Radical Sense
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For Hal

Youth
Is no excuse for such things
Responsibilities
Weigh like strawberries
On a shortcake.
Go
To the root of the matter
Get laid
Have a friend
Do anything
But be a free fucking agent.
No one
Has lots of them
Lays or friends or anything
That can make a little light in all that darkness.
There is a cigarette you can hold for a minute
In your weak mouth
And then the light goes out,
Rival, honey, friend,
And then you stub it out.

I ANGER AND TENDERNESS

. . . to understand is always an ascending movement; that is why comprehension ought always to be concrete. (one is never got out of the cave, one comes out of it.)

—Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*

Entry from my journal, November 1960

My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. Sometimes I seem to myself, in my feelings toward these tiny guiltless beings, a monster of selfishness and intolerance. Their voices wear away at my nerves, their constant needs, above all their need for simplicity and patience, fill me with despair at my own failures, despair too at my fate, which is to serve a function for which I was not fitted. And I am weak sometimes from held-in rage. There are times when I feel only death will free us from one another, when I envy the barren woman who has the luxury of her regrets but lives a life of privacy and freedom.*

And yet at other times I am melted with the sense of their helpless, charming and quite irresistible beauty—their ability to

* The term "barren woman" was easy for me to use, unexamined, fifteen years ago. As should be clear throughout this book, it seems to me now a

go on loving and trusting—their staunchness and decency and unselfconsciousness. *I love them.* But it's in the enormity and inevitability of this love that the sufferings lie.

April 1961

A blissful love for my children engulfs me from time to time and seems almost to suffice—the aesthetic pleasure I have in these little, changing creatures, the sense of being loved, however dependently, the sense too that I'm not an utterly unnatural and shrewish mother—much though I am!

May 1965

To suffer with and for and against a child—maternally, egotistically, neurotically, sometimes with a sense of helplessness, sometimes with the illusion of learning wisdom—but always, everywhere, in body and soul, *with* that child—because that child is a piece of oneself.

To be caught up in waves of love and hate, jealousy even of the child's childhood; hope and fear for its maturity; longing to be free of responsibility, tied by every fibre of one's being.

That curious primitive reaction of protectiveness, the beast defending her cub, when anyone attacks or criticizes him—And yet no one more hard on him than I!

September 1965

Degradation of anger. Anger at a child. How shall I learn to absorb the violence and make explicit only the caring? Exhaustion of anger. Victory of will, too dearly bought—far too dearly!

March 1966

Perhaps one is a monster—an anti-woman—something driven and without recourse to the normal and appealing consolations of love, motherhood, joy in others . . .

Unexamined assumptions: First, that a "natural" mother is a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace tuned to theirs; that the isolation of mothers and children together in the home must be taken for granted; that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless; that children and

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term both tendentious and meaningless, based on a view of women which sees motherhood as our only positive definition.

mothers are the "causes" of each others' suffering. I was haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is "unconditional"; and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity. If I knew parts of myself existed that would never cohere to those images, weren't those parts then abnormal, monstrous? And—as my eldest son, now aged twenty-one, remarked on reading the above passages: "You seemed to feel you ought to love us all the time. But there *is* no human relationship where you love the other person at every moment." Yes, I tried to explain to him, but women—above all, mothers—have been supposed to love that way.

From the fifties and early sixties, I remember a cycle. It began when I had picked up a book or began trying to write a letter, or even found myself on the telephone with someone toward whom my voice betrayed eagerness, a rush of sympathetic energy. The child (or children) might be absorbed in busyness, in his own dreamworld; but as soon as he felt me gliding into a world which did not include him, he would come to pull at my hand, ask for help, punch at the typewriter keys. And I would feel his wants at such a moment as fraudulent, as an attempt moreover to defraud me of living even for fifteen minutes as myself. My anger would rise; I would feel the futility of any attempt to salvage myself, and also the inequality between us: my needs always balanced against those of a child, and always losing. I could love so much better, I told myself, after even a quarter-hour of selfishness, of peace, of detachment from my children. A few minutes! But it was as if an invisible thread would pull taut between us and break, to the child's sense of inconsolable abandonment, if I moved—not even physically, but in spirit—into a realm beyond our tightly circumscribed life together. It was as if my placenta had begun to refuse him oxygen. Like so many women, I waited with impatience for the moment when their father would return from work, when for an hour or two at least the circle drawn around mother and children would grow looser, the intensity between us slacken, because there was another adult in the house.

