognizing them as evil until after the fact (and often, not even then). Second, we look at social and public policies that can culminate in evil; these most often involve either an instrumental or technical goal (which drives out ethics) or a moral inversion unseen by those pursuing such a policy.
- 4 Because public service ethics, and professional ethics more generally, are both anchored in the scientific-analytic mindset, in a technical-rational approach to administrative or social problems, and in the professions themselves, they are most often ineffective when faced with administrative evil. Since administrative evil



wears many masks, it is entirely possible to adhere to the tenets of public service and professional ethics and participate in even a great evil, and remain unaware of it, until it is too late (or perhaps not at all). Thus, finding a moral basis for public service or professional ethics in the face of administrative evil is problematic at best.

### Dirty Hands

Those in public life have always had to deal with questions of conscience that arise when one chooses what one hopes is a "small evil" in order to achieve a greater good on behalf of others. Machiavelli (1961, orig. c. 1520), in *The Prince*, still offers perhaps the clearest expression of the *dirty hands* conundrum in political action and public life (Wijze, 2002). *Raisons d'état*, or reasons of state, are advanced as good and valid reasons for engaging in minor, and sometimes not so minor, acts of evil. The problem of dirty hands has always had within it a subtle temptation, which has at times led to great evil in human history. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existential philosopher, wrote a play, *Les mains sales* (*Dirty Hands*; 1948), precisely on this subject, which one author (Sutherland, 1995, 490) has described as:

a fatalistic mockery of the bold adventurer in politics who feels fit to decide for others as though the future were a game of chess in an empty room; the play insists that one cannot predict what will happen as a result of one's act, from the basis of what one might want to think one had intended to happen.

But the arrogant, utilitarian flaw of dirty hands is different altogether from administrative evil.

The dirty hands choice means that one inflicts knowingly and deliberately (hopefully limited) pain and suffering on others, for a presumed good reason—for the greater good of the polity. Whether and when such a choice is justified has been widely debated, but it does not bear significantly on the topic of this book. Administrative evil is different in part because the culture of technical rationality tends to drive the consideration of ethics out of the picture altogether, not to mention the rational calculation of how much good can legitimately be traded off against evil. Because administrative evil is masked, ethics are not considered in the situation at all, meaning that we do not even see a choice about which we might calculate degrees of good.

### Hubris

Another venerable word, hubris, means an inflated pride or sense of self—a phenomenon often connected with "dirty hands" as just discussed. Hubris, although a frequent companion of evil throughout human history, while not a necessary component of administrative evil, can combine with it to produce particularly deadly results. Hubris can be an individual trait and a social and political characteristic, as in Nazi Germany. Although not discussed in great depth here, the career of Albert Speer, Hitler's Minister of Armaments, shows with remarkable clarity how hubris and administrative evil can combine with terrible results (Sereny, 1995; Speer, 1970). We suspect those more recently involved in policies and practices that enabled the United States to torture detainees in the "Global War on Terror" and recklessly lead the world into economic decline may have embodied hubris as well. Hubris might be compared to an accelerant, which when added to an existing fire (administrative evil) can easily escalate something seemingly small into a conflagration.

### Understanding Evil

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines evil as the antithesis of good in all its principal senses. Claudia Card (2002, 3) defines it as "foreseeable intolerable harm produced by culpable wrongdoing." Elias Staub (1992, 25) offers another characterization:

Evil is not a scientific concept with an agreed meaning, but the idea of evil is part of a broadly shared human cultural heritage. The essence of evil is the destruction of human beings.... By evil I mean actions that have such consequences.

Philip Zimbardo suggests the following definition (2007, 5): "Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize or destroy innocent others—or using one's authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf." Finally, Geddes (2003, 105) emphasizes that

evil is relational.... For evil occurs between people: one or more persons do evil (and are thereby understood to be evil or connected to evil) and someone else, or some other group, suffers evil. As Paul Ricoeur (1995, 250) notes, "To do evil is always, either directly or indirectly, to make someone else suffer. In its dialogic structure evil committed by someone finds its other half in the evil suffered by someone else."

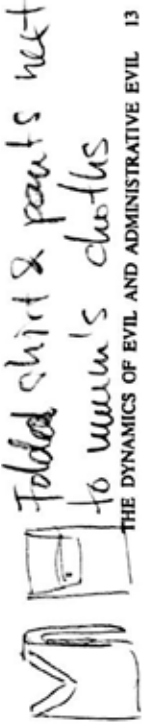
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These definitions, while helpful, can be further refined. We propose a continuum of evil and wrongdoing, with horrible, mass eruptions of evil, such as the Holocaust and other, lesser instances of mass murder, at one extreme, and the "small" white lie, which is somewhat hurtful, at the other extreme, and the "white-lie end of the continuum, wrongdoing turns into evil. At the white-lie end of the continuum, use of the term wrongdoing seems more apt. However, Sissela Bok (1978) has argued persuasively that even so-called white lies can have serious personal and social consequences, especially as they accrue over time. For the most part, we discuss the end of the continuum where the recognition of evil may be easier and more obvious (at least when it is unmasked). Nonetheless, the small-scale end of the continuum remains important, because the road to great evil often begins with seemingly small, first steps of wrongdoing (Zimbardo, 2007). Staub (1992, xi) notes that "Extreme destructiveness ... is usually the last of many steps along a continuum of destruction." Evil, in many cases, hides within cunning and seductive processes that can lead ordinary people in ordinary times down the proverbial slippery slope.

Thousands of years of human religious history have provided ample commentary on evil, and philosophers have certainly discussed it at length (Bernstein, 2002; Card, 1998; Cole, 2006; Dews, 2008; Garrard, 1998; Hallie, 1997; Haybron, 2002; Kateb, 1983; Kakes, 1990, 2005; Morton, 2004; Norden, 2000; Perret, 2002; Petrik, 2000; Rorty, 2001; Schrift, 2005; Stivers, 1982; Twitchell, 1985). While locating evil in the symbolic persona of the devil once provided adequate explanation of its origins, the modern scientific era both demands a more comprehensive explanation of the origins of evil and makes it nearly impossible to provide one. One author has argued that the modern age has been engaged in a process of un-naming evil, such that we now have a "crisis of incompetence" toward evil: "A gulf has opened up in our [modern] culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it" (Delbanco, 1995, 3). And Bernstein (2002, 2) further notes:

Philosophers and political theorists are much more comfortable speaking about injustice, the violation of human rights, what is immoral and unethical, than about evil. When theologians and philosophers of religion speak about "the problem of evil," they typically mean something quite specific—the problem of how to reconcile the appearance of evil with a belief in God.... It is almost as if the language of evil has been dropped from contemporary moral and ethical discourse.

Evil may not have become undiscussable or un-nameable, but in its administrative manifestations it usually goes unrecognized. Identifying evil



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depends on our approach and stance toward it, but in the modern age, we risk not seeing it at all, for administrative evil wears many masks.

The masking of administrative evil suggests that evil also occurs along another continuum: from acts committed in relative ignorance to those committed knowingly and deliberately, or what we would characterize as masked and unmasked evil. Plato maintained that no one would knowingly commit an evil act. The fact that someone did something evil indicates his ignorance. However, individuals and groups can and often do engage in evil acts without recognizing the consequences of their behavior, or when convinced their actions are justified or serving the greater good, as Staub (1992, 25) notes:

We cannot judge evil by conscious intentions, because psychological distortions tend to hide even from the perpetrators themselves their true intentions. They are unaware, for example, of their own unconscious hostility or that they are scapegoating others. Frequently, their intention is to create a "better world," but in the course of doing so they ... destroy the lives of human beings. Perpetrators of evil often intend to make people suffer but see their actions as necessary or serving a higher good. In addition, people tend to hide their negative intentions from others and justify negative actions by higher ideals or the victims' evil nature.

Administrative evil falls within the part of the continuum in which people engage in or contribute to acts of evil without recognizing that they are doing anything wrong.

Lang (1991) argues that, in the case of genocide, it is difficult to maintain that evil occurs without the knowledge of the actor. Genocide is a deliberate act; mass murderers know that they are doing evil. Katz (1993) recounts several instances in which deliberate acts of evil have occurred in bureaucratic settings (such as those based on the testimonies of the commandants of the death camps of Auschwitz and Sobibor). However, the direct act of mass murder or torture, even when facilitated by public institutions, is not what we call administrative evil, or at least represents its most extreme, and unmasked, manifestation. Before and surrounding such overt acts of evil, there are many more and much less obviously evil administrative activities that lead to and support the worst forms of human behavior. Moreover, without these instances of masked evil, the more overt and unmasked acts are less likely to occur (Staub, 1992, 20–21).

If administrative evil means that people inflict pain and suffering and death on others, but do so *not* knowingly or deliberately, can they be held responsible for their actions? We believe the answer is yes, but when ordinary

administrative orders

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people inflict pain and suffering and even death on others in the course of performing their "normal" organizational or policy role, they usually justify their actions by saying that they "didn't know" or were just following orders and doing their job. This reflects the difficulty of identifying administrative evil, and the possibility of missing it altogether. MacIntyre (1999, 329) argues that organizational actors who claim ignorance or helplessness while supporting evil acts cannot so easily deny moral agency, and goes on to say that, "they remained guilty and their guilt was not merely individual guilt, but... the guilt of a whole social and cultural order."

We agree that identifying administrative evil is most difficult within one's own culture, social/organizational milieu, and historical time period. In Chapter 4, we examine how the torture and abuse of detainees received, at a minimum, tacit approval from the U.S. government. The opaque nature of administrative evil should not lead us to conclude that it cannot be recognized or that evil cannot be prevented from developing into its worst manifestations. The Holocaust provides an example of the latter, when evil, both masked and unmasked, ran unchecked. We remember it now as an instance of administrative evil, but only after several decades of denial and suppressed memories. Other examples, which we recount in later chapters, show how what we remember is often not as important as what remains unseen or forgotten beneath the mask of administrative evil.

#### The Roots of Administrative Evil: A Psychological Perspective

We know that human beings are killers. We are (at least most of us) meat-eaters who must kill for the sustenance of life. We are in the food chain and are at minimum killers of plant life. We have also learned, during the course of human history, to kill for high social purposes; that is, for political, religious, and/or economic beliefs and systems. As uncomfortable as it may be to acknowledge, evil lurks as close to all of us as ourselves. Most versions of psychology, from Freud to Jung and beyond, explore the potentially destructive tendencies of human behavior, including aggression, anger, and rage. Richard Bernstein (2002, 231) summarizes Freud's stance quite well:

The most important lesson to be learned from Freud concerns the depth and inescapability of psychological ambivalence—an ambivalence ultimately rooted in the unconscious. Freud's reflections on civilization and its discontents serve as a warning against the idea that as civilization develops, so this powerful psychic ambivalence decreases. On the contrary, civilization leads to greater repression and an increased sense of guilt. And Freud well understood

projective identification

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how, as a consequence of this psychic ambivalence, we are always threatened by the possibility of destructive and self-destructive outbursts of repressed aggressiveness. This is the sense in which we must understand Freud's claim that, "In reality, there is no such thing as 'eradicating' evil."

Melanie Klein (1964), perhaps the preeminent object-relations psychologist, understands aggression, and other emotions as well, as relationships with "objects" (which are in most cases other human beings). As Greenberg and Mitchell (1983, 139–146) point out: "Drives, for Klein, are relationships." One such manifestation is hating those we love the most (as infants and children). Such a psychic contradiction is emotional dynamite and is defused through "splitting." Unlike repression, which drives unwanted or intolerable emotions underground into the unconscious, splitting allows these contradictory feelings to co-exist, albeit separately, in the human consciousness. Normally, the good aspect is held internally, and the bad aspect is split off and projected outward to some external person (the "object"). This is known as "projective identification." Developmentally, these phenomena interact in the following way (Alford, 1990, 11):

Primal splitting-and-idealization thus involves a delicate balancing act. Too little, and the child cannot protect itself from its own aggression, living in constant fear that its bad objects will overcome its good ones, and itself. Too much separation, on the other hand, will prevent the good and bad object from ever being recognized as one, an insight that is the foundation of the depressive position, in which the child despairs of ever being able to restore to wholeness the good object, which he now recognizes is inseparable from the bad object that he has destroyed in fantasy a thousand times. For Klein, the depressive position is not an illness, but a crucial step in emotional development, by which love and hate are integrated.

These insights help us understand the construction of social and organizational evil in adults. The tendency to "split off" unwelcome and negative feelings and emotions, and to project them onto others, manifests in both individual and group behavior. Zimbardo (2007, 230) states:

The fundamental human need to belong comes from the desire to associate with others, to cooperate, to accept group norms. However, ... the need to belong can also be perverted into excessive conformity, compliance, and in-group versus out-group hostility. The need for autonomy and control, the central forces toward self-direction and planning, can be perverted into an excessive exercise of power to dominate others or into learned helplessness.

in group versus out-group hostility

# Moral Disengagement

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And as Staub (1992, 17) notes, "Blaming others, scapegoating, diminishes our own responsibility. By pointing to a cause of the problems, it offers understanding, which, although false, has great psychological usefulness. It promises a solution to problems by action against the scapegoat." Our focus here is on group behavior and Staub clarifies these dynamics at that level (1992, 17): "people ... feel connected as they join to scapegoat others. The groups that are attractive in hard times often provide an ideological blueprint for a better world and an enemy that must be destroyed to fulfil the ideology.... These psychological tendencies have violent potentials."

## Distance, Perspective, and Moral Disengagement

*Distance* is important, both in terms of space and time, in understanding evil. It is clearly more difficult to name evil, and do so accurately, in one's own historical time period. The introduction and proliferation of the language of evil in political discourse, as in President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in 2003, only muddies the waters further. Consider the genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. Even from the distant perspective of a concerned nation—the United States—evidence during the time of those events was spotty. While we would argue that sufficient evidence existed for the United States to take earlier and stronger action, the point is that a social or political consensus to resist evil is not so easily achieved as events unfold and the situation remains murky (Power, 2002). In hindsight, and when no longer called upon to do anything, it is much easier to name such events as evil with widespread agreement (but only if a Serb and Bosnian or Kosovar, or Hutu and Tutsi, are not part of the discourse). Geographic and cultural (or racial) distance matter as well. The horrors of the Rwandan genocide occurred, after all, in Africa (Prunier, 1995). The genocide in Darfur generated impassioned discussion for several years, but effective preventive action emerged slowly and after many deaths. Naming the Holocaust as evil became easier because of the obvious horrors of the camps discovered at the end of the war, but even so, it took the passage of nearly twenty-five years before there was much discussion of this signal event in the United States (Hilberg, 2003).

*Perspective* is equally important in recognizing evil actions. In recognizing when evil has been done, the perspective of the victim has authority. The body or psyche of the victim (and sometimes both) bears the marks of evil. The witness and testimony of the victim(s) carry moral authority as well, and provide the foundation for making judgments of good and evil. Still, there is a distortion from the victim's perspective, from which an act of cruelty or violence (or the perpetrator of that act—or both) is typically described as

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evil—most typically, as wholly evil. Baumeister (1997, 17) refers to this as the *myth of pure evil*.

The myth of pure evil is compounded by at least two related tendencies. First of all, the psychological concept of splitting, as discussed earlier, projects those aspects of the psyche seen as "all bad" outward onto some object (typically a person or persons). Second, American culture has a propensity, considerably exacerbated by popular media and particularly by television, to cast moral questions in stark contrasts, all good or all bad terms. Villains appear as wholly evil, and heroes as all good. In the political arena, national leaders must have a *flawless* and *spotless* past. The myth of pure evil thus represents a dangerous propensity to cast moral questions in absolute terms, which in turn makes them easier to reverse, facilitating moral inversion (see Staub [1992, 83], for a closely similar argument).

The perpetrator's description of the same act differs from that of the victim, often dramatically. Baumeister (1997, 18) refers to this as the *magnitude gap*:

The importance of what takes place is almost always much greater for the victim than for the perpetrator. When trying to understand evil, one is always asking, "How could they do such a horrible thing?" But the horror is usually being measured in the victim's terms. To the perpetrator, it is often a very small thing. As we saw earlier, perpetrators generally have less emotion about their acts than do victims. It is almost impossible to submit to rape, pillage, impoverishment or possible murder without strong emotional reactions, but it is quite possible to perform those crimes without emotion. In fact, it makes it easier in many ways.

The magnitude gap is centrally important for understanding evil. From the victims' perspective and most often in hindsight, evil is more readily identified. But perpetrators rarely recognize their acts as evil. From the perpetrator's perspective, the act of cruelty or violence seems "not so good" (not to say, evil), but considering other factors, say, necessity, prior injustices or some provocation, perpetrators rather easily produce rationales and justifications for even the most heinous acts (von Kellenbach, 2013; Baumeister, 1997, 307): "The combination of desire and minimally plausible evidence is a powerful recipe for distorted conclusions." The importance of perspective in recognizing evil may be captured by the old adage "Whether one sees evil depends upon where one stands." One can stand elsewhere only by a mental act of critical reflexivity, in which one reflects critically on one's own position, which actively engages both context and empathy—seeing from the perspective of others.



# Moral inversion

## 18 WHAT IS ADMINISTRATIVE EVIL?

*Moral disengagement* is central to the magnitude gap. Although it is not easy to accept, moral standards and self-control are selective; they can be "switched" on and off, as the extensive research of Albert Bandura and others (Bandura, Underwood, and Fromsen, 1975) has demonstrated. There are at least four ways to switch off our moral compass. First, harmful behavior may be repackaged as positive (as in what we call moral inversions). Second, we can create distance between our actions and the destructive activity; this is easy within administrative evil because, after all, one is just doing one's job. Third, we can minimize or use euphemisms to diminish the destructive activity, thus convincing ourselves that nothing really bad happened. And finally, we can use dehumanization (further discussed later) to portray the victims as deserving of their treatment.

Distance, perspective, and moral disengagement are powerful constituents of the mask of administrative evil. Naming any evil that those in public service have committed, even many years ago, remains difficult because we have no distance from our own culture and profession. Recognizing administrative evil in our own time is most problematic of all because we have neither distance nor perspective—and perhaps not even moral engagement—without an explicit and somewhat difficult effort to create them (critical reflexivity). In subsequent chapters, we name evil done by those in public service, but realize that there will be no easy agreement on the part of at least some readers with our diagnosis. Unmasking administrative evil in our time and in our culture is fraught with difficulty because, essentially, we wear the mask.

### Language and Dehumanization

Given that much of what we do on a daily basis is taken for granted or tacit (Polanyi, 1966), two additional elements make us especially susceptible to participation-in-evil, without "knowing" what we are doing. The first of these is language. The use of euphemism or of technical language often helps provide emotional distance from our actions (Orwell, 1984, original). "Collateral damage" from bombing raids is a euphemism for killing civilian non-combatants and reducing non-military property to rubble. In the Holocaust, code words were used for killing: "evacuation," "special treatment," and the now well-known "final solution." In cases of moral inversion, euphemism or technical language can enable us to disconnect our actions from our normal, moral categories of right and wrong, good and evil (Arendt, 1963). Deportation—that is, the uprooting of entire communities, the expropriation of their property, and their evacuation to forced labor or death camps—was called "resettlement" or "labor in the East." Such

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language provided the minimal evidence needed to convince people that this activity was not evil, and that, to the contrary, it was socially appropriate or even necessary. Language often masks administrative evil.

*Dehumanization* is another powerful ally in the conduct of evil (Staub, 1992, 3). As Zimbardo (2007, 222) notes: "One of the worst things we can do to our fellow human beings is deprive them of their humanity, render them worthless by exercising the psychological process of dehumanization." If one does something cruel or violent to a fellow human being, it may well be morally disturbing. But if that person belongs to a group of people deemed (that is, redefined as) not "normal," not like the majority, or even dangerous, such action becomes easier. Furthermore, if a people can be defined as less than human, "all bad," rather like bugs or roaches (a classic moral inversion), extermination can all too easily be seen as the appropriate action. "They" brought it on themselves, after all. As Albert Speer, Hitler's Minister of Armaments, said about Jews (Speer, 1970, 315): "If I had continued to see them as human beings, I would not have remained a Nazi. I did not hate them. I was indifferent to them." Dehumanization also often masks administrative evil.

### The Taken-for-Granted

Tacit knowing—the taken-for-granted nature of our daily habits of action—is essential to our ability to function in a social world (Polanyi, 1966) in which even the simplest activity is enormously and dauntingly complex if each component and step has to be articulated and thought about explicitly. But the taken-for-granted also bears on our human capacity to participate in evil, as Baumeister (1997, 268) notes:

Another factor that reduces self-control and fosters the crossing of moral boundaries is a certain kind of mental state. This state is marked by a very concrete narrow, rigid way of thinking, with the focus on the here and now, on the details of what one is doing. It is the state that characterizes someone who is fully absorbed in working with tools or playing a video game. One does not pause to reflect on broader implications or grand principles or events far removed in time (past or future).

Most of our daily life in social institutions and organizations occurs within the realm of the taken for granted. Not only do we not stop and think about everything that we do (which would socially paralyze us), we hardly stop and think about anything. We do not have to decide which side of the road to drive on when we start our automobile; indeed, "side of the road" does not

come up on our conscious "radar screen." In most of what we do on a daily or routine basis, we simply engage in well-worn habits of action. Nothing prompts us to stop and question. So it is with administrative evil. In a culture that emphasizes technical rationality, being "at work" means maintaining a narrow focus on the task at hand. This typical focus of awareness drives out, or at least minimizes, our subsidiary awareness of ethics and morality (and other contextual matters as well). Acts of administrative evil can all too easily be taken for granted as well.

### The Social Construction of Evil

Individualism, one of the core values of American culture, forms a barrier to our understanding of group and organizational dynamics—and administrative evil (Zimbardo, 2007, 212). In our culture, we often assume that an individual's actions are freely and independently chosen. When we examine an individual's behavior in isolation or even in aggregate, as we often do, that notion can be reinforced. However, such assumptions about individuals blind us to group and organizational dynamics, which typically play a far more powerful role in shaping human behavior than we assume (Mynatt and Sherman, 1975; Wallach, Kogan, and Bem, 1962). As Zimbardo (2007) suggests, it is useful to distinguish between dispositional, situational, and systemic understandings.

It is an easy but important error to personalize evil in the form of the exceptional psychopath, such as Charles Manson or Jeffrey Dahmer (often without considering how they might be a product of our culture). This dispositional understanding—the default option in a society such as ours that so highly values individualism—draws a cloak over social and organizational evil. Yet the term "mob psychology" still has resonance. The United States had a long history of public lynching, clearly a recurring example of social evil. Even more to the point, thousands of people have been subjected to administrative evil in dehumanizing experiments, internment camps, and other destructive acts by public agencies, often in the name of science and/or the national interest (Nevitt and Comstock, 1971; Stannard, 1992). Situational factors are far more significant than we typically imagine.

As we argue in Chapter 2, the modern age has been dominated by the scientific-analytic mindset. We have approached social and political problems with the tools of science, thinking of social and human phenomena as if they had the same tangibility and properties as physical reality. But societies and cultures are human artifacts, created and enacted by human activities through time (Zimbardo, 2007, 221): "It is the meaning that people assign to various components of the situation that creates its social reality." Social and

political institutions, indeed all organizations, are thus socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This means, of course, that they are not immutable: what human beings create and enact can be re-enacted in a different way. However, this does not mean that organizations and institutions are easily malleable.

To say that human social and cultural institutions and organizations are socially constructed may seem to imply that at some point groups of people rationally choose to meet together, and consciously and intentionally set about to devise an institution. Such an activity, of course, is the very rare exception. Rather, organizations and institutions more typically emerge and develop incrementally over a long period of time. As children, we are socialized into a culture that already has a vast array of institutions, practices, and rules of the road. For the most part, these all come to feel natural to us, or, more aptly, like second nature. During a person's lifetime, most organizations or institutions will change some, but usually not dramatically. Still, they could change dramatically. Revolutions, economic depressions, and even natural cataclysms can prompt rapid and dramatic change in a society. And of course, there are new institutions. Television and the Internet as social institutions developed within the lifetime of recent generations. Given this context of social construction, how does evil find its way in?

### Individual, Organization, and Society

So far, we have seen how cultural predispositions can blind us to aspects of human behavior crucial for understanding administrative evil. But how do we develop these behavioral tendencies and bring them to organizations, and how do these dynamics link with our larger social and cultural context? Shapero and Carr explore these connections in their book, *Lost in Familiar Places: Creating New Connections between the Individual and Society* (1991). Both families and organizations, along with other social institutions, are familiar places for us; after all, we spend our lives in them. Yet, as the authors note, we increasingly experience a sense of strangeness in these places—hence the phrase "lost in familiar places." Old ways of understanding a family, for example, seem overwhelmed by changes that impact the ways in which, over time, we negotiate a sense of meaning in our lives (social construction). The old anchors do not reach bottom, and we are cast adrift. A more or less stable, shared understanding of the family or of the church or of the work organization in the past served in part as a buffer for the ideology of individualism so pervasive in American society. For most of us, our socialization into various institutions is no longer "automatic," and the socialization that we do receive is increasingly fragmented and complex.

Shapiro and Carr discuss meaning, and in particular, the process by which we develop meaning, as negotiated collaborative interpretation—a fundamentally relational process. And they focus on the primary human group—the family—as the context in which we first learn this process, and as providing the initial model with which we subsequently attempt to make meaningful sense out of organizational life. As they develop a phenomenology of family life, the authors suggest that curiosity is a central constant in healthy families, that is to say, the parents' (or caregivers') stance toward the child is captured by the question, "What is your experience?" rather than by versions of the command, "Your experience is ...". The question builds, over time, a capacity for negotiated, collaborative interpretation (the child pieces together boundaries that define "who I am"), while the command cuts off negotiation and imposes a definition of self on the child, leading potentially to a fragmented, defensive, and often neurotic personality. In this case, the child is apt to carry un-integrated rage and aggression into adult life, along with its characteristic splitting and projective identification.

Alternatively, the split good and bad objects can be successfully reintegrated into the self, which may lead to reparation. Reparation, which we address in more depth in Chapter 9, is the motivation in mature human beings to complete worthy tasks and to render things whole again, and to do so in the recognition that there is capacity for both great good and great evil in each of us. This then is a recognition that moves one past splitting and projective identification, processes we learn as children to cope with the unbearable knowledge that we experience hate and rage toward those we love, and the concomitant anxiety that those feelings induce. Alternatively, destructive patterns of interaction quite common in organizational life enable us to maintain the projections we grew used to as children, or even to be ready accomplices to administrative evil.

Shapiro and Carr go on to make interesting linkages to broader social institutions, such as religion. Here the key concept is the notion of a holding environment (or container), which has to do with how families (or other organizations) manage the emotional issues of their members. In the successful holding environment, empathic interpretation, valuing the experiences of others, and containment of aggression and sexuality are managed in ways that sustain the integrity of members. Organizations, social institutions, and countries also function as holding environments, or containers (see, for example, Volkan, 1997). Religious institutions may be thought of as ritualized symbolic structures that contain chaotic experiences; that is, act as holding environments for these difficult feelings and emotions: "Our proposition is that a key holding environment is continually being negotiated and created through the unconscious interaction between members of a society and its

religious institutions" (Shapiro and Carr, 1991, 159). However, the concept of administrative evil shows how organizations, institutions, and countries can also serve as masked holding environments for evil. People who need direction—a target, really—for their unintegrated rage and aggression, who split off the "bad" and project it out, hear all too well the siren call of groups and organizations that will contain this psychic energy for them. The price tag is almost always obedience and loyalty, sometimes moral inversion and administrative evil, and occasionally the price is very dear indeed—those truly evil eruptions that become the great moral debacles of human history.

Material from  
**A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 1–18.**

## Introduction

If you want a definition of this place,  
you don't have the right to have rights.

—Nizar Sassi, 2002

In January 2002, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay received its first so-called enemy combatants—detainees of the War on Terror. Five months later, one of those inmates, Nizar Sassi, defined his new surroundings as a place where “you don't have the right to have rights.”<sup>1</sup> He was neither making a public critique about the camp nor trying to enter the contentious global debates surrounding it. He was merely describing his life in an otherwise mundane postcard written to his family.

While intended for his parents and siblings, Sassi's message was also a political statement, its power amplified by his deeply embedded call to “you” that transcended Guantánamo's boundaries and evaded a basic purpose of the camp: to remove him from any community that might receive his act of bearing witness. Indeed, his seemingly simple remark implicated his addressees in his predicament, but only under the condition that “you” care enough to want to know about “this place.” Though it is Sassi who is imprisoned, he draws you, the recipient of his address, into the place of his removal—where he does not have rights, not even the right to have rights. Eventually, his call beyond the camp's boundaries was heard. Sassi found release from Guantánamo in July 2004, when France, the country of his citizenship, brokered his transfer home, along with that of three other detainees. As he exited the camp, detainees left behind implored Sassi and his compatriots to “tell the world what is happening here.”<sup>2</sup>

In the decade since, Sassi and other released detainees have borne witness to the violence at the heart of the camp, and yet the plight of those still in Guantánamo has intensified. As of June 2015, 106 men remain locked in a place where they do not have the right to have rights: their never-ending imprisonment has become a normalized background to the troubled political present. Although lamented by detainees and



their advocates who continue to make impassioned cries against it, Guantánamo remains for much of the public a taken-for-granted reality confined to a remote corner of Cuba. And the predicament to which Sassi and other detainees speak is not confined to Guantánamo alone. Rather, they stand as the most recent, and most dramatic, examples of a particularly modern, and particularly disturbing, trend: the United States has created a peculiar place with an ambiguous relationship to the law—the camp—and has created a peculiar kind of person to be imprisoned there—the rightless.

We live in a time of expanding individual rights. Since the end of World War II, both the United States and the international community have prioritized the rights of individuals, and the protection of those rights. Rights, in other words, have become an ascendant political discourse. Yet Sassi's testimony sheds light on the underside of this remarkable historical trajectory: the deepening limits and contradictions of rights, a reality that stains the seeming ascension of rights around the globe. By closely reading testimonies from Sassi and others held by the United States in camps, this book grapples with the reality of this parallel world. Its narrative is built on examinations of three camps and their detainees—Japanese Americans interned during World War II, who then fought for redress in the late 1980s; HIV-positive Haitian refugees detained at Guantánamo in the early 1990s; and Guantánamo's enemy combatants from the War on Terror. The following pages reflect on these episodes in paired chapters. The first chapter examines the legal and historical conditions that rendered each group of people rightless; the second chapter uncovers the efforts of each group of rightless people to challenge their dispossession and testify to this dark reality in the hopes that someone would listen. This pairing structure elucidates, on the one hand, how the state's legal apparatus renders rightless subjects unworthy of being listened to, and on the other hand, the ways that these subjects speak out and contest their disappearance.

Moving through these three episodes in chronological order, the book's narrative reveals how the United States has adapted to shifting historical conditions, continually renewing its ability to deploy the technology of the camp and maintain populations of rightless subjects. These three rich sites of investigation comprise not isolated examples, but linked, portentous manifestations of state power as the United States has ascended to global dominance. Focusing on the decades between the twilight of the Cold War and the present emphasizes the historical

connection between these camps and two other crucial, and similarly interrelated, developments—the rise of rights as a privileged political discourse and the rise of the United States as the world's most dominant superpower. While this period has witnessed the expansion of rights discourses, it has also witnessed an expanding imprisonment regime, including the use of camps. Imprisonment and extralegal detention have become central to U.S. governance, and in the process they have produced a proliferation of rightless people. The concept of rightlessness—both a theoretical vantage point and a lived experience—confronts and interprets this seeming paradox.

### THE ROLES OF RIGHTLESSNESS

Rightlessness is made possible by the convergence of multiple factors. Rightless subjects are defined in part by the deprivation of rights. Denied due process like access to a trial and subjected to mass imprisonment, they are removed from the rest of the world to the world of the camp, where the protections that many of the rest of us take for granted do not apply. A spectrum ranges between the rightful and the rightless, spanning from persons who enjoy protections of the law and rights, to prisoners who are subject to the law as convicted felons, to camp inmates who are swept into these spaces of removal—with many gradations in between. Even camp prisoners are not identical to each other, falling on different points on this spectrum. And yet they cluster toward the rightless extreme. Rightless subjects are also defined by the violence that their removal requires, a violence that can be both mundane and extraordinary—in capture and transport, surveillance, enforced boredom, interrogations, (coerced) medical treatment, and torture. But as I argue, what lies at the very center of rightlessness, following subaltern studies scholar John Beverley, is “not mattering, not being worth listening to.”<sup>3</sup> The position of rightlessness renders the knowledge of its subjects unbelievable, or even worse, unthinkable. Rightless subjects exist at the edge of understanding, not just our understanding of rights but of the human (the subject of rights) and of politics (how we determine who gets to have rights). While clearly exerted in the abuses prisoners endure within the camps and in the very fact of their imprisonment, the violence of rightlessness is also epistemological. It is a problem of knowledge. When what they know does not matter, to seek recognition, these prisoners must begin with the overwhelming challenge of breaking through the utter disregard of the

outside world. Yet as their testimonies show, rightless people refuse to be silenced; they refuse to become abject objects of state power.<sup>4</sup>

As they struggle against their condition, rightless people reveal the complexity of their existence, elucidating the ways rightlessness exceeds legal status. They thereby show how rightlessness extends contemporary notions of what rights mean. While the term suggests a categorical definition—either a person has rights or not—my analysis of rightlessness challenges its semantic, seemingly absolute meaning. Rightlessness does not denote a strict legal status or essential set of identities. Rather, it is a condition that emerges when efforts to protect the rights of some depend on disregarding the rights of others. The camps examined here, and the rightless subjects forced to live within them, resulted from three particular historical consequences: the color-blind legal reforms that produce racist state violence, the management of perceived crises over “alien invasion” by “diseased” migrants, and the fight against global terrorism. The rightful—as worthy, deserving subjects—enjoy the protection of rights only because other, rightless subjects are so devalued that they are excluded from those protections. Put differently, the recognition of rights depends on the denigration of the rightless. Rightlessness is therefore necessary, and endemic, to rights.

In their efforts to make sense of their upended lives, the rightless also use the very conditions of their subjugation to leverage trenchant critiques of state violence and the limits of rights. Japanese American internees criticized not only the repression they endured in the camps but also the constrained and even disabling conditions of redress—its limited engagement with internment’s history and its paltry lessons for the future. Indeed, only three years following redress, the Haitian refugees indefinitely detained at Guantánamo condemned the U.S. government’s treatment of them, not as patients, refugees, or humans, but as unwanted carriers of disease. And the enemy combatants of Guantánamo have consistently resisted their imprisonment, its abuse, and the manipulations of domestic and international law that enable their rightlessness. As these men and women recognize, people are rendered rightless not as the result of the failures of rights, but as a necessary condition for rights to have meaning in the first place.

To understand rightlessness in terms of absence begins from the false assumption that all persons have inalienable rights that are then unjustly evacuated. Yet the existence of rightless subjects reveals that the idea of inalienable rights, no matter how often it is assumed, remains a

fiction. Indeed, Hannah Arendt elaborated the irresolvable paradoxes of inalienable rights in part by drawing on her own experience as a witness to World War II and as a camp inmate. Arendt not only bore witness to the proliferation of stateless people expelled from membership in any nation-state during the war and its aftermath; she also spent the summer of 1940 imprisoned in Camp Gurs in France, becoming, as she put it, “a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.”<sup>5</sup> On obtaining liberation papers, Arendt became a stateless person and fled Europe. Though spared the Nazi death camps, Arendt connected them to the internment camps where she and many others suffered mass detention. In fact, when transferred from French to German control, thousands of Jewish prisoners ultimately perished in the extermination camps. Further, because Camp Gurs, in its five-year existence, held political refugees who crossed the border following the Spanish Civil War as well as Jewish German “enemy aliens,” leftist French political prisoners, and, later, prisoners of war from the Axis powers, Arendt suggests underlying connections linking these different types of prisoners and different kinds of prison camps. While the death camps are their most brutal and horrifying manifestation, their genocidal violence was enabled by and shared with other camps a fundamental condition of imprisonment and removal from the political community. As Arendt notes, at the very moment when stateless people had to call on the inalienable Rights of Man, they discovered that these supposedly baseline protections could not be secured. What actually mattered was “not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever.”<sup>6</sup>

If, as Arendt argues, inclusion in a political community stands as the precondition for rights—like those to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—to have meaning, and the camp extricates prisoners from that community, then those prisoners do not have the essential “right to have rights.” What different kinds of camp prisoners share is their removal from political community. My inquiry into rightlessness examines what it means to be sundered from the community that could guarantee the right to have rights, rather than marking how different camps deprive their distinct prisoners of the same specific rights or deploy the same strategies of governance and control. Indeed, in his uncanny invocation of Arendt, Sassi astutely recognized that his rightless condition exceeded the deprivation of substantive rights like due process. Though

still a citizen of France and therefore not a stateless person, Sassi nevertheless found himself in a similar predicament as Arendt, six decades later—removed from any political community, national or international, that could assure his right to have rights.