I did not understand that this circle, this magnetic field in which we lived, was not a natural phenomenon.

Intellectually, I must have known it. But the emotion-

charged, tradition-heavy form in which I found myself cast as the Mother seemed, then, as ineluctable as the tides. And, because of this form—this microcosm in which my children and I formed a tiny, private emotional cluster, and in which (in bad weather or when someone was ill) we sometimes passed days at a time without seeing another adult except for their father—there *was* authentic need underlying my child's invented claims upon me when I seemed to be wandering away from him. He was reassuring himself that warmth, tenderness, continuity, solidity were still there for him, in my person. My singularity, my uniqueness in the world as *his mother*—perhaps more dimly also as Woman—evoked a need vaster than any single human being could satisfy, except by loving continuously, unconditionally, from dawn to dark, and often in the middle of the night.

2

In a living room in 1975, I spent an evening with a group of women poets, some of whom had children. One had brought hers along, and they slept or played in adjoining rooms. We talked of poetry, and also of infanticide, of the case of a local woman, the mother of eight, who had been in severe depression since the birth of her third child, and who had recently murdered and decapitated her two youngest, on her suburban front lawn. Several women in the group, feeling a direct connection with her desperation, had signed a letter to the local newspaper protesting the way her act was perceived by the press and handled by the community mental health system. Every woman in that room who had children, every poet, could identify with her. We spoke of the wells of anger that her story cleft open in us. We spoke of our own moments of murderous anger at our children, because there was no one and nothing else on which to discharge anger. We spoke in the sometimes tentative, sometimes rising, sometimes bitterly witty, unrhetorical tones and language of women who had met together over our common work, poetry, and who found another common ground in an unacceptable, but undeniable anger. The words are being spoken now, are being written down; the taboos are being

broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through.

For centuries no one talked of these feelings. I became a mother in the family-centered, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950s. My husband spoke eagerly of the children we would have; my parents-in-law awaited the birth of their grandchild. I had no idea of what *I* wanted, what *I* could or could not choose. I only knew that to have a child was to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove myself, to be "like other women."

To be "like other women" had been a problem for me. From the age of thirteen or fourteen, I had felt I was only acting the part of a feminine creature. At the age of sixteen my fingers were almost constantly ink-stained. The lipstick and high heels of the era were difficult-to-manage disguises. In 1945 I was writing poetry seriously, and had a fantasy of going to postwar Europe as a journalist, sleeping among the ruins in bombed cities, recording the rebirth of civilization after the fall of the Nazis. But also, like every other girl I knew, I spent hours trying to apply lipstick more adroitly, straightening the wandering seams of stockings, talking about "boys." There were two different compartments, already, to my life. But writing poetry, and my fantasies of travel and self-sufficiency, seemed more real to me; I felt that as an incipient "real woman" I was a fake. Particularly was I paralyzed when I encountered young children. I think I felt men could be—wished to be—conned into thinking I was truly "feminine"; a child, I suspected, could see through me like a shot. This sense of acting a part created a curious sense of guilt, even though it was a part demanded for survival.

I have a very clear, keen memory of myself the day after I was married: I was sweeping a floor. Probably the floor did not really need to be swept; probably I simply did not know what else to do with myself. But as I swept that floor I thought: "Now I am a woman. This is an age-old action, this is what women have always done." I felt I was bending to some ancient form, too ancient to question. *This is what women have always done.*

As soon as I was visibly and clearly pregnant, I felt, for the first time in my adolescent and adult life, not-guilty. The at-

mosphere of approval in which I was bathed—even by strangers on the street, it seemed—was like an aura I carried with me, in which doubts, fears, misgivings, met with absolute denial. *This is what women have always done.*

Two days before my first son was born, I broke out in a rash which was tentatively diagnosed as measles, and was admitted to a hospital for contagious diseases to await the onset of labor. I felt for the first time a great deal of conscious fear, and guilt toward my unborn child, for having "failed" him with my body in this way. In rooms near mine were patients with polio; no one was allowed to enter my room except in a hospital gown and mask. If during pregnancy I had felt in any vague command of my situation, I felt now totally dependent on my obstetrician, a huge, vigorous, paternal man, abounding with optimism and assurance, and given to pinching my cheek. I had gone through a healthy pregnancy, but as if tranquilized or sleep-walking. I had taken a sewing class in which I produced an unsightly and ill-cut maternity jacket which I never wore; I had made curtains for the baby's room, collected baby clothes, blotted out as much as possible the woman I had been a few months earlier. My second book of poems was in press, but I had stopped writing poetry, and read little except household magazines and books on child-care. I felt myself perceived by the world simply as a pregnant woman, and it seemed easier, less disturbing, to perceive myself so. After my child was born the "measles" were diagnosed as an allergic reaction to pregnancy.