For both Arendt and Sassi, the camp became the site and means for their exclusion. A modern, militarized institution of intense surveillance and domination, the camp constitutes a space set apart, as marked by its barbed-wire perimeter, its armed guards, and its physical segregation. It is, in other words, a space of removal. Camps are removed, in space, from the prisoners' social communities of friends, neighbors, and family, and removed, in law, from the political communities that could provide the precondition for rights recognition. The War Relocation Authority in charge of managing Japanese American internment during the Second World War set up the camps in deserts and swamps, in austere, undesirable areas of the West and Arkansas. Further, the U.S. executive branch has established camps at Guantánamo because it lies outside U.S. territory and ostensibly occupies a legally ambiguous zone between the governments of the United States and Cuba. Located in ambiguous spaces designed to remove them from social and political community, these camps are cast as exceptions to the space of the nation, and thus exceptions to the right to have rights.

Camps are embedded in a much longer history of spatial exceptions. Like the coexistence and codependence of rights and rightlessness, the use of spatial exceptions stretches back to the origins of the United States, to both imperial spaces like the frontier and the colony, and to internal zones of exclusion.<sup>7</sup> These spaces have existed alongside—and have in fact enabled—the country to claim its complete commitment to rights. As the historian Paul Kramer argues: "While the separation of these enclaves is physical and legal, it is also conceptual and moral: cast as wrinkles in an otherwise seamless fabric of sovereignty, rights, and the rule of law, they shield imperial formations whose proponents insist upon their liberalism and universality."<sup>8</sup> Put simply, these spatial exceptions are not exceptional at all, but the U.S. state consistently disavows them as such. Camps mark just one way such spatial exceptions take shape. Thus, although camps, particularly those located outside formal U.S. territory, are understood as extreme and external to the United States, such ideological divides between the normal and the exceptional, or the foreign and the domestic, obscure their co-constitution and connection to each other. Proceeding from internment to Guantánamo, the

following chapters trace these camps' links to each other while simultaneously tracking the shifts in U.S. governance that externalize rightlessness. As the ascension of rights has undermined the legitimacy of creating rightlessness through camp imprisonment, the United States has had to adapt by moving camps beyond its territory and by narrowing the scope of rightlessness to focus more intently, though not exclusively, on people who cannot claim the United States as the guarantor of their rights. While divisions between inside/outside and alien/citizen bleed into each other, the United States can embrace rights and yet create rightless subjects by pushing camps and rightlessness beyond the forms of belonging conferred by spatial territory and national status.

The conceptual separation of camps from the United States is also temporal and historical. In representing itself as the exemplary world leader of rights and the giver of freedom, the United States presents a vision of history that elides these scenes of removal, as if they were safely contained in the past. It is this condition of systemic, collective forgetting—of history under erasure—that makes the continued development of actual camps possible. The United States has consistently accounted for such camps as exceptions to the country's normal functioning: its violent strategy of governance against illiberal, rightless subjects is framed as a perhaps regrettable, but necessary means to preserve its liberal, democratic order. As an institution of removal, the camp frees the state from the constraints of rights recognition and enables the subjection of camp inmates to systemic control over their existence.

Just as rights and rightlessness exist in a mutually imbricated relationship, the U.S. state depends on the rightless to establish its authority. The camp is distinct from federal and state prisons, whose captives, while removed from community, have at least nominal access to due process and a trial (though too often a corrupted one). And yet the camp aligns with what the ethnic studies scholar Dylan Rodriguez calls the U.S. prison regime—a system of state practices that seek "absolute dominion" over the captive and that ultimately pervade the camp.<sup>9</sup> These efforts at domination crystallize most apparently in the institution of the prison, even as the state exercises such power far beyond the prison's boundaries. Or, in the words of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "prison is not a building 'over there' but a set of relationships that undermine rather than stabilize everyday lives everywhere."<sup>10</sup> While generally imagined as external to normal civil society, the prison regime is integral to U.S. statecraft, its methods of exercising and displaying its power.<sup>11</sup> Extending this argument, it is against

rightlessness that U.S. state power—and its ability to bestow rights and freedom—becomes intelligible; rightlessness is therefore essential to the exercise of U.S. state authority.

As “a medium of racialized statecraft,”<sup>12</sup> the U.S. prison regime has targeted populations of racial others and exploited their “vulnerability to premature death,”<sup>13</sup> to cite Gilmore’s incisive definition of racism. The sweeping of particular groups into camp imprisonment has been legitimated through direct and indirect invocations of racism—from the explicit maligning of Japanese persons as “enemy aliens”<sup>14</sup> during World War II to their racial rehabilitation as model minorities in the period of redress; to the less explicit, but no less real, rationale that excluded nearly all Haitian refugees from attaining asylum; to the U.S. government’s creation of the “enemy combatant,” a vague band of “terrorists” who are always already “Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, the rightless person is always envisioned as a racial other. Camps could not exist, and people could not be rendered rightless, without “camp-thinking”—Paul Gilroy’s term for nationalist and racist invocations of difference, structured around categories of self/other and friend/stranger. As Gilroy cogently argues, because we are divided and set against each other by camp-thinking, a direct relationship binds the racism and nationalism that is considered conventional with the camps seen as exceptional.<sup>16</sup> Imprisonment is structured by camp-thinking, making certain populations more susceptible to capture. But more important, imprisonment also generates and redefines prisoners’ racial subordination, violently attaching racial meanings to rightless persons. As the sociologist Avery F. Gordon argues: “Racism explains not just who becomes a prisoner (almost everywhere and at all times poor persons of color, members of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and dissidents), but also what the prisoner becomes.”<sup>17</sup>

The camp, ultimately, constitutes a dense node of state power, one that reveals how the government contravenes the rules that define and enable its authority.<sup>18</sup> It therefore provides a focusing lens that elucidates how power operates more broadly—the mechanisms, discourses, actors, and techniques used by the state to maintain its authority. This focused understanding can also shed light on how power permeates other strategies of governance and the parts of the world that are far more familiar than the camp. The power relations that create rightless people are not limited to the terrain of the law, but pervade our social and political culture. The capacity of the state to produce rightlessness extends beyond

racial others and beyond the camp’s borders and inmates. Those who are liminally rightful—like undocumented immigrants, convicted felons (whether imprisoned or released), and those living under heightened suspicion of being criminals, terrorists, or gang members—consistently endure the non-recognition and violation of their rights.<sup>19</sup> To reiterate, there are variegations of rights and gradations of rightlessness. Camp imprisonment exposes a basic human vulnerability, which links the fates of the rightful and the rightless: all but the most powerful can be ensnared by the state power that produces rightlessness. And it is the people who do not matter, who are not worth listening to, who in fact foretell the ominous direction that our own futures could take. The camp’s perimeter separates us, the relatively rightful, from the rightless, but it cannot fully obscure the ways that we overlap; indeed, the stories that the rightless tell summon us to see their predicament as our own.

#### THE ROOTS OF RIGHTLESSNESS

The camps explored here trace the ways in which rights and rightlessness have become increasingly central to U.S. state power, as they mark the congruent rise of rights discourses and of the United States as global hegemon. This concomitant ascent emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, intensified during the Cold War, and culminated with the latter’s dissolution and the consequent affirmation of the United States as the world’s dominant superpower. On the one hand, rightlessness is not strictly limited to the United States or to more recent U.S. history. Rightlessness encompasses the camps of other empires, such as Spain’s re-concentration camps in Cuba and British camps of the Second Boer War in South Africa. Further, since its very origins as a nation-state, the United States has deployed many strategies of governance that have produced rightlessness, including the use of camps during the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century and in the Philippine-American War of the early twentieth century. On the other hand, however, the dual ascent of rights discourses and of U.S. global power (enabled in part by its affirmation of rights) warrants a particular focus on the rightlessness created by the United States during the height of its influence. The United States, in this period of rights ascension, provides a particularly revealing example of the fusion of rightlessness and a commitment to rights.

The destruction and atrocities wrought by World War II, particularly in Europe, created the context in which human rights emerged as a



recognizable and desirable goal, supported by national and international institutions and articulated in international conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), passed in 1948.<sup>20</sup> Previously, states were the only subjects of international law, but in the aftermath of the Second World War, the "human" individual also became recognized as a subject of international law and political discourse.<sup>21</sup> The concept that all humans have some fundamental rights—not solely "life, liberty, and security of person" but also "the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law,"<sup>22</sup> as the UDHR proclaims—outside and above any membership in a state marked a key shift in human rights history. But human rights were not the only or the inevitable response to the war's devastation. Alternative utopian visions existed, such as those offered by communism, by socialist states, and by decolonization and the third world movements. By the 1970s, these alternative visions had failed to deliver on the hopes inspired. In the vacuum left behind, the historian Samuel Moyn argues, "human rights emerged historically as the last utopia—one that became powerful and prominent because other visions imploded."<sup>23</sup>

As the United States asserted its power as a primary architect of the postwar order,<sup>24</sup> it promoted its vision of free markets and democratic governance by claiming the language of human rights. After the war, the United States became the primary patron of global human rights and in this role profoundly shaped the legal institutions that emerged to support and spread rights.<sup>25</sup> The expansion of U.S. power around the globe, alongside a U.S.-centered vision of human rights, solidified during the Cold War: human rights were increasingly allied with the liberal freedoms of the capitalist first world, and their violations identified with the communist and ostensibly undemocratic regimes of second world.

Ideology, however, did not always match practice. Racially based immigration exclusion and formal segregation, among other persistent forms of oppression, gave lie to claims that the United States was the exemplary sponsor of human rights and equality. The federal government recognized that the contradiction between its ideological image and its legal reality worked against its primary foreign policy objective—"to make the United States an enormous, positive influence for peace and progress throughout the world," as a 1947 Committee on Civil Rights report states.<sup>26</sup> The granting of formal equality through civil rights reforms enabled the state to claim that racism was fundamentally at odds with its founding principles. The ensuing, and astounding, string

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of civil rights victories, including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), seem from this perspective less like proof that determined individuals can better the world, and more like a means for the government to instrumentalize civil rights as a tool in advancing its global ambitions. The advance of civil rights not only furthered U.S. interests abroad but also worked to defuse radical movements for racial and social justice within its own borders.<sup>27</sup>

The end of the Cold War consolidated the mutual ascent of human rights as a primary political discourse and of the United States as the world's sole remaining superpower. The collapse of communism has meant "that the ideological controversies of the past have given way to general agreement about the universality of Western values and have placed human rights at the core of international law,"<sup>28</sup> the legal scholar Coustas Douzinas argues. The United States has established an unrivaled capacity to exercise power across the globe through multiple means—via its military and economic might, via geopolitical relations, and just as important, via cultural politics. It extends its power and influence globally in part by invoking its commitment to rights, freedom, and capitalist prosperity. Put differently, the United States delivers rights as a desirable, benevolent "gift of freedom," one that has helped secure U.S. global dominance. However, as the "core proposition" of liberal war, the gift of freedom, as Mimi Thi Nguyen argues, "demand[s] occupations and displacements of racial, colonial others in the name of the human."<sup>29</sup> With no alternative to this political lingua franca, the U.S. invocation of rights has enabled global hierarchies of power and violent interventions.

The co-constitutive ascent of rights and U.S. global power has given rise to a fundamental contradiction: the United States champions the rights of all and simultaneously renders people rightless. Prevailing nationalist accounts of U.S. history can explain away this contradiction, however. As I have argued, camps and rightless people are characterized as exceptions to U.S. history and culture. Furthermore, though camps subject their captives to vitiating regimes of depersonalization, the U.S. government has characterized these spaces of confinement as projects of liberal governance. For example, the New Deal liberals who organized Japanese American internment sought to use the camps to instill U.S. culture and democratic values in their inmates; four decades later, the United States rewarded these domesticated model minorities with a redress that again reaffirmed the state's liberal beneficence. Rather than positing a unity between the internment and Guantánamo camps, the

first two chapters of the book reveal how redress has shaped the ways camps are understood—as exceptional, aberrant, external. Moving from internment and redress to Guantánamo then elucidates how the United States continues to deploy camps under the ascension of rights—in part by pushing them beyond formal territories and statuses of belonging. The U.S. military defined its indefinite detention of Haitian refugees as a “humanitarian mission,” one that in fact exposed these captives to conditions suspended between life and death. And the U.S. government has created an entire parallel legal system at the current Guantánamo camp under the pretense of recognizing the rights of the detained. It has also described its role as that of a “steward” over its captives, emphasizing its need to keep these detainees alive—even against their will, even while subjecting them to torture. Thus the state persistently claims that its treatment of the rightless aligns with its commitment to liberal governance. Within this paradoxical logic, rightlessness coincides with the United States’ highest democratic aims. The discourse of rights and its attendant political tools have proven unable to counter the very circumstances of terror and bodily and social disintegration they are designed to guard against. As partner to U.S. global dominance, rights abet the exposure of others to violence and death.

Even while rights constitute yet another means of exercising state power, rightless subjects nevertheless appropriate this language that explicitly excludes them. For rightless subjects, rights are, in Gayatri Spivak’s words, “what we cannot not want.”<sup>36</sup> To refuse rights because of their limits and contradictions is a privilege the rightless do not have. As the prevailing lexicon of national and international governments around the world, rights provide a crucial language for seeking recognition and redress, however insufficient. Japanese American internees deployed rights discourses to call for recognition of internment’s historical injustice and of their suffering at the hands of the state, decades after their release from camp. They sought redress not solely for themselves, but to prevent the recurrence of racially based mass imprisonment in the future. The HIV-positive Haitian refugees drew on human rights language to demand their release from indefinite imprisonment to anywhere but Haiti, the place of their certain persecution. Similarly, even as they remain intensely critical of rights and legal institutions, the enemy combatants of Guantánamo have consistently worked through the language of rights to demand both improved camp conditions, like protection against religious abuse and torture, and, fundamentally,

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release from indefinite detention. All these rightless people have had to use the flawed instrument of rights—both rights discourses and specific legal documents of rights, like the U.S. Constitution and the Geneva Conventions—to resist state power.

The varied forms of rightless resistance further reveal how the state is not a singular entity but an intricate, multidimensional assemblage of forces: from individuals to the departments and institutions they work for, and from the beliefs and ideologies that motivate those individuals to the tactics they use in the pursuit of the state’s many aims. That cacophony marshals immense force, and yet the work of these many moving parts is inevitably incongruous, sometimes even in direct conflict with itself.<sup>31</sup> The state’s internal contradictions create spaces in which the rightless can contest the state’s seemingly overwhelming authority. The chapters that follow show, for example, how certain federal courts and judges have attempted to curtail the prerogative power exercised by the executive branch, while others have affirmed it; how different state agencies within the same camp work to uphold or contest the prisoners’ rightlessness; and how camp administrators negotiate their commanding orders from other sectors of the state against the day-to-day realities of dealing with rightless prisoners. Rightless people have no choice but to resist state violence from within the state’s structures. Indeed, “if agency is the human ability to craft opportunity from the wherewithal of everyday life,” as Gilmore argues, “then agency and structure are products of each other.”<sup>32</sup> Rightless subjects craft opportunity through the very same mechanisms that have created their rightless condition. While their invocations of rights cannot be equated with justice and do not alter the organization of state power, claiming rights is one of their only means to resist rightlessness.<sup>33</sup>

#### THE TESTIMONIES OF RIGHTLESSNESS

Against a state that at once legitimizes and disavows its use of camps, the testimony of the rightless constitutes a “counterarchive of struggle”<sup>34</sup> that critically interprets both their peculiar predicament and our peculiar historical moment. Offering “an essential moral resource,”<sup>35</sup> as Gilroy notes, such testimony challenges the violence and dehumanization at the heart of rightlessness in ways that can work against its persistent reemergence. Again, this violence is not merely physical but also epistemological: the discrediting of the words and wisdom of these witnesses—their “not

matter, not being worth listening to." *Rightlessness* counters this utter disregard and instead acknowledges that the rightless offer a necessary, commanding knowledge of their condition. As a form of what Michel Foucault calls subjugated knowledge, rightless testimonies are rooted in "what people know."<sup>36</sup> They point toward, at times in only suggestive traces, ways of living and surviving within the camp, providing "a pedagogy of finding and making life where death and destruction dominate," as Gordon notes.<sup>37</sup> Excavating the subjugated knowledge of rightless subjects by closely reading their testimonies can sharpen our understanding of the complex predicaments of rights, rightlessness, and state violence. From these testimonies, in which the future appears so very bleak, it is my hope that we can find our way toward an alternative future.

Sassi has already offered a bare glimpse of testimony in the postcard to his family. His brief utterance sheds light on his daily reality. But more important, his comment defining Guantánamo as a place where "you don't have the right to have rights" gestures toward the broader implications of his dire situation—the conditions of rightlessness he and his fellow prisoners have endured. The category of testimony extends from the postcard to encompass a broad variety of efforts. The following chapters examine testimonies given at the behest of the state, as well as testimonies voiced outside of the official institutions of government. This archive includes both written and oral testimonies, ranging from legal forms like affidavits and testimony spoken during depositions, trials, and hearings; to popular narrative forms like personal letters, opinion-editorial pieces, and statements to the press; to aesthetic forms like testimonial poetry and experimental video.

While a testimony can take many forms, all testimonies share several key features. Most generally, testimony is a first-person narrative told from the perspective of the witness who offers it. But just as crucial, testimony is authentic. It conveys its narrative as true, as emerging from the actual lived experiences of the witness. Authenticity proves central to the power of testimony and distinguishes it from other first-person narratives in genres like fiction or satire. Collectivity is also central.<sup>38</sup> The extraordinary violence that generates rightlessness simultaneously distills a shared identity and collective memory to which the testifying witness speaks. In other words, each testimony articulates a voice that is at once highly particular and yet situated and communal. It is never given solely for the sake of telling one's story alone, but seeks to contest the condition of rightlessness. That collective nature of testimony separates

it from autobiography.<sup>39</sup> And finally, while speaking to the past and the present, testimony is invested in the future. The giving of testimony constitutes an event of its own, beyond the mere recounting of what has happened: it forms part of a strategy of survival and self-constitution, and it attempts to seize the listener, to insist that we engage. As Gilroy argues, "their testimony calls out to us and we must answer it."<sup>40</sup> It hails us in ways that "are worth listening to," offering the possibility of solidarity with—not just charity or sympathy for—the rightless. The testifying act seeks to build a link between the speaker and us (the rightless and the relatively rightful), to reach beyond the camp's boundaries and connect their world to ours.

As the camp seeks a totalizing dominion over its captives, that dominion becomes the foundation for the captives' knowledge of rightlessness. From their encounters with legal systems to their daily existence within barbed wire, the rightless gather an intimate understanding of the many ways that power functions—the shifting legal categories, the distribution of food and medical care, the vagaries of sanitation, and collective and individual confrontations with guards. Fundamentally, the practices of imprisonment that produce rightless subjects also inscribe them with a profound knowledge, from the banalities of the lumbering mechanisms of the state to the horrors of pain, terror, and death.<sup>41</sup> The knowledge articulated in the testimonies, then, exceeds the particularities of the individual testifying subject but speaks to the broader conditions that emerge from the "intersection of the (auto)biographical with the (empire's) historical,"<sup>42</sup> as Rodriguez describes. These testimonies theorize and interpret rightlessness in ways that speak beyond their particular point of view. In contesting their subjection, these prisoners challenge the logic of the state and suggest more expansive ways of understanding personhood.

Even as the rightless offer these testimonies—and even as the state solicits them—the accounts of the rightless are always subject to doubt. Testimony narrates an assemblage of facts, memory, experience, and material and social context, weaving together a story that evinces the witness's truth. In other words, testimony tells a person's individual and collective truth through the vehicle of the story. Thus, while authenticity stands as one of its key features, testimony cannot prove its own authenticity.<sup>43</sup> The legal forums that frame many of these testimonies also work against the claims of the rightless. The law regards testimony as evidence and prioritizes not its capacity to tell stories but its clarity, accuracy, and

operates through practices and principles that purport to be objective, impersonal, and neutral, but that are "in fact mired in hidden subjectivities and unexamined claims," which, as the critical race theorist Patricia J. Williams notes, often serve to denigrate the knowledge of marginalized groups as "emotional," 'literary,' 'personal,' or just Not True.<sup>45</sup> Already consigned to silence (or, more precisely, to that which cannot be heard), righteous subjects by definition cannot receive the legitimacy that such "hidden subjectivities and unexamined claims" support. Put differently, the law and its ways of knowing are not neutral but produce the repressive conditions that render righteous people not worth listening to, that "disqualify" their knowledge as "below the required level of erudition or scientificity,"<sup>46</sup> as Foucault states. The testimonies of the righteous are subject to doubt precisely because their subjugated knowledge challenges the epistemological frameworks through which we understand issues of rights and rightlessness. The constant doubt that shadows righteous testimony points to a deeper struggle over who has the power and license to tell the story.<sup>47</sup> By closely reading their testimonies on their own terms—as more than just evidence—my method and analysis recognize the authority of righteous people to narrate their truth.

The demand that righteous testimony conform to the legal apparatus—and in particular, to the legal apparatus of the state that produced rightlessness in the first place—enacts another form of epistemological violence on the witness. In demanding recognition from the state, righteous subjects must reproduce their subordinate position to make their appeals intelligible to an entity not interested in recognizing either their suffering or its own transgressions. Internees, refugees, and enemy combatants did bear witness to various state representatives within and beyond the camp—administrators, social scientists, lawyers, and judges. However, even if sympathetic to the witnesses' plight, these listeners were in many cases not in a position to build a politics of solidarity with the righteous, who remained objects of knowledge or recipients of services under conditions of confinement. In other words, the rightless remained, even when speaking, "not worth listening to." As the following chapters show, even successful appeals do not fundamentally change the legal structures or the social, economic, and political conditions that render individuals rightless or that make the camp available for future use.

Despite such irresolvable contradictions, finding an audience in the state remains crucial for rightless subjects. Like rights themselves,

recognition by the state is what the rightness cannot not want. Witnesses testify to rightlessness in legal settings not for the sake of communicating their experiences to the world—for the sake of storytelling itself—but in hopes that the state will recognize them as rightful subjects. Though they articulate their testimonies in the legal archive, "a supreme technology of the . . . imperial state," the archive remains a site of knowledge production that "attests to its own contradictions and yields its own critique,"<sup>48</sup> as the cultural studies scholar Lisa Lowe lucidly argues. It is both possible and necessary to read the legal archive against the grain and excavate those moments when rightless witnesses break through the limits of the legal structures in which they are spoken.

Even though testimony cannot prove its authenticity, it is imperative to recognize that righteous witnesses speak their truth. This recognition of truth is particularly important because their testimony contains within it a challenge to their rightless condition.<sup>49</sup> Yet I examine testimonies not to establish their truthfulness. Rather than focus on the undeniable question of veracity—risking both romanticizing their words as unmediated access to their condition or subjecting their words to a trial—I am centrally concerned with the ways these witnesses articulate their own camp lives, as well as the fundamental conditions that they confront each day: their subjection to state violence, camp-thinking, and rightlessness.

#### THE STAKES OF RIGHTLESSNESS

Testimonies of rightlessness contest the nationalism and racism behind camp-thinking. The testimonial act contains within it a call for social change. As they testify to rightlessness—situating their condition in larger, shared histories and in social relations of friends, family, and community—the witnesses challenge their depiction as less-than-human subjects, as enemies, as contagious agents, as threats to the national body. They disrupt the rationale that relegates them to the camp, that makes rightlessness seem logical and legitimate. Put differently, their testimonies work to challenge the very operations of power that create the camps and rightlessness itself. As part of its pedagogy, the testimony of the rightless hails its recipients in ways that might forge relationships connecting the rightful and the rightless. And yet, the responsibility for forging these ethical and political connections lies not solely with the rightless witness, but also with the rightful recipient.<sup>51</sup>



While it is crucial for critical listeners to receive their acts of bearing witness, the rightless testimonies also point to the failure of a politics of representation alone to redress their subjugation. Just as rights cannot offer the solution for the rightless, however, the goal of testimonies is not strictly confined to representation. Rightless testimonies articulate a condition that cannot be represented in terms of liberal democracy, citizenship, or visibility. They instead point to the impossibility of negotiating the limits of political and narrative representation from the condition of rightlessness. But this impossibility is not a defeat. As the following chapters show, the testimonies of the rightless can achieve urgent and immediate goals, like release from indefinite imprisonment. But another goal ultimately proves more important. As Lisa Cacho argues, "Empowerment comes from deciding that the outcome of struggle doesn't matter as much as the decision to struggle."<sup>32</sup> The fact that rightless subjects continue to bear witness even under circumstances designed to disregard everything they say elucidates this decision to struggle in the face of certain defeat—at least when defeat is defined as anything more than gaining immediate, strategic goals. Their defiance in spite of failure suggests that the condition of rightlessness challenges our very definitions of success and failure. Their testimonies, in other words, challenge us to think past the horizons of our political imagination. As Cacho highlights, to "mobilize *against* preserving this way of life" that produces rightlessness, we must also mobilize against "the ways of knowing that this life preserves."<sup>33</sup> Spoken from a bleak present, but oriented toward a different future, these testimonies—as powerful as they are subjugated—can help us not only understand our current condition but also imagine the world we want to live in.

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## Part I

### *Japanese internment camps*

#### *United States (various locations)*

##### *May 1942–March 1946*

On 14 February 1942, two months after Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States officially entered the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the mass evacuation and imprisonment of all ethnic Japanese persons living on the West Coast, including 80,000 U.S. citizens. The War-time Civilian Control Administration (WCCA), the federal agency hurriedly created to manage the evacuation, gave these 120,000 citizens and residents as little as two weeks to settle their affairs. Properties were sold short; businesses shuttered. The WCCA then transported this suspect group of people—now called "internees"—en masse to nearby assembly centers, some of them in whitewashed horseracing or fairground facilities. In these cases, families took the place of horses. From assembly centers, internees were then removed to one of ten internment camps located in the deserts of the West or in the swamps of Arkansas.

The War Relocation Authority (WRA), another civilian government agency established to administer internment, built the camps within a few months. The camps ranged in size, holding anywhere from 7,000 to nearly 19,000 inmates. They were organized into housing blocks that each contained rows of barracks, a mess hall, a communal hall, laundry facilities, and men's and women's bathrooms. The camps also contained administrative buildings and housing for soldiers, as well as buildings that served as hospitals, schools, religious sites, canteens, and post offices. The barracks each measured about 120 feet by 20 feet, and were divided to house up to six families. Each apartment contained a single light fixture, a stove for heating, and a cot for each resident. Hastily constructed out of cheap materials and covered with tar paper, this housing offered little privacy or shelter from the extreme weather. The windows

**Selected by Sung Tieu**

**Material from  
Ron Robin, *The Cold War They Made* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard  
University Press, 2016), 54–73.**

To publish, however, Roberta first had to usher the book through a Kafkaesque security gauntlet, beginning with a laborious editing process to purge the text of potential security breaches, already a meaningless task for a book based on unclassified sources. Then, after she submitted a clean manuscript to Stanford, RAND received notification that the study had been classified and would be withdrawn from publication. Neither Roberta nor RAND were given any explanation—"they did not have a high enough clearance to be told." The Pentagon refused Roberta permission to revise the manuscript, claiming that the entire text was "contaminated." By September 1960, the Pentagon ordered all copies of the manuscript destroyed and placed the printer's copy in a secured vault. "Apparently not only the public, the Army, the Navy, and the government, but even the Air Force are not permitted to read it," a frustrated Roberta recounted.<sup>16</sup>

Much to her relief, the government eventually relented. Under the conditions of release, the manuscript could contain no mention of RAND or government sponsorship and was redacted of any overt comment on lessons drawn from Pearl Harbor for defense in the nuclear age. Writing to an anonymous Pentagon official, Roberta declared that her revised manuscript contained "no reference to current or future intelligence operations. Pearl Harbor is compared to a few other cases of past military surprises and there is no reference to the essential relevance of the surprise attack to thermonuclear war (changed to 'problems today')."<sup>17</sup>

#### Surprise at Pearl Harbor

Roberta's manuscript had presumably alarmed military censors because she had revealed an uncomfortable truth they wanted kept from public view, though it was hiding in plain sight. Contrary to received wisdom, Roberta's study of Pearl Harbor rejected interpretations of the debacle as the result either of incompetence or of pernicious motives. Mainstream assessments of the attack concluded that if errors borne out of stupidity or dereliction of duty had been rectified, the nation might have avoided Pearl Harbor. Roberta, by contrast, maintained that the singular focus on the failure of the human element deflected attention from the larger issue. "There were of course many errors, and some unintelligent ones, both in Washington and in the theater." However, a dispassionate examination suggested "the disaster occurred in spite of the many

men . . . who were above the ordinary in ability and dedication."<sup>18</sup> The source of anxiety among her censors had to do with the doubt she cast over contemporary warning systems in general. "It can happen again," she wrote. "If we rely on the simple-minded belief that an intelligent decision-maker" could supersede the type of cognitive pathologies that had produced that day of infamy.<sup>19</sup> "Today, more than in 1941, preparations for a surprise attack can be well concealed." As such, no nation could rely on its intelligence services for security and protection against surprise attacks.<sup>20</sup>

The main concept that Mrs. Wohlstetter brings to bear on these events," Warner Schilling noted in his perceptive review of the book, is that "the pictures of the world that government officials build from intelligence . . . are not so much a matter of the 'facts' their sources make available as they are a function of the 'theories' about politics already in their minds which guide both their recognition and their interpretation of said 'facts.'"<sup>21</sup> Displaying an almost postmodern flair, she had deflected attention away from the quality of the message—intelligence data available prior to the attack—to the mode of its reception.

It was only from the illusory vantage point of hindsight, Roberta wrote, that the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor appeared to be an anomalous event. Even though her research was based on unclassified documents, Roberta pasted together a detailed picture of precise, albeit fragmentary flows of intelligence on the eve of the attack. Disconnected slivers of evidence on Japanese intentions abounded. A mercurial intelligence services had broken the Japanese diplomatic code (known as "Magic"), and enjoyed almost unrestricted access to diplomatic traffic between Tokyo and major Japanese embassies. The U.S. ambassador in Tokyo offered prescient assessments and intelligence information, including at least one specific warning—albeit from a less than compelling source—on the impending attack in Pearl Harbor. Navy signal intelligence units pieced together important insights on Japanese naval intentions. Foreign intelligence agencies provided fragments of information, as did the many unclassified mass media reports emanating from Japan. Even the Japanese press, "rife with explicit signals of aggressive intent," was proclaiming "the Japanese government's determination to pursue its program of expansion into Southeast Asia."<sup>22</sup> With Magic deciphered, U.S. authorities were fully apprised of the November cutoff dates for negotiations, as well as of the "entire substance of the Japanese demands

and concessions. All that we lacked was the date . . . a precise list of targets, and—most important—an ability to estimate correctly Japanese desperation and daring."<sup>23</sup> The United States, Roberta argued, enjoyed the luxury of unprecedented, detailed information on enemy designs.

Given this wealth of data, the complete surprise at Pearl Harbor struck many commentators as difficult to believe, if not outright suspicious. Roberta summarily dismissed rumors of a warmongering conspiracy to delete crucial intelligence information in order to draw the United States into a then-unpopular war. She rejected, as well, attempts to impugn both military and civilian authorities for dereliction of duty. Instead, she offered a cogent explanation for the surprise attack as the result of an unmanageable—and chronic—confluence of technical, managerial, and cognitive failings, a perfect storm that would surely happen again.

Roberta cautioned that historical inquests were conducted from the vantage point of retrospection, where circumstances and outcomes were deceptively clear. When dissected after the fact, the distinction between pertinent signals and distracting "noise"—the term she used to describe competing and contradictory information—appears to be misleadingly obvious; hindsight consistently and inevitably distorts retrospective judgment and identifies clarity where it never existed. At the time, however, the many relevant signals and their significance were imbedded in a "buzzing and blooming confusion" of contradictory data that in retrospect—and only after the fact—turned out to be irrelevant or actually deceptive.<sup>24</sup>

At Pearl Harbor, the nuisance factor of intelligence "noise" was somewhat more complex than "the natural clatter of useless information and competing signals" accompanying any type of intelligence enterprise.<sup>25</sup> In the heat of battle, Roberta's admiring disciples explained, "noise" has always prevailed over 'signals,' inertia over openness, and wishful thinking over realism."<sup>26</sup> Deception—self-induced or deliberately spread by the enemy—was almost inevitable; "there is actually no difference between 'signals' and 'noise'—except in retrospect." Edward Luttwak claimed in his Roberta-inspired analysis of another intelligence misreading of surprise attacks. In the heat of battle, true and false data were indistinguishable; "in a deeper sense, all strategic warning data is

'noise,'" as all information is both confusing and illuminating at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

Roberta identified a host of other factors contributing to this instance of monumental strategic surprise. Multiple false alarms preceded the actual attack on Pearl Harbor, which, for obvious human reasons, lowered the threshold of alertness within the government and military on the eve of the event. This lull in attentiveness in the Pacific was further exacerbated as Washington's focus was elsewhere. "The most important single thing to note about our government in the last weeks before Pearl Harbor," Roberta observed, "is the enormous absorption of almost everyone in the Atlantic and European battle areas." The lack of attention paid to Japanese actions was not, then, due to "deliberate deafness or conspiratorial silence," but resulted, rather, from an overwhelming concern with developments in Europe. "Japanese aggression was a constant threat, of course, demanding careful diplomatic attention to prevent war on two fronts; but compared to Germany's war machine, the menace of Japan seemed more remote and manageable."<sup>28</sup>

Heuristic American conceptual frameworks about enemy objectives and capabilities contributed to the confusion. Most U.S. officials agreed with Winston Churchill that Japan would not confront the Pacific powers prior to the weakening of Allied military might. Though some feared an attack on American bases in the Philippines, no one expected a Japanese attack on the United States so long as the Japanese were unable to annihilate Britain's Pacific bases.<sup>29</sup> Despite some misgivings concerning the clustering of an entire fleet in close quarters, the U.S. Pacific Fleet seemed to be a highly improbable target for a Japanese attack. According to standard American military doctrine, the fleet's powerful presence in Pearl Harbor was the ultimate deterrent. For the Japanese, however, the array of sitting ducks spread across the harbor offered an irresistible target. In the eyes of Japanese strategists, one well-planned mission would incapacitate America's major military apparatus in the Pacific while dealing a tremendous blow to American morale and prestige.

Yet for all its military brilliance, Roberta claimed, the Japanese decision to attack had been reached with no meaningful debate on its political ramifications. The evidence that she had at her disposal indicated that "the Japanese decision to go to war with the United States was not clearly faced, but rather accepted as the lesser of two evils."<sup>30</sup> Japanese

officials had acted out of political compromise and without any meaningful analysis of alternatives. Strategic considerations appeared to take a backseat to wishful political thinking. Had the Japanese truly thought through the ramifications of the Pearl Harbor attack, they would surely have anticipated its dire results. "It gives one pause to contemplate how slightly the future acted as a curb," Roberta ruminated. "With all the necessary economic and military data to predict their own defeat, the Japanese never seriously considered restraint in the pursuit of territorial expansion, with which they identified 'national honor.'"31

While American decision makers may have been somewhat unimaginative in forecasting the moves of their Asian enemy, the Japanese were spectacularly flippant in their assessments of American reactions to the attack. "Most unreal was their assumption that the United States, with ten times the military potential and a reputation for waging war until unconditional victory, would . . . simply accept the annihilation of a considerable part of its air and naval forces and the whole of its power in the Far East."<sup>32</sup> Here, then, lay one of Roberta's most important insights. Both American defenders and Japanese aggressors had allowed their preferred reaction of the enemy to inform their military strategy; both the Americans and the Japanese were quite unwilling to entertain the idea that their respective enemies would opt for strategies that differed from their own constructions. They therefore failed to prepare for contingencies.

The most meaningful insight from Pearl Harbor, Roberta concluded, was that fundamental lacunae in the human psyche, rather than individual lapses in judgment, were responsible for the surprise. Inherent cognitive flaws and self-deceptions were the most formidable enemies of all. Having decided beforehand that the Japanese would most probably carry out their major naval offensive elsewhere, the Americans either misinterpreted or ignored information to the contrary. Warnings that conflicted with well-entrenched beliefs, Roberta explained, would always be ambiguous, if not deceptive, even without elaborate deception on the part of an enemy.