Within two years, I was pregnant again, and writing in a notebook:

November 1956

> Whether it's the extreme lassitude of early pregnancy or something more fundamental, I don't know; but of late I've felt, toward poetry,—both reading and writing it—nothing but boredom and indifference. Especially toward my own and that of my immediate contemporaries. When I receive a letter soliciting mss., or someone alludes to my "career", I have a strong sense of wanting to deny all responsibility for and interest in that person who writes—or who wrote.
>
> If there is going to be a real break in my writing life, this is as

good a time for it as any. I have been dissatisfied with myself, my work, for a long time.

My husband was a sensitive, affectionate man who wanted children and who—unusual in the professional, academic world of the fifties—was willing to "help." But it was clearly understood that this "help" was an act of generosity; that *his* work, *his* professional life, was the real work in the family; in fact, this was for years not even an issue between us. I understood that my struggles as a writer were a kind of luxury, a peculiarity of mine; my work brought in almost no money: it even cost money, when I hired a household helper to allow me a few hours a week to write. "Whatever I ask he tries to give me," I wrote in March 1958, "but always the initiative has to be mine." I experienced my depressions, bursts of anger, sense of entrapment, as burdens my husband was forced to bear because he loved me; I felt grateful to be loved in spite of bringing him those burdens.

But I was struggling to bring my life into focus. I had never really given up on poetry, nor on gaining some control over my existence. The life of a Cambridge tenement backyard swarming with children, the repetitious cycles of laundry, the night-wakings, the interrupted moments of peace or of engagement with ideas, the ludicrous dinner parties at which young wives, some with advanced degrees, all seriously and intelligently dedicated to their children's welfare and their husbands' careers, attempted to reproduce the amenities of Brahmin Boston, amid French recipes and the pretense of effortlessness—above all, the ultimate lack of seriousness with which women were regarded in that world—all of this defied analysis at that time, but I *knew* I had to remake my own life. I did not then understand that we—the women of that academic community—as in so many middle-class communities of the period—were expected to fill both the part of the Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House, and also of the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse. I only sensed that there were false distractions sucking at me, and I wanted desperately to strip my life down to what was essential.

June 1958

These months I've been all a tangle of irritations deepening to

anger: bitterness, disillusion with society and with myself; beating out at the world, rejecting out of hand. What, if anything, has been positive? Perhaps the attempt to remake my life, to save it from mere drift and the passage of time . . .

The work that is before me is serious and difficult and not at all clear even as to plan. Discipline of mind and spirit, uniqueness of expression, ordering of daily existence, the most effective functioning of the human self—these are the chief things I wish to achieve. So far the only beginning I've been able to make is to waste less time. That is what some of the rejection has been all about.

By July of 1958 I was again pregnant. The new life of my third—and, as I determined, my last—child, was a kind of turning for me. I had learned that my body was not under my control; I had not intended to bear a third child. I knew now better than I had ever known what another pregnancy, another new infant, meant for my body and spirit. Yet, I did not think of having an abortion. In a sense, my third son was more actively chosen than either of his brothers; by the time I knew I was pregnant with him, I was not sleepwalking any more.

August 1958 (Vermont)

I write this as the early rays of the sun light up our hillside and eastern windows. Rose with [the baby] at 5:30 A.M. and have fed him and breakfasted. This is one of the few mornings on which I haven't felt terrible mental depression and physical exhaustion.

. . . I have to acknowledge to myself that I would not have chosen to have more children, that I was beginning to look to a time, not too far off, when I should again be free, no longer so physically tired, pursuing a more or less intellectual and creative life. . . . The *only* way I can develop now is through much harder, more continuous, connected work than my present life makes possible. Another child means postponing this for some years longer—and years at my age are significant, not to be tossed lightly away.

And yet, somehow, something, call it Nature or that affirming fatalism of the human creature, makes me aware of the inevitable as already part of me, not to be contended against so much as brought to bear as an additional weapon against drift, stagna-

> tion and spiritual death. (For it is really death that I have been fearing—the crumbling to death of that scarcely-born physiognomy which my whole life has been a battle to give birth to—a recognizable, autonomous self, a creation in poetry and in life.)
>
> If more effort has to be made then I will make it. If more despair has to be lived through, I think I can anticipate it correctly and live through it.
>
> Meanwhile, in a curious and unanticipated way, we really do welcome the birth of our child.