Even when warning signals were strong and unambiguous, the Pearl Harbor debacle proved they could still be garbled when interpreted through the prism of preconceptions. General Douglas MacArthur received word that Pearl Harbor had been attacked about ten hours before Japanese forces struck and destroyed the entire air force under his com-

mand in the Philippines.<sup>33</sup> American forces in the Philippines had still not expected a second wave to hit them, and as such decided against any significant defensive maneuver. The signals were clear, but MacArthur ignored them because they clashed with American presumptions that ignored the flight zones of Japan's fighter aircrafts and the military concerning the Japanese adversary. "There is a difference, then," Roberta skill of the Japanese adversary. "Between having a signal available somewhere in the heap of insisted, "between having a signal available somewhere in the heap of irrelevancies, and perceiving it as a warning." Imbued with the lessons of *Hamlet* she had formulated at Radcliffe, she added that "there is also a difference between perceiving it as a warning, and acting or getting action on it."<sup>34</sup>

As for reforms in intelligence sharing and national security assessment, Roberta placed only perfunctory faith in reorganization. Given the fundamental perceptual barriers that kept analysts from anticipating Pearl Harbor, no structural reform could eliminate the danger of further strategic surprises. Pearl Harbor was neither an "isolated catastrophe" nor the result of a particular instance of "negligence, or stupidity, or treachery." Quite the contrary: "honest, dedicated, and intelligent men" had failed to discern enemy intentions because of chronic failures "conditions of human perception" and "uncertainties so basic that they are not likely to be eliminated, though they might be reduced."<sup>35</sup>

Human nature, Roberta explained, was ill equipped to deal with departures from well-entrenched preconceptions. The clients of any intelligence apparatus tend to react on a scale between extreme reluctance and indolence when confronted with information that conflicts with existing arrangements of institutional resources, attention, and commitment. "A warning signal," she pointed out, "is not likely to be heard if its occurrence is regarded as so improbable that no one is listening."<sup>36</sup>

The inherent difficulty of grasping how the future might differ from the past, in addition to the very human tendency to confuse expectations with wishful thinking, would always trump intelligence warnings. At Pearl Harbor, an entrenched belief that geography endowed the United States with immunity from surprise attacks blunted the resonance of all conflicting information. "Human attention is directed by beliefs as to what is likely to occur, and one cannot always listen for the right sound," she observed.<sup>37</sup> As Stephen Chan explains, in his analysis of Roberta's insights, radical departures from a paradigm, or challenges to ingrained "routines or interests" that entail the "reallocation of decision makers'



Roberta Morgan Wohlstetter, 1963. Photograph by Bruce H. Cox. Originally published in "Woman of the Year: Trouble Shooter Aims High," January 15, 1964, *Los Angeles Times*.

time, resources, and attention," invariably invoke extreme resistance rather than sudden awakening.<sup>38</sup>

#### Recurring Pearl Harbors

Roberta's analysis was by no means limited in time and space to Pearl Harbor. The past, she implied, was of little use if it did not provide a glimpse of the future. Her writing suggests little patience with interpretations of past events as *sui generis*. The significance of Pearl Harbor was too great to be left to pedantic documentarians. She was pursuing a usable past, the representation of a historical incident as an explanatory device for comprehending contemporary reality and future challenges.

The primary, practical lesson of Roberta's Pearl Harbor, therefore, was that the United States should invest in rapid and aggressive means for responding to surprise attacks. Given the fundamental human incapacity to anticipate the unfamiliar, Pearl Harbor was bound to happen again. She offered the example of Harvey DeWeerd's RAND study on strategic surprise in the Korean War as the ultimate proof of her prediction that no amount of structural reform would preclude a repeat occurrence.<sup>39</sup>

Released for public distribution at about the same time as Roberta's study, this RAND report documented in painful, familiar detail a return

of American self-deception at crucial junctures of the Korean War. Despite mechanisms for intelligence sharing and analysis, and irrespective of overwhelming intelligence on the likelihood of a North Korean invasion, both the intelligence community and the National Security Council had consistently misread the signals. In a moment of supreme candor, General Douglas MacArthur explained that the unanticipated North Korean invasion was not the result of conflicting or weak intelligence. "No man or group of men could predict the North Korean attack 'any more than you could predict such an attack as took place at Pearl Harbor.'"<sup>40</sup> The misinterpretation of relevant intelligence was "preconditioned by the official belief that any war in the 1950 time period would be an all-out affair involving the Soviet Union," and that, at the very most, South Korea would suffer a North Korean inspired campaign of political subversion.<sup>41</sup>

China's intervention in the Korean War presented yet another depressingly familiar example of the overwhelming power of preconception over reality. Civilian and military authorities, including MacArthur (who should have known better, given his experiences in World War II), disregarded the "convincing picture" of Chinese intentions and capabilities.<sup>42</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson explained that despite intelligence information to the contrary, the United States believed that there would be no Chinese intervention in the war. According to American intelligence assessments, the massive commitment of troops to such an action was unlikely, owing to Chinese fears of destabilizing its border areas. China had no real interest in such a conflict, and, barring a decision by the Soviet Union to "precipitate a global war, Chinese intervention in Korea was 'improbable.'"<sup>43</sup> Unlike Pearl Harbor, there were no conflicting intelligence reports. According to MacArthur, "we refused to believe what our intelligence told us was in fact happening because it was at variance with the prevailing climate of opinion in Washington and Tokyo."<sup>44</sup>

As far as the postwar years were concerned, Roberta predicted that any future surprise attack would have far more lethal consequences than Pearl Harbor, the Korean War, or any other attack from the annals of conventional warfare. "There have been many attempts in recent years to cheer us with the thought that the H-bomb has so outmoded general war" that it had rendered the study of surprise attacks irrelevant.



Contrary to such self-deluding expectations, she noted, the perceived benefits of surprise "have increased enormously and the penalties for losing the initiative in an all-out war have grown correspondingly."<sup>45</sup>

Without mentioning the Soviet Union by name, though in an apparent violation of the censorship guidelines she had accepted, Roberta explained that a contemporary aggressor did not have to hide massive troop maneuvers in order to achieve surprise. "An all-out thermonuclear attack on a Western power" would probably be launched by air, and vital, precious time "would surely have to pass before that power's allies could understand the nature of the event and take appropriate action."<sup>46</sup> The delivery of a single projectile would far surpass the type of limited strategic damage associated with past, pre-nuclear surprise attacks. One stealthy surprise blow, launched from a great distance with little involvement of auxiliary troops, might annihilate an adversary's entire war-making capabilities.

Surprise attacks offered an unambiguous advantage to the aggressor: "In spite of the vast increase in expenditures for collecting and analyzing intelligence data . . . the balance of advantage seems clearly to have shifted since Pearl Harbor in favor of a surprise attacker."<sup>47</sup>

For all of the reasons enumerated in her Pearl Harbor study—the distraction of conflicting signals, interservice rivalries, and human fallibility—Roberta asserted that no society seeking protection from aggressive predators could expect impenetrable security or infallible knowledge of enemy intentions.<sup>48</sup> "At the time of Pearl Harbor, the circumstances of collection in the sense of access to a huge variety of data were . . . ideal," she argued. "If our intelligence system and all our other channels of information failed to produce an accurate image of Japanese intentions and capabilities, it was not for want of the relevant materials."<sup>49</sup>

Roberta urged her readers to comprehend the "one major practical lesson" that emerged from her autopsy of Pearl Harbor. "Since we cannot rely on strategic warning," she warned, "our defenses . . . must be designed to function without it."<sup>50</sup> Instead of the futile search for invulnerability and safety through intelligence, Roberta advocated using imaginative strategies to protect against the unimaginable, although she offered no details. Surprise was inevitable, Roberta maintained, even under the best of circumstances, when policy makers enjoyed picture-perfect intelligence. "We have to accept the fact of

uncertainty and learn to live with it. No magic, in code or otherwise, will provide certainty."<sup>51</sup>

### *Orthodoxy and Revisionism*

Roberta's influential book spurred a cottage industry of inquests into issues of strategic surprise. Historical studies of the successful German campaigns during World War II—the German surprise attack on Norway, Operation Barbarossa, and more—reached conclusions that reinforced Roberta's analysis.<sup>52</sup> She was, in many ways, the inspiration for an entire paradigm of strategic studies, sometimes dismissed by its detractors as the "orthodox school" of surprise attacks.<sup>53</sup> Aficionados of this school offered hope for circumventing cognitive obstacles by minimizing the human hand in intelligence operations. Significant aspects of analysis, they explained, could be transferred to computers where mathematical probabilities, rather than subjectivity or intuition, would offer an important corrective to intelligence assessments.

Even though they accepted Roberta's discouraging insights on human cognition, proponents of the orthodox school did not dismiss reforms of the human and organizational elements. They proposed a solid middle ground between the Byzantine compartmentalization of intelligence services that had prevailed on the eve of Pearl Harbor and a converse monopolistic intelligence structure. Roberta's study had demonstrated the shortcomings of compartmentalized intelligence operations. Centralization, however, was equally daunting as it produced unchallenged appraisals of enemy intents and designs. The Israeli intelligence apparatus on the eve of the Yom Kippur War offered a prime example of the failure of monopoly.<sup>54</sup>

Not everyone accepted Roberta's thesis on intelligence and surprise.<sup>55</sup> Critics questioned her premise of Pearl Harbor as the archetype for surprise attacks. Ariel Levite's revisionist study of the December 7 attack suggests that, contrary to Roberta's assertion, Pearl Harbor did not even qualify as an example of strategic surprise. Pearl Harbor was not the result of faulty analysis but, instead, was the quintessential example of a lack of intelligence data. Brushing aside Roberta's examples of incriminating data that accumulated on the tables of intelligence analysts, Levite argued that the United States had been unprepared for, rather than surprised by, Pearl Harbor. Orthodox studies of surprise, including

Roberta's work, had erroneously lumped together unpreparedness, a function of a lack of pertinent information, with the notion of surprise, the misreading of available information pointing toward the obvious existence of a clear and present danger. In the case of Pearl Harbor, Levite claimed, Roberta had grossly overstated the case for surprise. Had she moved beyond her very limited sources, she would have discovered that pivotal points of her argumentation fell apart.

Levite and others questioned Roberta's claim that on the eve of the attack the United States had squandered a veritable treasure trove of warning signals on Japan's intentions. He offered evidence that the United States had not actually deciphered any key messages on an imminent attack prior to the actual Japanese onslaught. Magic had revealed major concepts of Japan's negotiating strategy, but it offered no "information of operational value on the Japanese armed forces."<sup>56</sup> Magic's information on diplomatic maneuvering was partial at best. The timetable for severing diplomatic relations passed through Magic only a couple of hours before the actual attack on Pearl Harbor. "Even the last, and probably also the most revealing Magic message . . . indicated no more than that the Japanese were planning a formal suspension of the negotiations with the United States for December 7, 1941."<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to its partial success in deciphering diplomatic traffic, the United States had made only modest dents in military channels of information. A breakthrough in cracking Japanese naval codes occurred about a week after Pearl Harbor. The paucity of information from signal intelligence was compounded by weak human intelligence. By his own admission, the senior American emissary in Tokyo, Joseph Grew, had no access whatsoever to privileged sources. The informant who had identified Pearl Harbor target to Ambassador Grew turned out to be an imaginative cook in the staff at the Peruvian embassy in Tokyo. Though accidentally prescient in retrospect, Grew's comments, by his own admission, were merely ruminations unsupported by evidence.

In other words, Levite showed, Pearl Harbor was the opposite of what Roberta thought: it was "essentially a failure of collection, not of analysis."<sup>58</sup> A series of financial, political, and administrative obstacles had hampered efforts to collect data on Japanese intentions. These included Victorian sensibilities concerning the morality of eavesdropping, a lag in the deciphering techniques of encoded messages, and an economically driven decision to focus intelligence efforts on the European front. The

snippets of intelligence pointing toward Pearl Harbor were fragmentary, unreliable, and scattered. Pearl Harbor was, therefore, an extraordinarily poor example of the ineffectiveness of intelligence warnings in staving off surprise attacks. "The number of warnings received by the United States prior to December 7, 1941, keeps on growing and like a fine wine, so does their quality seem to improve" in the hands of historians and policy makers driven by ulterior motives.<sup>59</sup>

Levite and others rejected Roberta's policy recommendations, as well. Her grim prognosis posited surprise attacks as inevitable unless the price for such attacks was raised to intolerable levels. Despite the censorship that had truncated her study, she implicitly, but quite clearly, argued for a significant buildup in military might as the only realistic tool to dissuade an enemy from a surprise attack. And yet, Levite contended, "undue pessimism is no less dangerous as a policy guide than unwarranted optimism. While the latter inspires over-confidence and complacency, the former breeds either fatalism and apathy or worst-case analysis and overreaction—neither of which is conducive to national and international security."<sup>60</sup>

As for the lessons of history accompanying Roberta's study, her own analysis partially undermined her advocacy of deterrence and retaliatory forces as the best possible mechanism for discouraging surprise attacks. The presence of the Pacific fleet in Hawaii was supposed to have been a deterrent against Japanese aggression. The Japanese, by contrast, interpreted the presence of the fleet as a clear and present danger to its existential ambitions, a threat that demanded an immediate response. One person's deterrent is another person's target.

Critics pointed out that in contrast to Roberta's impeccable analysis of the events surrounding surprise at Pearl Harbor, her presentation of Pearl Harbor look-alikes was surprisingly shallow. In fact, Roberta's sweeping prediction of continuing vulnerability to surprise attacks was based on a singular incident in Korea. Aside from a glancing footnote at the Korean War, she did not muster any other analysis of surprise attacks to bolster her far-reaching conclusions. She dedicated no more than a page to some casual observations on other surprise attacks.<sup>61</sup>

Using a larger sample, a perceptive Robert Jervis reached flatly contradictory conclusions. Jervis contended that when viewed in a comparative historical context, surprise attacks were relatively rare. Intelligence apparently worked. In fact, most deterrence strategies against surprise



attacks had dangerous, unintended consequences, as they were liable to be misread as threats. "There seem to be more cases of statesmen incorrectly believing others are planning major acts against their interest than of statesmen being lulled by a potential aggressor."<sup>62</sup>

Critics charged that Roberta with "over-representation of intelligence failures," though intelligence successes offered valuable comparative perspective.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Roberta stood accused of pronouncing "strategic surprise as the progenitor of disaster." In actual fact, as Levite asserted, the most salient modern examples of strategic surprise suggested that the most initiators of surprise attacks—Germany, Japan, North Korea, Egypt, Syria, and Argentina—were ultimately defeated.<sup>64</sup>

Roberta's *Pearl Harbor* struck Michael Howard as a somewhat flawed use of history. The quest for a usable past was a dubious enterprise at best. Analysis of the past was not a scientific venture in the classic sense. Historical events were, contrary to Roberta's sweeping declarations, sui generis. Ignoring the uniqueness of the past in the quest for meaningful lessons for the future led to an exaggerated influence of the historian's worldview. Extracting lessons from history tended to be subjective, more reflective of the historian's own mind-set than some grand discovery of design and purpose.<sup>65</sup>

Yet even if one accepted the notion of a usable past, Pearl Harbor offered poor material for such an exercise. The attack was indeed the most immediate and familiar example of surprise, but it was precisely for these reasons that its relevance was highly questionable. The analysis of recent events was the most treacherous enterprise of all; sources are usually incomplete and slanted by selective access to evidence. In Roberta's case, she had based her study on unclassified material only. Context is often blurred by temporal proximity; relevant data rush by unnoticed. Moreover, critics held that familiarity breeds contempt for profundity. Intimate knowledge is often mistaken for expert knowledge; such knowledge, in turn, becomes massively oversimplified.

Roberta's study did indeed omit information that may have compromised the cause of RAND's Strategic Air Command (SAC) clients. To begin with, she left out the political context of the Japanese attack. She had claimed that the decision to attack Pearl Harbor made no geographic sense, and that ulterior political and psychological reasons were the main motivating forces: motives of saving face and national pride, or internal power struggles. Her critics argued that, from the point of view

of the Japanese leadership, the attack on Pearl Harbor was a geopolitical and military necessity. The attack, in Michael Howard's view, "was part of a desperate attempt by Japan to escape from the choice imposed on her by the American embargo of July 24, 1941, between economic strangulation and capitulation to the American demand that she should renounce her entire policy in East Asia."<sup>66</sup> Bernard Brodie, the Wohlstetters' RAND colleague and rival, claimed that the type of deterrent steps the Wohlstetters advocated were, in fact, counterproductive. Pearl Harbor suggested that a military buildup as a deterrent mechanism had the potential to induce desperation and provoke an enemy to "fear us too much."<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Roberta had glossed over an important lesson for would-be aggressors. As far as Japan's strategic objectives were concerned, Pearl Harbor had been a fantastically unsuccessful operation. Despite the admirable execution of the attack, Japan had failed to accomplish any of its major goals. Unbeknownst to the Japanese, the prime targets of the American armada were absent from Pearl Harbor on December 7. In addition, American retaliatory capacity had far exceeded the worst-case scenarios envisioned by the Japanese.

Whatever weaknesses plagued American intelligence operations on the eve of the attack, the most spectacular failure of this formative crisis belonged to the Japanese, in particular, and, by implication, to any potential attacker. The Japanese had failed to assess the ability of the United States to regroup and ultimately retaliate. As such, Pearl Harbor's most significant intelligence failure belonged to the Japanese aggressor.

Unanticipated consequences and surprise worked both ways. While even the most efficient intelligence apparatus could not provide airtight guarantees against surprise attacks, Pearl Harbor suggested that aggressors would face equally challenging intelligence lacunae. An enemy could never hope to have a "sufficiently complete picture of our state of readiness and retaliatory capacity to make a surprise attack a rational course of action." If anything, the uncertainty confounding a would-be aggressor, Michael Howard argued, had "increased a thousandfold since 1941."<sup>68</sup>

In sum, Roberta's critics held that Pearl Harbor appeared first and foremost to indicate the *futility* of surprise attacks. An almost flawless execution ultimately succumbed to a misreading of the American response. Rather than a limping, demoralized post-Pearl Harbor enemy,

Japan confronted a galvanized American public and a reenergized war machine of unprecedented consequences.

Roberta's implication that strong nuclear deployments were the only meaningful manner to deter future surprise attacks struck an otherwise admiring Werner Schilling as wrongheaded. Actual political behavior in wartime situations suggested to him that the "quality of destruction" of thermonuclear war would not function as a deterrent to surprise attacks. Echoing Herman Kahn's horrific thermonuclear war scenarios, Schilling assumed that strategic choice would always be driven by "reference to relative rather than absolute costs (better World War III now than later)."<sup>69</sup> Under the best of circumstances, "even a peaceful and conscientious leader can frequently do no better than be guided by the crude speculation that the costs of war now will be less than the costs of war later."<sup>70</sup>

Contrary to Roberta, Schilling feared that a deterrent mechanism might morph with alacrity into something significantly unstable. A porous line barely separated deterrent retaliatory capability from preemptive force. "Think how much more damage could be avoided" by a successful first strike, Schilling's imaginary policy maker might think to himself.<sup>71</sup> By Roberta's own account, one could not rely on rational cost-benefit analysis as the ultimate deterrent. She had assigned the seemingly irrational Japanese choice to launch their strike to a particular and extraordinary case of "fuzziness," the result of unclear divisions of power between Japanese military and civilian authorities, as well as of "the mysteries of Japanese logic." Schilling disagreed. "It is the character of such choices to be fuzzy" and unpredictable, irrespective of the cultural idiosyncrasies of particular nations.<sup>72</sup> If anything, the Japanese decision-making process suggested that rationality was in the eyes of the subjective beholder.

### *The Psychology of Surprises*

*Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* resonated in the halls of power. Roberta's observations on the nature of surprise attacks became a recurring motif among policy makers. Despite its shortcomings, her book entered a select list of compulsory reading for administration officials during the Cold War, and then again following 9/11, when the irreparable harm of surprise attacks became, once again, painfully evident.

Roberta's academic fortunes, by contrast, were decidedly different. Originally hailed as a foundational text, her study of surprise at Pearl Harbor slowly receded into the underworld of footnotes and then passed into silence. Richard Betts's well-received *Surprise Attack* (1980) dismissed Roberta with the faint praise of two perfunctory mentions.<sup>73</sup> A 1985 inquest on psychology, surprise attacks, and deterrence, compiled by the luminaries of political psychology, was equally taciturn; Roberta's work was conspicuously absent, as was the Pearl Harbor example. A perusal of the index of this collection reveals no mention of the Wohlstetters, while Pearl Harbor warranted only two glancing footnotes.<sup>74</sup>

One can only surmise the reasons for her study's waning academic fortunes. To begin with, Roberta's methodology might have appeared somewhat precious by the 1980s. Roberta's style of copious, blow-by-blow details may have appeared too factual and not theoretical enough. Her conventional empirical investigation, bogged down in the weeds of conflicting accounts and interpretations of motivation, appeared frozen in time, perhaps irrelevant to contemporary challenges. Left unsaid, but presumably not forgotten, was the taint of a RAND imprimatur, a study beholden to its military funders, who would leverage it to seek massive funding in anticipation of the next surprise attack, this time with nuclear weapons. Her study lacked the trappings of objectivity that were enshrined, albeit selectively, within political science and its offshoots. Reflecting on historical scholarship on the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Roger Dingman explained that "despite its scholarly dissection of the intricacies of intelligence gathering and evaluation," Roberta's book "was more a tract for Cold War times than an analysis of Japan's misdeeds."<sup>75</sup> In other words, her book was now a period piece: not without value but nevertheless quite distant from cutting-edge scholarship.

To be fair, a RAND study in the 1950s could hardly have been expected to produce a balanced account on the variety of threats facing the nation. Thermonuclear challenges emanating from powerful nation-states furnished the *raison d'être* of RAND's patrons in the Air Force in general, and in SAC in particular. As far as SAC in the 1950s was concerned, massive surprise attacks launched by competing nation-states were the only potential military threat facing the nation. The only meaningful preparation for them, therefore, was to create a good scholarly rationale for thermonuclear deterrence—a second-strike airborne capability that would survive a nuclear Pearl Harbor.

The core problem of Roberta's study lay in insisting on the relevance of an historic event to future warfare. Roberta had dismissed the opinions of some of her RAND colleagues who believed that the waging of war between two titans had been rendered obsolete by the nuclear revolution. Most often identified with the early writings of Bernard Brodie, this school of thought claimed that, with the advent of nuclear weapons, conventional military thought had reached a point of paradigmatic crisis.<sup>76</sup> Any notion of war between nuclear armed nation-states, Brodie argued, ran the risk of negating "the principle of life itself," in George Kennan's phrase.<sup>77</sup> Brodie cautioned against the fatal and existential error of initiating, or planning to initiate, the employment of atomic weapons, and instead counseled the development of *détente* with the nation's enemies, based on mutual restraint and the recognition of common existential vulnerability.

As Chapter 3 demonstrates, Albert Wohlstetter embraced Roberta's central assumptions on the imminence of the next great surprise attack and its cyclical recurrence. The lesson of Pearl Harbor for the thermo-nuclear age was to eliminate the temptation of an enemy first strike by providing adequate defensive shelter and the removal of the countervailing forces from immediate enemy striking range. Such moves would prove adequate only if the United States could credibly and unambiguously convey that the cost of challenging its deterrent power would exceed any imaginable gains. Beginning with that belief, Albert would stake his career on advocating for a highly lethal redundancy in weapons and their delivery systems. His strategies of deterrence were all premised on the annihilating consequences of a credible second strike. Pearl Harbor, according to the Wohlstetter Doctrine, proved that wars—past and future—occurred when a potential national predator miscalculates its relative strength. Situations such as Pearl Harbor, characterized by a roughly equal balance of power, increase the likelihood of miscalculation and heighten the probability of aggression.

Following in Roberta's footsteps, Albert would reject the reliance on intelligence warnings. Given the recurring failures in anticipating enemy notions of vulnerability, the only viable strategy to obtain security was to avoid divinations of the enemy's psyche and create, instead, an unambiguous and existential deterrent threat. At Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet had failed to convey an unequivocal signal of deterrence. This sedentary and exposed target had in fact conveyed vulnerability; it

had not been clear and lethal enough to discourage an enemy attack. By the same token, nuclear deterrence, if pursued weakly and fitfully, would inevitably aggravate insecurity in the anarchic world system. By contrast, a well-protected and aggressive module of deterrence would strike fear in the hearts of even the most predatory opponents. Preparation for a Roberta-inspired Pearl Harbor in the nuclear age would become Albert's main claim to fame.

### *Pearl Harbor in Reverse*

Unbeknownst to the Wohlstetters, the historical trauma of Pearl Harbor took on a life of its own, producing unanticipated results in policy circles to which neither Roberta nor Albert were privy. The motif of Pearl Harbor—seen through the lens of the Kennedy administration—played a major role in the Cuban missile crisis, by all accounts the critical, existential moment of the Cold War. The manner in which Pearl Harbor affected the crisis circumvented, if not ignored, Roberta's analysis.

Roberta and Albert played a peripheral role during those fateful days in October 1962. Still employed at RAND, the Wohlstetters were assigned to write position papers in the Quarantine Committees, one of the several advisory panels delivering insight to those who sat with President Kennedy and his advisers in the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (the ExComm). The record of the Wohlstetters' participation is sparse. "I was naturally included as a valued advisor, sort of a junior version of Acheson at that level," Albert reported, not elaborating on Roberta's role.<sup>78</sup> A subset of the Wohlstetters' recommendations was published later in a RAND paper. While obviously not a full record of their input, their proposals amount to nothing more than refrains on maintaining a stiff upper lip. Apparently unaware of the actual deliberation in ExComm, they were reduced to exhorting against concessions of any kind.<sup>79</sup>

Looking back on the crisis, Albert deplored what he considered a transparent instance of collateral damage suffered by the United States. These thirteen days in October had eroded the resolve of the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, beyond repair. Albert contemptuously lashed out at his allegedly weak-kneed interpretations of those tense days. The "quite extraordinary" McNamara he had admired before the missile crisis had emerged from the ExComm lacking confidence in the

ability of the Great Powers to engage in a controlled conflict. Albert appeared astounded by the fact that he had rejected—or perhaps never read—the Wohlstetters' position paper on "Controlling Risks in Cuba." "McNamara and most of the principals," Albert wrote, "really thought they were practically on the edge of war" and that war—once it transpired—could not be controlled and contained from spiraling into a full-blown nuclear clash.<sup>80</sup>

From his vantage point of sheer ignorance, Albert found that position ludicrous. Much to Albert's chagrin, the missile crisis led the secretary of defense away from the elaborate plotting of graduated response, second strikes, and controlled nuclear warfare to the much-maligned strategy of M.A.D. McNamara had "moved towards Deterrence-only, which is deterring without intending to do so," abandoning in the process the Wohlstetter position of "assuring an adversary that not only could you retaliate, but you would retaliate."<sup>81</sup> McNamara and all the other paper tigers surrounding the president had lost their nerve, thereby jeopardizing the strategic outcome of the crisis. By Albert's account, the secretary of defense had emerged from the ExComm determined to snatch defeat from this manifest victory.

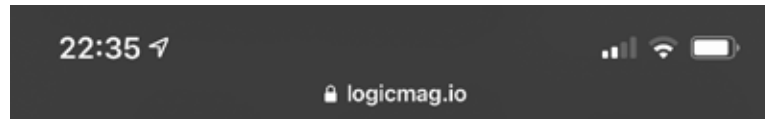
Albert was unaware that a rogue interpretation of Pearl Harbor had played a significant role in the Kennedy administration's sudden loss of interest in a military option. The secretly recorded tapes of the ExComm, released in 1997, reveal stiff resistance to the very concept of controlled escalation with a nuclear adversary, and a growing fear that any type of warfare would almost certainly deteriorate into a nuclear exchange. In response to those members of the ExComm who advocated a swift first strike against the missile sites, a cohort of advisers pushed back, defining a first strike as "a Pearl Harbor in reverse." Bobby Kennedy, Under Secretary of State George Ball, and CIA Director John McCone, as well as McNamara, had persuaded the president that any form of first strike against the missile sites would be morally analogous to the Japanese surprise attack—a venal, immoral act that would erode allied support for the American position.<sup>82</sup> As had been the case at Pearl Harbor, there was, as well, no certainty that such a strike could indeed wipe out all its targets, or deter a Soviet counterattack. The very idea of a surprise attack would turn allies against the United States.

Based, in part, on this argument, the ExComm rejected strategies of bellicose threats and actual acts of war, preferring instead to forge a se-

cret agreement to remove American missiles in Turkey in exchange for the dismantling of the sites in Cuba. During those thirteen days in October, the entire laundry list of controlled warfare, first and second strikes, and American willingness to engage the Soviets directly was transformed into a hollow and unworkable pipe dream that had failed the test of reality. As the historian Dominic Tierney suggests, the moral analogy of Pearl Harbor as a devious and duplicitous strategy trumped the historical Munich analogy of the need for an unflinching response to totalitarian gestures.<sup>83</sup>

Never having analyzed Pearl Harbor as a moral failing of the enemy, and without any knowledge of the ExComm's deliberations or the concessions made to the Soviets, Roberta claimed victory. She deemed the Kennedy administration's military response to the Soviet challenge an unqualified ratification of the Wohlstetter paradigm of controlled threats. "The response chosen kept to a minimum the actual contact with Russian forces, but a minimum compatible with assuring Khrushchev that we meant business: quarantine, the threat of boarding, the actual boarding of one Lebanese vessel," and, eventually, "a world-wide alert of the Strategic Air Command."<sup>84</sup> Given the Kennedy administration's history of aggressiveness toward Castro's Cuba, and certainly convinced that their theory of credible threats and graduated response had carried the day, the Wohlstetters may be forgiven for their premature victory laps. The ethical concerns of a "Pearl Harbor in reverse" and the doubts concerning their advocacy of viable graduated threats remained hidden from view. For all practical purposes, their doctrine remained intact, vindicated by the flurry of disinformation emanating from government circles in the aftermath of the missile crisis.

**Material from Anonymous, "Inside the Whale: An Interview with an Anonymous Amazonian," *Logic* 12 (December 20, 2020), <https://logicmag.io/commons/inside-the-whale-an-interview-with-an-anonymous-amazonian/>.**



focus at Amazon because the data being collected—what books people were ordering—wasn't that sensitive. It's not information most people were concerned about anybody having. We had to have a way to secure credit card information to make online transactions possible. But we outsourced that.

After AWS got started in 2006, security became a much bigger concern. Amazon realized how important it was to its most lucrative customers. These days, the company takes security extremely seriously. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find many nation states that have as sophisticated a security approach as Amazon.

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Security is mostly about making yourself a difficult target. It's like that joke where you go hiking with your friends and a bear attacks you. You don't need to be faster than the bear; you just need to be faster than your slowest friend.

**Big companies have traditionally operated their own data centers. Was it hard to make the case to them that they should move to the cloud? They might feel more secure if they're doing everything themselves.**

They might but ultimately the security

22:37



logicmag.io

became aware that I'm not nearly as secure as I thought.

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Plus, we make it easy to migrate and difficult to leave. If you have a ton of data in your data center and you want to move it to AWS but you don't want to send it over the internet, we'll send an eighteen-wheeler to you filled with hard drives, plug it into your data center with a fiber optic cable, and then drive it across the country to us after loading it up with your data.

### **What? How do you do that?**

We have a product called Snowmobile. It's a gas-guzzling truck. There are no public pictures of the inside, but it's pretty cool. It's like a modular datacenter on wheels. And customers rightly expect that if they load a truck with all their data, they want security for that truck. So there's an armed guard in it at all times.

It's a pretty easy sell. If a customer looks at that option, they say, yeah, of course I want the giant truck and the guy with a gun to move my data, not some crappy system that I develop on my own.

**Wow.**

There are also specific security services

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military?

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For the rank and file, yes. There is a concerted effort to recruit former law enforcement and military. In fact, Amazon thinks of military personnel as a diversity category and does targeted hiring. We have an internal affinity group called Warriors@Amazon for ex-military personnel, and it is by far our most successful diversity hiring group.

At the higher levels, there's a revolving door. If you're a chief procurement officer at the Pentagon, the guy who orders whatever they're buying for the military, you do that for awhile and then you go to the General Accountability Office to be a watchdog. And then after you've been a watchdog for awhile, you go to work for Amazon, where you can make half a million dollars a year selling Amazon services back to the Pentagon. And you can get it past the watchdog because you used to be the watchdog.

Amazon's not the only company that does this, obviously. Everybody does. It's the same twenty thousand people in the United States who have had jobs in the military, regulatory, and industry, all selling these things to each ~~other back and forth.~~



Material from  
Anonymous, "Nikola Tesla Cured Mark Twain's Constipation,"  
*Racing Nelly Bly*, February 14, 2015, [https://racingnelliebly.com/  
weirdscience/did-nikola-tesla-cure-mark-twains-constipation/](https://racingnelliebly.com/weirdscience/did-nikola-tesla-cure-mark-twains-constipation/).

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🔒 racingnelliebly.com — Private



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When Mark Twain complained to his friend of chronic digestive problems, Tesla reasoned that vibration could cure constipation. Twain was a trusting friend who was always up for a good time. He stood on the oscillator's platform. Tesla flipped the switch. Reportedly in less than two minutes, Mark Twain jumped from the gizmo and ran to the toilet.

The photo at the top of this post illustrates another experiment in Tesla's lab. Tesla (to the left) watches in the darkness. Twain peers into what looks like a plasma ball hovering between his hands. The photo was published to illustrate an article in *Century Magazine* in April of 1895:

*"IN Fig. 13 a most curious and weird phenomenon is illustrated. A few years ago electricians would have considered it quite remarkable, if indeed they do not now. The observer holds a loop of bare wire in his hands. The currents induced in the loop by means of the —resonating— coil over which it is held, traverse the body of the observer, and at the same time, as they pass between his bare hands, they bring two or three lamps held there to bright incandescence.*

*Strange as it may seem, these currents of a voltage one or*



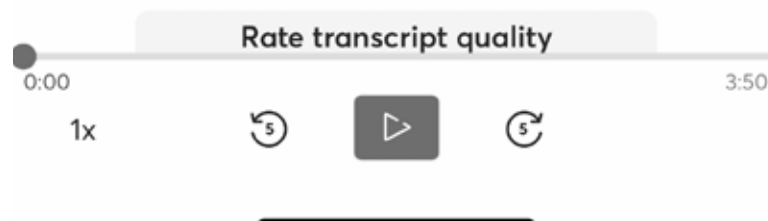
Material from

J. G. Ballard, BBC interview, 1978, reposted on Facebook February 4, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/BBCArchive/videos/1978-the-book-programme/1222500351293816/>.

20:28



between reality and fantasy was fairly clear, Carter, reality was the external world of work, industry, agriculture, was, and so on. And the fantasy was the world inside one's head, one's dreams, hopes, ambitions, and the like. But by the 50s, was added completely, everybody knows now that it completely reversed and the external world will complete fiction on every level, and it was hardly even the most trivial things, not just in terms of, say, Vietnam, transmitted as a TV war or presidential elections as huge advertising campaigns. But even something like say, you know, flying to Paris, I mean, you from London, let's say, I mean, you didn't just buy a ticket. This is true today. vendors, buy, buy, buy transportation, buy a ticket, you're buying the image of an airline, you're buying a sort of, without realizing it, you're buying sort of the sort of smiles, the host, you know, the hostesses give you any you want season ones, friends, even the weather, furnish their homes and there's a tremendous super abundance of a fiction of fantasy of every kind, no, one node of reality that's left is going to take between our temples. That's all that one kings when I suppose the hero of, of the atrocity exhibition appears in all the stories is a man who is almost overwhelmed by this super abundance of, of fictions of every kind. atrocity exhibition, in part was an attempt to try to evolve us all, a kind of system to live by. It was a sort of handbook for survival in a way that I was trying to devise the preoccupations of science fiction



**Selected by Nora Turato**


**Material from  
Christopher Beha, "Reality Check," *Harper's Magazine*, August 2020,  
<https://harpers.org/archive/2020/08/reality-check/>.**

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MAGAZINE[\[Editor's Desk\]](#)

## Reality Check

Adjust  $\pm$  =Share   By [Christopher Beha](#)

On the morning of May 26, Donald Trump posted a pair of tweets about voting by mail. “There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent,” Trump wrote. “This will be a Rigged Election.” Soon after, a monitor flagged the tweets for violating Twitter’s “civic integrity policy,” which reads, in part, “You may not use Twitter’s services for the purpose of manipulating or interfering in elections or other civic processes.” In response, Twitter appended to the tweets an unobtrusive link that read “Get the facts about mail-in ballots” and brought users to a page noting: “Trump’s claims are unsubstantiated, according to CNN, Washington Post and other fact checkers.”

Outraged by this rather mild clarification, Trump issued an executive order threatening protections contained within Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, the 1996 law that gives “interactive computer services” like Twitter immunity from legal responsibility for user-generated content. (There was a certain irony to this response, since it is precisely Twitter’s status as a “platform” rather than a “publisher” that has allowed it to host Trump’s defamatory statements with impunity.) The day after Trump issued this order, he posted a tweet calling black Americans protesting police brutality “THUGS,” adding that “when the looting starts, the shooting starts,” a threat that was judged—quite correctly—to have violated the site’s policy against glorifying or inciting violence. This time, Twitter went a step further. The company hid the tweet from view, forcing users to click through in order to read it and preventing them from replying to it. But they did not take it down, as they likely would have if any other user had posted it.