There was, of course, an economic as well as a spiritual margin which allowed me to think of a third child's birth not as my own death-warrant but as an "additional weapon against death." My body, despite recurrent flares of arthritis, was a healthy one; I had good prenatal care; we were not living on the edge of malnutrition; I knew that all my children would be fed, clothed, breathe fresh air; in fact it did not occur to me that it could be otherwise. But, in another sense, beyond that physical margin, I knew I was fighting for my life through, against, and with the lives of my children, though very little else was clear to me. I had been trying to give birth to myself; and in some grim, dim way I was determined to use even pregnancy and parturition in that process.

Before my third child was born I decided to have no more children, to be sterilized. (Nothing is removed from a woman's body during this operation; ovulation and menstruation continue. Yet the language suggests a cutting- or burning-away of her essential womanhood, just as the old word "barren" suggests a woman eternally empty and lacking.) My husband, although he supported my decision, asked whether I was sure it would not leave me feeling "less feminine." In order to have the operation at all, I had to present a letter, counter-signed by my husband, assuring the committee of physicians who approved such operations that I had already produced three children, and stating my reasons for having no more. Since I had had rheumatoid arthritis for some years, I could give a reason acceptable to the male panel who sat on my case; my own judgment would not have been acceptable. When I awoke from the operation, twenty-four hours after my child's birth, a young

nurse looked at my chart and remarked coldly: "Had yourself spayed, did you?"

The first great birth-control crusader, Margaret Sanger, remarks that of the hundreds of women who wrote to her pleading for contraceptive information in the early part of the twentieth century, all spoke of wanting the health and strength to be better mothers to the children they already had; or of wanting to be physically affectionate to their husbands without dread of conceiving. None was refusing motherhood altogether, or asking for an easy life. These women—mostly poor, many still in their teens, all with several children—simply felt they could no longer do "right" by their families, whom they expected to go on serving and rearing. Yet there always has been, and there remains, intense fear of the suggestion that women shall have the final say as to how our bodies are to be used. It is as if the suffering of the mother, the primary identification of woman *as* the mother—were so necessary to the emotional grounding of human society that the mitigation, or removal, of that suffering, that identification, must be fought at every level, including the level of refusing to question it at all.

3

"Vous travaillez pour l'armée, madame?" (You are working for the army?), a Frenchwoman said to me early in the Vietnam war, on hearing I had three sons.

April 1965

Anger, weariness, demoralization. Sudden bouts of weeping. A sense of insufficiency to the moment and to eternity . . .

Paralyzed by the sense that there exists a mesh of relations, between e.g. my rejection and anger at [my eldest child], my sensual life, pacifism, sex (I mean in its broadest significance, not merely physical desire)—an interconnectedness which, if I could see it, make it valid, would give me back myself, make it possible to function lucidly and passionately—Yet I grope in and out among these dark webs—

I weep, and weep, and the sense of powerlessness spreads like a cancer through my being.

August 1965, 3:30 A.M.
Necessity for a more unyielding discipline of my life.
Recognize the uselessness of blind anger.
Limit society.
Use children's school hours better, for work & solitude.
Refuse to be distracted from own style of life.
Less waste.
Be harder & harder on poems.

Once in a while someone used to ask me, "Don't you ever write poems about your children?" The male poets of my generation did write poems about their children—especially their daughters. For me, poetry was where I lived as no-one's mother, where I existed as myself.

The bad and the good moments are inseparable for me. I recall the times when, suckling each of my children, I saw his eyes open full to mine, and realized each of us was fastened to the other, not only by mouth and breast, but through our mutual gaze: the depth, calm, passion, of that dark blue, maturely focused look. I recall the physical pleasure of having my full breast suckled at a time when I had no other physical pleasure in the world except the guilt-ridden pleasure of addictive eating. I remember early the sense of conflict, of a battleground none of us had chosen, of being an observer who, like it or not, was also an actor in an endless contest of wills. This was what it meant to me to have three children under the age of seven. But I recall too each child's individual body, his slenderness, wiriness, softness, grace, the beauty of little boys who have not been taught that the male body must be rigid. I remember moments of peace when for some reason it was possible to go to the bathroom alone. I remember being uprooted from already meager sleep to answer a childish nightmare, pull up a blanket, warm a consoling bottle, lead a half-asleep child to the toilet. I remember going back to bed starkly awake, brittle with anger, knowing that my broken sleep would make next day a hell, that there would be more nightmares, more need for consolation, because out of my weariness I would rage at those children for no reason they could understand. I remember thinking I would never dream again (the unconscious of the young mother—

where does it entrust its messages, when dream-sleep is denied her for years?)