Trump has violated one or another of Twitter’s policies on a near-daily basis in the decade since he joined the site. But until now, the platform has taken a laissez-faire approach, allowing him to communicate without editorial oversight to his eighty million followers, not to mention the readers of the countless media outlets that treat his tweets as inherently newsworthy and breathlessly amplify them. So even these minor interventions represented a major policy shift, as Trump himself obviously recognized. While many users believed that the site had not gone far enough—Trump’s account should have been suspended, they said—there was a widespread belief that this was a step in the right direction. Finally, Trump’s tweets would be fact-checked.

Fact-checking is often identified as one of the features that distinguish so-called legacy publications such as *Harper’s Magazine* from the “publish first, ask questions later” world of new media. And it’s true that we consider getting things right to be an essential part of what we do. But I’m skeptical that Twitter’s apparent embrace of this ethos will amount to much. While Trump is not the first serial liar to occupy the White House, he is the most aggressively “fact-checked” president in history. The Duke Reporters’ Lab, which conducts an annual “fact-checking census,” has found that since Trump took office the number of outlets that “actively assess claims from politicians and social media” has more than doubled. Over the years, the *New York Times* has attempted to keep a “definitive list” of Trump’s lies. The *Washington Post* even encourages the public to get in on the fun, with its interactive FACT OR FICTION game, which invites readers to guess whether various Trump statements “pass the Pinocchio test.” Needless to say, none of this work has been

particularly effective in changing anyone's mind about Trump, and it's tough to see how the occasional Twitter alert about "unsubstantiated" claims will do any better.

One thing that years of work as a fact-checker teaches is the limits of what can be checked. The prevailing philosophy of Silicon Valley—not just of its social-media platforms, but of such data-driven, explainer-journalism sites as *FiveThirtyEight* and *Vox*, and of the rapidly proliferating online fact-checking projects—is a kind of positivism that treats arriving at the truth as a simple matter of data collection: the more facts we have, the closer we are to a complete picture of reality.

This philosophy has also made its way to mainstream outlets like the *Times*. When a recent op-ed by Senator Tom Cotton, headlined SEND IN THE TROOPS, caused widespread outrage both inside and outside the *Times*, the paper responded with a statement acknowledging that the op-ed "did not meet [its] standards"—because it contained a handful of factual errors. As a corrective, the *Times* committed to expanding its checking operations.

Like so many effective ideologies, this elision of information and truth persuades precisely by presenting itself as the absence of ideology, the neutral view that is laid bare once the facts are allowed to speak for themselves. But facts cannot speak for themselves. Even if they could, they could not speak all at once—the result would just be noise. The truth can't be arrived at by accumulating atomized data points, no matter how scrupulously they have been vetted. Truth requires a shared context within which the relative meaning and importance of various facts can be judged. It is this sort of context that magazines like *Harper's* seek to provide, and getting our facts straight is a necessary but not sufficient part of that work.

Social media—by design—strips this context away. On Twitter, an anguished lament about police brutality follows an absurdist riff on the distracted-boyfriend meme follows an invitation to a friend's book reading follows an engagement announcement. None of these tweets is "false," but what is the truth to which they add up?

This lack of context is what makes Trump such a natural fit for the platform. Not because he is the master of the impulsive non sequitur, but because he brings his own context—his own values and worldview—with him wherever he goes. While that context has been painfully manifest in recent weeks, he has carried it with him for his entire public life. It is the context of a man whose first appearance in a major newspaper was as a defendant in a Justice Department suit for housing discrimination against black tenants, a man whose transition from tabloid clown to commander in chief began with his championing of the birther conspiracy. Trump's supporters know that every tweet carries this context with it, but the structure of social media allows him to deny it when politically expedient. If this feels dispiriting, never fear: both the *Times* and the *Post* recently fact-checked Trump's claim to have done more for black people than any president since Lincoln, with the *Post* awarding it a rare "Four-Pinocchio" rating.

This checking obsession recently reached a kind of apotheosis after the U.S. Park Police cleared peaceful protesters from Lafayette Square, near the White House, for a Trump photo op. Protesters said the police had used tear gas against them; the government insisted it had merely used pepper spray. Luckily, the Associated Press stepped in to fact-check the matter. Is pepper spray a tear gas? It turns out this depends on whether the term was used in a "common or formal" way. This was as clear a picture as one could have of where we've arrived: the president is gassing his own people, and the media is fact-checking the gas.

TAGS

[African Americans](#) [Corrupt practices](#) [Elections](#) [Journalistic ethics](#) [Postal voting](#) [Social media](#) [Truthfulness and falsehood](#) [Twitter](#)

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## More from [Christopher Beha](#)

[Life After Trump](#)

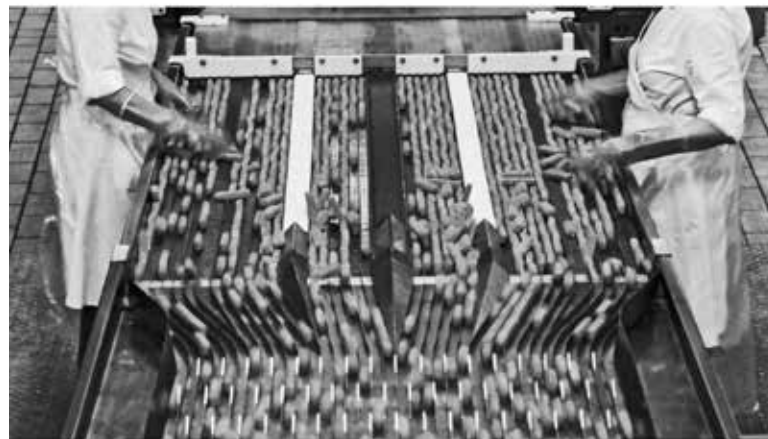
Material from Ute Eberle and *Hakai Magazine*, "Fish Sticks Make No Sense," *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2021/04/fish-sticks-make-no-sense/618685/>.



## Fish Sticks Make No Sense

How a weird 1950s finger food made it big

UTE EBERLE AND HAKAI MAGAZINE 9:00 AM ET



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There are many curious facts about fish sticks. The invention of this frozen food warranted a U.S. patent number, for instance: US2724651A. The record number of them stacked into a tower is 74. And, every year, a factory in Germany reportedly produces enough fish sticks to circle Earth four times.

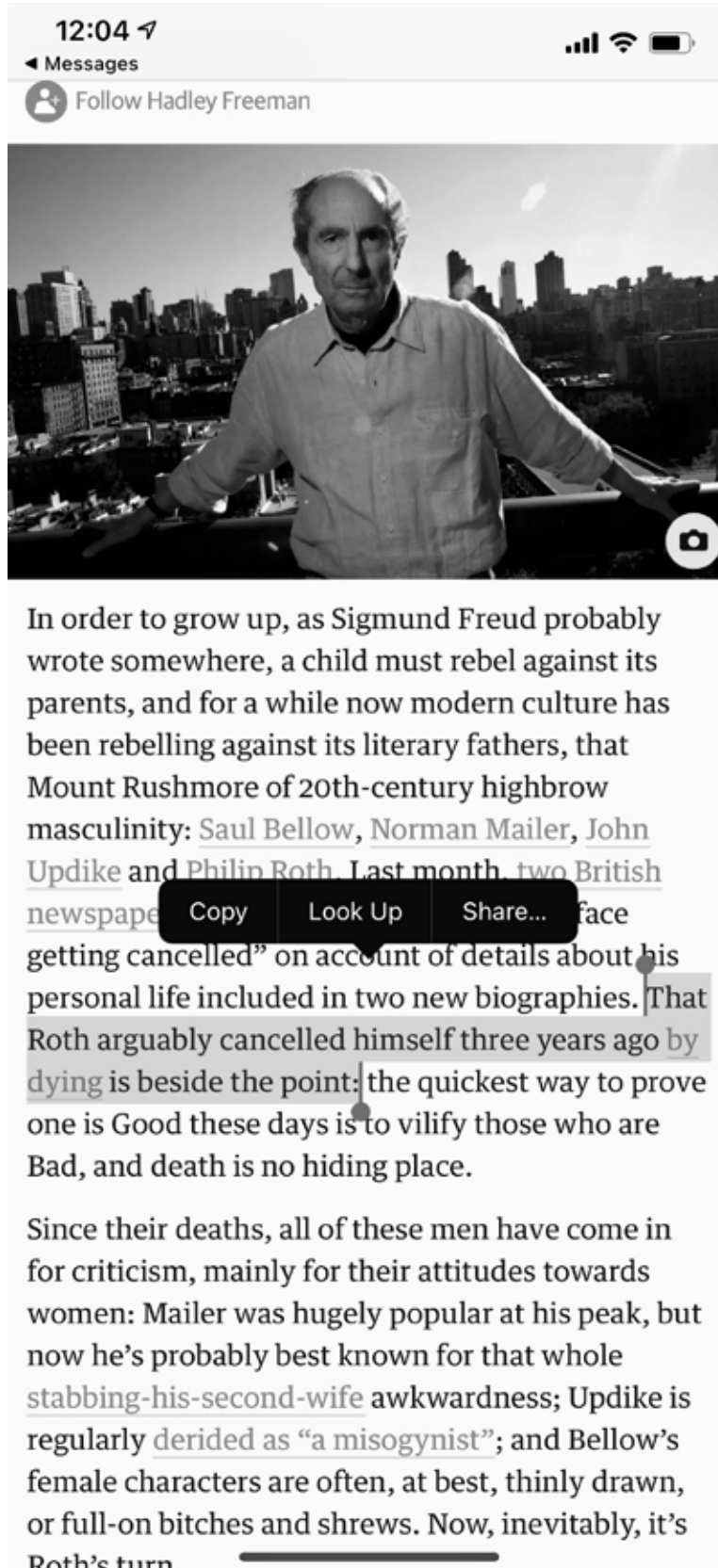
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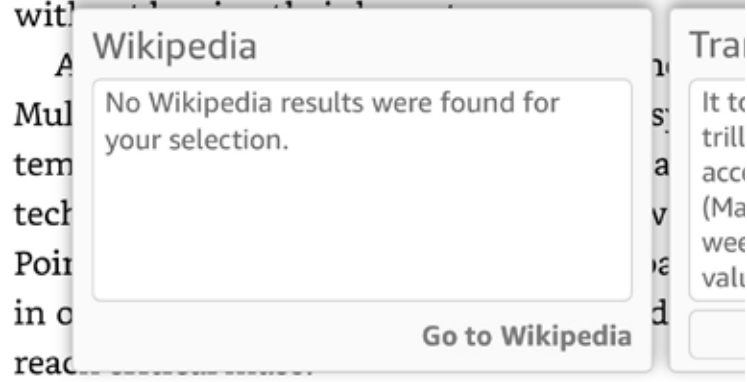
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Material from  
Hadley Freeman, "Philip Roth," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/03/new-biography-unveils-philip-roth-as-misogynist-tell-me-something-i-dont-know>.



**Material from  
Scott Galloway, *Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity* (London:  
Portfolio/Penguin, 2020).**

tients from across the country, and students  
learning from the world's great teachers  
with

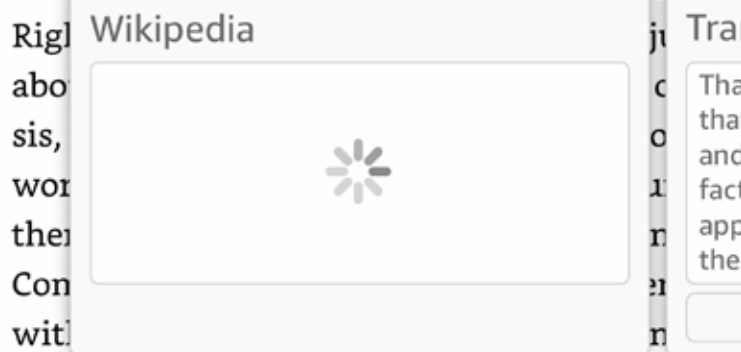


Then, in weeks, our lives moved online  
and business went remote. Every business  
meeting went virtual, every teacher became  
an online educator, and social gatherings  
moved to a screen. In the markets, investors  
calibrated the value of disruptive companies  
base  
assumptions of the market position in 2020.

It took Apple 42 years to reach \$1 trillion  
in value, and 20 weeks to accelerate from \$1  
trillion to \$2 trillion (March to August 2020).  
In those same weeks, Tesla became not only  
the most valuable car company in the world,  
but more valuable than Toyota, Volkswagen,  
Daimler, and Honda . . . combined.

For decades, big-city mayors and plan-  
ning officials have been calling for more bike  
lanes, pedestrian access, and fewer cars. And  
for decades, traffic, air pollution, and acci-  
dents congested our streets and skies. Then,  
in weeks, cyclists took over the road, outdoor  
Page xviii of 231 es sprouted, and skies cleared. 3%

This helps explain the strong performance of the market leaders. A firm's valuation is a function of its numbers and narrative



to acquire the assets of distressed competitors and consolidate the market.

The pandemic is also boosting an “innovation” narrative. Firms deemed innovators are receiving a valuation that reflects estimates of cash flows 10 years from now, and discounted back at an incredibly low rate.

Investor  
sion, its narrative about where it could be in a decade. That's how Tesla's value now exceeds that of Toyota, Volkswagen, Daimler, and Honda combined. That's despite the fact that in 2020 Tesla will produce approximately 400,000 vehicles, while the other four companies will build a combined 26,000,000.

The market is making bold bets about the post-corona environment, and we are seeing both big gains and steep declines. At the end of July, Tesla was up 242% on the year, while GM was down 31%. Amazon

Page 3 of 231 57%, and JCPenney was bankrupt 6%. This “disconnect”—between the big and the small, the in- 

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 old fashioned



don't have dedicated workspaces.

Those frustrations spell opportunity, however. The same tech that enables working from home also enables working from satellite and temporary offices. I was, to put it mildly, a WeWork bear,<sup>12</sup> but I'm actually bullish on the underlying concept. Flexible spaces where people can work alone or in teams, distributed throughout cities and beyond, sounds like the future.


The second-order effects of a shift toward much more working from home—or working from remote offices—are fascinating.

Why don't need to live in the city:

It's a trend worth watching, but I wouldn't write the obituary of cities just yet. Forty years ago, it was fashionable to predict the death of the city, but they came roaring back, and not because people had to live in them for their jobs. Young people brought cities back because they wanted to live near other young people and to get access to culture and entertainment. Indeed, those draws have proven so strong that many cities, New

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back to the Village.

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luxury hotel brand had to cease all print advertising as revenue per room had declined 25%. And a strange thing happened when demand returned: the absence of print marketing didn't seem to make any difference. Multiply this phenomenon by a million, and you have what will happen—thousands of the biggest advertisers globally are about to use this forced abstinence from broadcast media (with business down 30–50%) to kick the habit, and never return.

The two largest radio firms, iHeartRadio and Cumulus Media, will likely be Chapter 11 (again) by summer 2021. Radio advertising is projected to decline 14% in 2020.<sup>15</sup> Covid-19 has a mortality rate of 0.5–1% in the U.S.<sup>16</sup> Among U.S. media firms, the death rate will be ten times higher. Firms ranging from C and laid off people as Facebook and Google have ramped up hiring. How do you identify the best people at News Corp, Time Warner, and Condé Nast? Simple, they will soon be working at Google.

Even harder hit are the digital marketing

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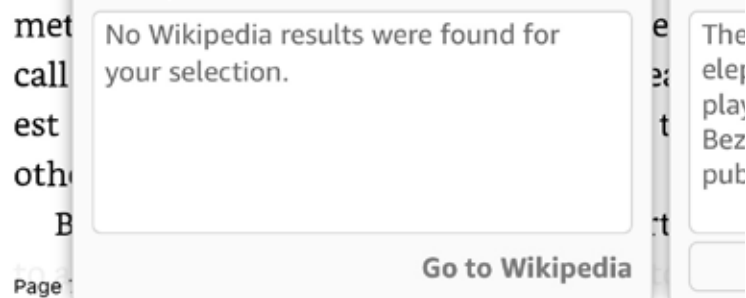
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DECEMBER 2019 VS. MARCH 2020  
DEC 19 MAR 20

innovate and attract a younger, more online customer base has been lethal to traditional retail even pre Covid. Medium and large companies with weak balance sheets will create the most damage from an economic standpoint. This is the challenge with owning a restaurant. A large fixed cost—your lease—and little or nothing you can do about it, and because it's a low-margin business with few sources of funding, there's typically no capital cushion to survive lean times.

## Crisis Management 101

At the outset of addressing this crisis, it's essential to focus on the strategic spectrum of the pandemic.

The right moves for the biggest elephant in the herd are not the smart play for a “sickly gazelle” (how Jeff Bezos once described small book publishers). Sector plays a big role here: some are doing great (technology), some are just okay (transportation, healthcare), and some are struggling (restaurants, hospital-ity)



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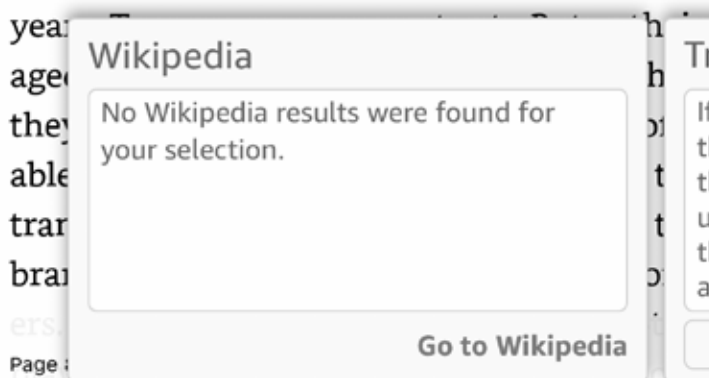
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that are not in a position to feast on weaker competitors need to think well outside the

est sector, someone will come through the other side.