For many years I shrank from looking back on the first decade of my children's lives. In snapshots of the period I see a smiling young woman, in maternity clothes or bent over a half-naked baby; gradually she stops smiling, wears a distant, half-melancholy look, as if she were listening for something. In time my sons grew older, I began changing my own life, we began to talk to each other as equals. Together we lived through my leaving the marriage, and through their father's suicide. We became survivors, four distinct people with strong bonds connecting us. Because I always tried to tell them the truth, because their every new independence meant new freedom for me, because we trusted each other even when we wanted different things, they became, at a fairly young age, self-reliant and open to the unfamiliar. Something told me that if they had survived my angers, my self-reproaches, and still trusted my love and each others', they were strong. Their lives have not been, will not be, easy; but their very existences seem a gift to me, their vitality, humor, intelligence, gentleness, love of life, their separate life-currents which here and there stream into my own. I don't know how we made it from their embattled childhood and my embattled motherhood into a mutual recognition of ourselves and each other. Probably that mutual recognition, overlaid by social and traditional circumstance, was always there, from the first gaze between the mother and the infant at the breast. But I do know that for years I believed I should never have been anyone's mother, that because I felt my own needs acutely and often expressed them violently, I was Kali, Medea, the sow that devours her farrow, the unwomanly woman in flight from womanhood, a Nietzschean monster. Even today, rereading old journals, remembering, I feel grief and anger; but their objects are no longer myself and my children. I feel grief at the waste of myself in those years, anger at the mutilation and manipulation of the relationship between mother and child, which is the great original source and experience of love.

On an early spring day in the 1970s, I meet a young woman friend on the street. She has a tiny infant against her breast, in a bright cotton sling; its face is pressed against her blouse, its tiny hand clutches a piece of the cloth. "How old is she?" I

ask. "Just two weeks old," the mother tells me. I am amazed to feel in myself a passionate longing to have, once again, such a small, new being clasped against my body. The baby belongs there, curled, suspended asleep between her mother's breasts, as she belonged curled in the womb. The young mother—who already has a three-year-old—speaks of how quickly one forgets the pure pleasure of having this new creature, immaculate, perfect. And I walk away from her drenched with memory, with envy. Yet I know other things: that her life is far from simple; she is a mathematician who now has two children under the age of four; she is living even now in the rhythms of other lives—not only the regular cry of the infant but her three-year-old's needs, her husband's problems. In the building where I live, women are still raising children alone, living day in and day out within their individual family units, doing the laundry, herding the tricycles to the park, waiting for the husbands to come home. There is a baby-sitting pool and a children's playroom, young fathers push prams on weekends, but child-care is still the individual responsibility of the individual woman. I envy the sensuality of having an infant of two weeks curled against one's breast; I do not envy the turmoil of the elevator full of small children, babies howling in the laundromat, the apartment in winter where pent-up seven- and eight-year-olds have one adult to look to for their frustrations, reassurances, the grounding of their lives.

4

But, it will be said, this is the human condition, this interpenetration of pain and pleasure, frustration and fulfillment. I might have told myself the same thing, fifteen or eighteen years ago. But the patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the "human condition" any more than rape, prostitution, and slavery are. (Those who speak largely of the human condition are usually those most exempt from its oppressions—whether of sex, race, or servitude.)

Motherhood—unmentioned in the histories of conquest and serfdom, wars and treaties, exploration and imperialism—has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism. My individual, seemingly private pains as a

mother, the individual, seemingly private pains of the mothers around me and before me, whatever our class or color, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extrauterine reproductive experiments—all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers.

Throughout patriarchal mythology, dream-symbolism, theology, language, two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, "the devil's gateway." On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood—that same body with its bleedings and mysteries—is her single destiny and justification in life. These two ideas have become deeply internalized in women, even in the most independent of us, those who seem to lead the freest lives.