But many won't. Stubbornness is a virtue to a point, but companies in hard-hit sectors that are not in a position to feast on weaker competitors need to think well outside the box. Is there a pivot available? An asset that can be bridged to a new business? For example, I'm an investor and on the board of the nation's largest yellow pages company. Now, they are morphing into a customer relationship management (CRM) company. They're taking advantage of their strongest asset—their relationship with hundreds of thousands of small businesses—to offer their

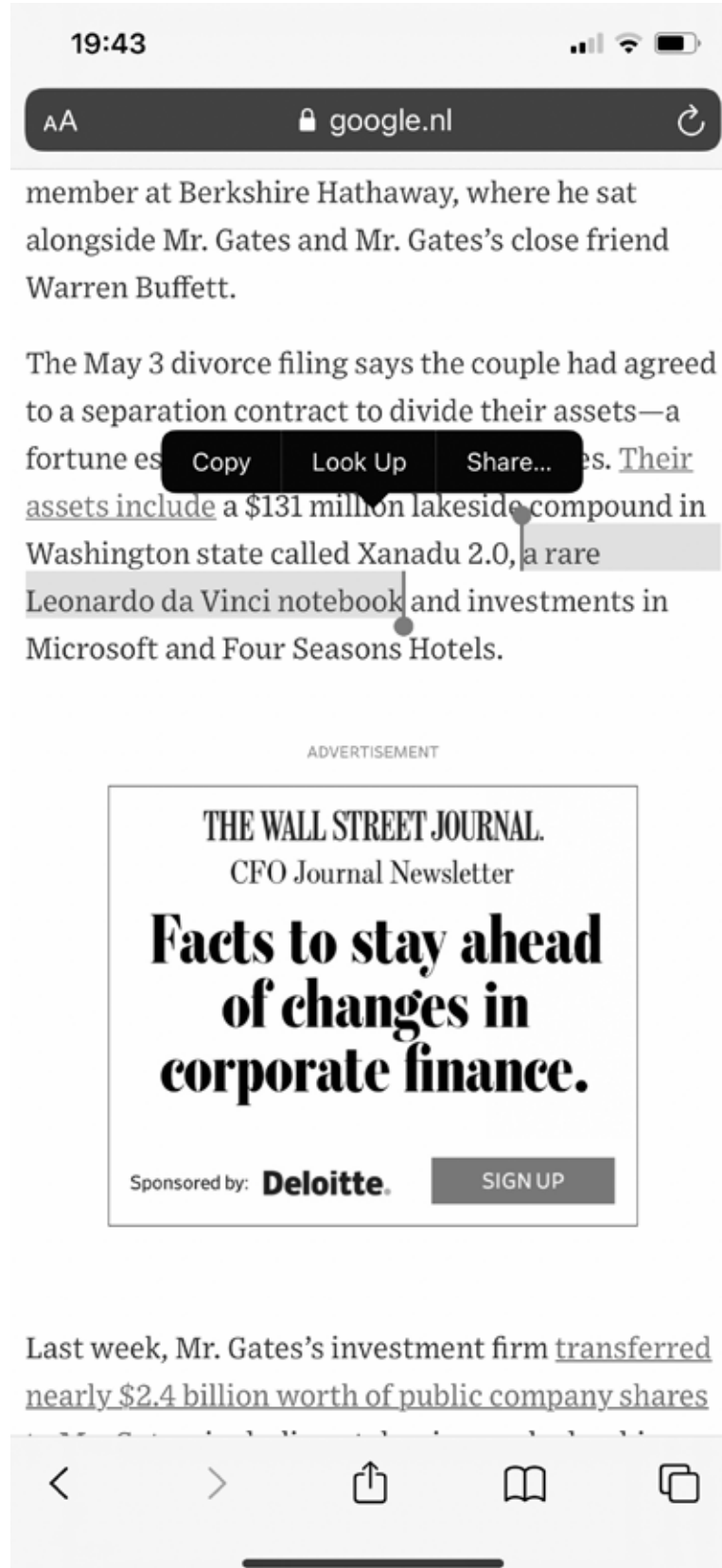
ing  
If the strongest asset is the brand, but the business is in structural decline, think seriously about milking the brand until it dies. As much as we humanize them, brands are not people—they are assets to be monetized. Letting one die is only a bad thing if you don't get all the value out of it in its golden






The screenshot shows a mobile interface with a text selection tool. A grey selection bar highlights the text: "If the strongest asset is the brand, but the business is in structural decline, think seriously about milking the brand until it dies. As much as we humanize them, brands are not people—they are assets to be monetized. Letting one die is only a bad thing if you don't get all the value out of it in its golden". Above the selection is a toolbar with icons for copy, paste, share, and search. Below the selection is a white overlay box with the title "Wikipedia" and the message "No Wikipedia results were found for your selection." At the bottom of the overlay is a button labeled "Go to Wikipedia".

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for a graceful exit that protects employees and doesn't leave the company with the lurch

Material from  
**Emily Glazer and Khadeeja Safdar, “Melinda Gates Was Meeting with Divorce Lawyers since 2019 to End Marriage with Bill Gates,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/melinda-gates-was-meeting-with-divorce-lawyers-since-2019-to-end-marriage-with-bill-gates-11620579924>.**



Material from  
Mike Katzif, "How *American Idol* Uses (and Abuses) Melisma,"  
NPR, January 11, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6791133>.

14:36   

amateurs. [ Pages pasted from Safari ] the devices  
of the style's most famous practitioners — singers  
like Mariah Carey, who indulge in runs.

### How can melisma serve singer and song?



It can carry both the singer and the congregation to a higher sense of the song's meaning; until it really becomes really a form of musical catharsis.

### For example...?

[When [the late gospel singer] Marion Williams sings "The Day Is Past and Gone," her subtle use of melisma helps turn a lullaby into a cosmic blues. The note-bending begins with the third word, "is," which is echoed in the next measure by a moaned hum, which is also melismatic. The listener understands at once that she is singing about something deadly serious. By the time she has reached the penultimate line of the second verse, "but death may soon disrobe us," each melismatic turn has led us to the song's crux.]

### With all the attention and backlash this style receives, how subjective is any of this?

In and of itself, melisma can be a great thing, it's just been terribly abused by some untalented and

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**Material from  
Flora Lichtman, "A World without Humans Looks a Lot Like a Rat Race,"  
NPR, September 24, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/2015/09/24/443053700/a-world-without-humans-looks-a-lot-like-a-rat-race?t=1622015251924>.**



LICHTMAN: Jan writes about this in a book called "The Earth After Us." And in it, he tosses out this idea that the animals best suited to take over after we're gone are rats.

ZALASIEWICZ: Some will become big, some will become small, some will become fat, some will become thin, then taking over to fill those niches that we have vacated and the elephants have vacated and the rhinoceri have vacated.

LICHTMAN: So we can visualize, actually, like, an elephant-sized rat grazing somewhere on the savannah?

ZALASIEWICZ: Yes, of course. The whale rat, the seal rat, the walrus rat would be a very nice one. They're already pretty smart, so some might become really quite smart. And, you know, we may have the rat civilization.

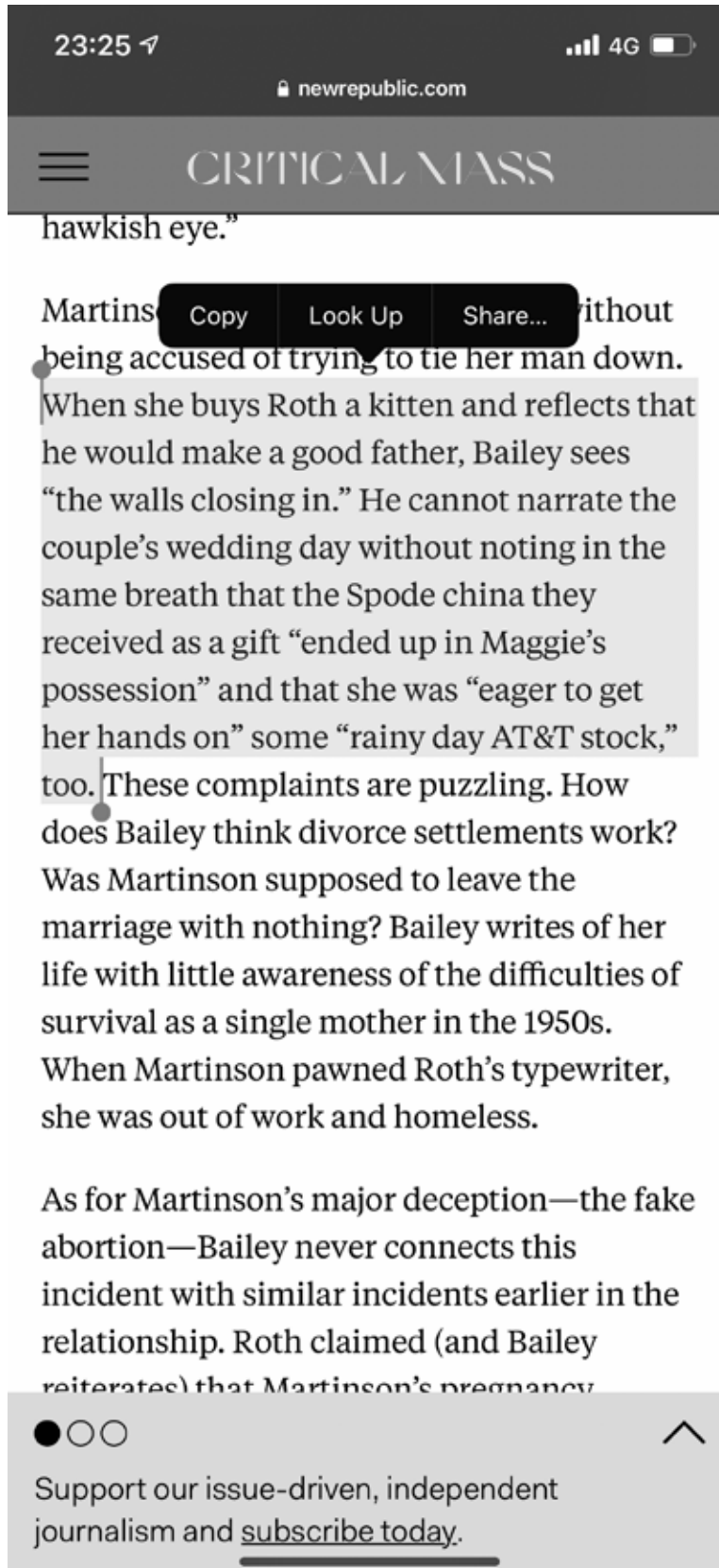
KATHERINE WELLS, BYLINE: So I love this as a thought experiment...

LICHTMAN: This is producer Katherine Wells.

WELLS: ...Obviously.

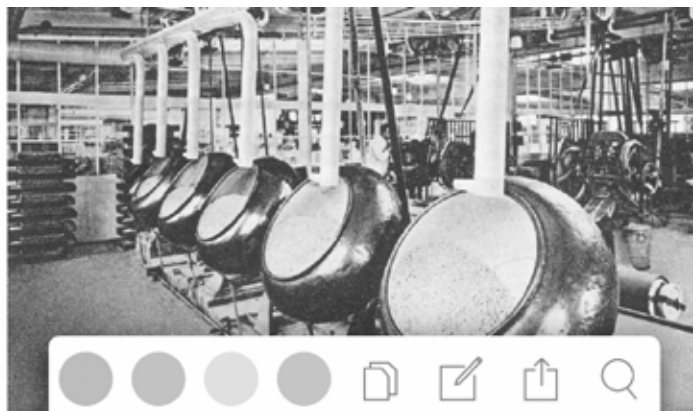


Material from  
Laura Marsh, “Philip Roth’s Revenge Fantasy,” *New Republic*,  
March 22, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/161640/philip-roths-revenge-fantasy-review-blake-bailey>.



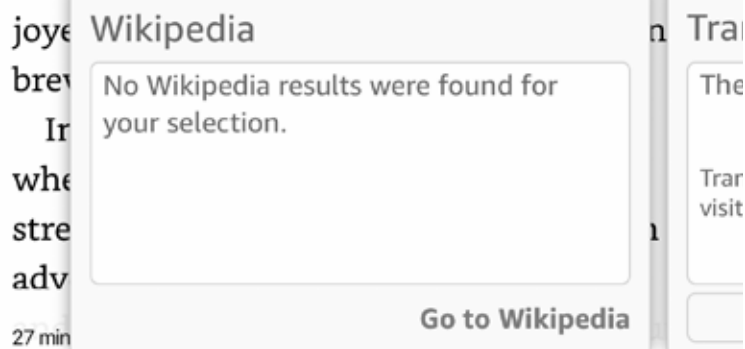


**Material from Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany* (London: Penguin, 2016).**



The sugar-coating room at Temmler.

Although such possible side-effects have been investigated by now, further in-depth research was put on the back-burner at the time because Temmler were over-eager, bursting with pride over their new product. The company smelled a roaring trade and contacted one of the most successful PR agencies in Berlin to commission an advertising campaign the like of which Germany had never seen. Their publicity model was the marketing strategy for another rather stimulating product, produced by none other than the Coca-Cola Company, which – with the catchy slogan ‘ice cold’ – had enjoyed



trains of Berlin. In a modern, minimalist style they merged the company's trademark

the effect, but not of the dangers: 'If next week goes as quickly as last, I'll be glad. Send me more Pervitin if you can; I can use it on my many watches; and a bit of bacon, if possible, to fry up with potatoes.'<sup>3</sup> His mentions of the upper, as short as they are frequent, are not without a certain disapproval of its use. 'Dear parents and siblings! Now I have time to write to you, and more importantly the peace to do so. Of course I am dog-tired, because last night I only slept for two hours, and tonight again I won't have more than three hours of sleep, but I've just got to stay awake. The Pervitin will soon start working, by the way, and help me over my tiredness. Outside the moonlight is unusually bright, there's a clear, starry sky and it's very cold.'<sup>4</sup> Again and again sleep seems to be Böll's great adversary: 'I'm exhausted and now I want to knock off. If possible send me some more Pervitin and some Hillhall or Kamil cigarettes.'<sup>5</sup> And elsewhere: 'Duty is strict, and you must understand if in future I write only every 2-4 days. Today I'm mostly writing to ask for Pervitin!'<sup>6</sup>

25 min

Wikipedia

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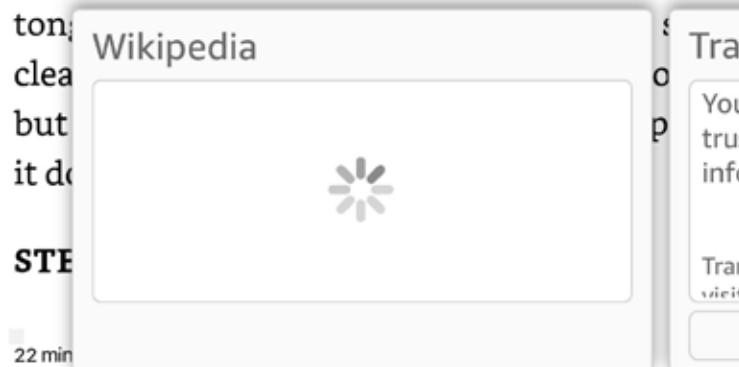
Tra

'De:  
tim

cheek muscles are lifted up and the throat is open for the roar or the yawn. We have been civilized out of the extremity of this animal-roar opening and, as a consequence our average mouth opening is diminished. When you next see a cat yawning or a lion roaring (a photograph will do), notice that the tongue is forward in the mouth; sometimes it sticks right out of the mouth. Our tongue-stretching exercise is designed to help restore some of our animal impulse behavior in the interest of clearing an open channel for the voice to travel through.

- Keep the blade and tip of the tongue attached to the back of the bottom teeth both while rolling the tongue forward and when it relaxes back into the mouth. See whether what you see is actually happening. Your physical awareness cannot be trusted yet to feed you accurate information.

In the course of the exercise, whenever the



stretch the middle of your tongue forward out of your mouth and hold it

ich bin' by Arne Hülphers and his orchestra  
now rang out inside the official car, while

out:

Pers

in t

A

the

dec

Pers

His war diary for the next few weeks, pre-

served in the Freiburg Military Archive,

gives an unadorned insight into the second

phase of the campaign, concerned with the

French heartland, the operation called '*Fall*

*Rot*' (Case Red). Often Ranke's sentences are

chopped and the descriptions over-hasty,

full c

a considerable quantity of methamphetamine:

14.6.40 Friday 9 a.m.: discussion

with Lieutenant Colonel Kretschmar about

military situation. Knows precisely, takes

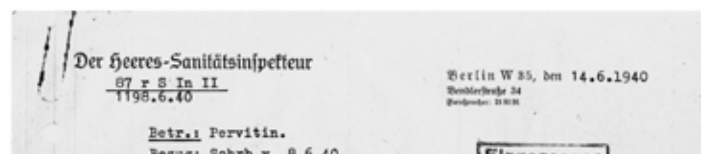
2 tabs c. every 2nd day, finds it fabulous,

is fresh afterwards without subsequent

tiredness, no mental under-achievement on

Pervitin, expressly confirmed in response to

question from me.<sup>195</sup>



11 mins left in book

28%

Die Erfahrungen der Wehrmacht über die Anwendung des  
Pervitin...  
...beschlagnahmt. Bericht

or them wrote poems; the ones who did were more likely to survive. Like the priests who would pray. My father wanted all of his kids to go to university. That was his dream. And all of us – there are four of us – ended up with degrees. But he also taught us how to plough, to mow the grass. I know how to load a cart with hay and how to make a haystack. ‘Anything can come in handy,’ Papa believed. And he was right.

Now I want to remember it all... I want to understand what I’ve lived through. And not just my own life, all of our lives... our Soviet life... Overall, I’m not impressed with my people. And I’m not impressed with the Communists either, our Communist leaders. Especially nowadays. All of them have grown petty and bourgeois, all of them chase a want to consume and consume and hold on to whatever they can! The Communists aren’t what they used to be. Now we have Communists who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Millionaires! An apartment in London, a palace in Cyprus... What kind



Wikipedia

No Wikipedia results were found for your selection.

Go to Wikipedia

berating Marx. The times are as terrifying as they were... stand behind

ing them to pick up the complexities of changing moods and responses. Muscles of the face, like all the muscles of the body, become flaccid or stiff without exercise. For this natural exercise to happen, though, people must want to reveal themselves, be unafraid of such openness of countenance, and believe that vulnerability in communication is strength.

The lips can develop into heavily armed portcullises or into well-oiled doors that open easily. The stiff upper lip is no mere symbol of British phlegm; it exists and seems to stiffen in response to a determined need not to show fear or doubt. It can also stiffen to hide bad teeth or a smile that its owner thought unattractive in formative years. The freedom of the top lip is essential to lively articulation. Articulating responsibility should be equally divided between the top lip and the bottom lip to achieve maximum efficiency. If the top lip is stiff, the bottom lip will be doing at least eighty-five percent of the work and will probably enlist the jaw as extra support. The

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hard, aggressive go-getter in order to shield a frightened, insecure little boy; voices that

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**Simon Denny**  
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