In order to maintain two such notions, each in its contradictory purity, the masculine imagination has had to divide women, to see us, and force us to see ourselves, as polarized into good or evil, fertile or barren, pure or impure. The asexual Victorian angel-wife and the Victorian prostitute were institutions created by this double thinking, which had nothing to do with women's actual sensuality and everything to do with the male's subjective experience of women. The political and economic expediency of this kind of thinking is most unashamedly and dramatically to be found where sexism and racism become one. The social historian A. W. Calhoun describes the encouragement of the rape of Black women by the sons of white planters, in a deliberate effort to produce more mulatto slaves, mulattos being considered more valuable. He quotes two mid–nineteenth-century southern writers on the subject of women:

> "The heaviest part of the white racial burden in slavery was the African woman of strong sex instincts and devoid of a sexual conscience, at the white man's door, in the white man's dwelling." . . . "Under the institution of slavery, the attack against the integrity of white civilization was made by the insidious influence of the lascivious hybrid woman at the point of weak-

> est resistance. In the uncompromising purity of the white mother and wife of the upper classes lay the one assurance of the future purity of the race."[1]

The motherhood created by rape is not only degraded; the raped woman is turned into the criminal, the *attacker*. But who brought the Black woman to the white man's door, whose absence of a sexual conscience produced the financially profitable mulatto children? Is it asked whether the "pure" white mother and wife was not also raped by the white planter, since she was assumed to be devoid of "strong sexual instinct?" In the American South, as elsewhere, it was economically necessary that children be produced; the mothers, Black and white, were a means to this end.

Neither the "pure" nor the "lascivious" woman, neither the so-called mistress nor the slave woman, neither the woman praised for reducing herself to a brood animal nor the woman scorned and penalized as an "old maid" or a "dyke," has had any real autonomy or selfhood to gain from this subversion of the female body (and hence of the female mind). Yet, because short-term advantages are often the only ones visible to the powerless, we, too, have played our parts in continuing this subversion.

5

Most of the literature of infant care and psychology has assumed that the process toward individuation is essentially the *child's* drama, played out against and with a parent or parents who are, for better or worse, givens. Nothing could have prepared me for the realization that I *was* a mother, one of those givens, when I knew I was still in a state of uncreation myself. That calm, sure, unambivalent woman who moved through the pages of the manuals I read seemed as unlike me as an astronaut. Nothing, to be sure, had prepared me for the intensity of relationship already existing between me and a creature I had carried in my body and now held in my arms and fed from my breasts. Throughout pregnancy and nursing, women are urged to relax, to mime the serenity of madonnas. No one mentions the psychic crisis of bearing a first child, the excita-

tion of long-buried feelings about one's own mother, the sense of confused power and powerlessness, of being taken over on the one hand and of touching new physical and psychic potentialities on the other, a heightened sensibility which can be exhilarating, bewildering, and exhausting. No one mentions the strangeness of attraction—which can be as single-minded and overwhelming as the early days of a love affair—to a being so tiny, so dependent, so folded-in to itself—who is, and yet is not, part of oneself.

From the beginning the mother caring for her child is involved in a continually changing dialogue, crystallized in such moments as when, hearing her child's cry, she feels milk rush into her breasts; when, as the child first suckles, the uterus begins contracting and returning to its normal size, and when later, the child's mouth, caressing the nipple, creates waves of sensuality in the womb where it once lay; or when, smelling the breast even in sleep, the child starts to root and grope for the nipple.

The child gains her first sense of her own existence from the mother's responsive gestures and expressions. It's as if, in the mother's eyes, her smile, her stroking touch, the child first reads the message: *You are there!* And the mother, too, is discovering her own existence newly. She is connected with this other being, by the most mundane and the most invisible strands, in a way she can be connected with no one else except in the deep past of her infant connection with her own mother. And she, too, needs to struggle from that one-to-one intensity into new realization, or reaffirmation, of her being-unto-herself.

The act of suckling a child, like a sexual act, may be tense, physically painful, charged with cultural feelings of inadequacy and guilt; or, like a sexual act, it can be a physically delicious, elementally soothing experience, filled with a tender sensuality. But just as lovers have to break apart after sex and become separate individuals again, so the mother has to wean herself from the infant and the infant from herself. In psychologies of child-rearing the emphasis is placed on "letting the child go" for the child's sake. But the mother needs to let it go as much or more for her own.

Motherhood, in the sense of an intense, reciprocal relationship with a particular child, or children, is *one part* of female

process; it is not an identity for all time. The housewife in her mid-forties may jokingly say, "I feel like someone out of a job." But in the eyes of society, once having been mothers, what are we, if not always mothers? The process of "letting-go"—though we are charged with blame if we do not—is an act of revolt against the grain of patriarchal culture. But it is not enough to let our children go; we need selves of our own to return to.

To have borne and reared a child is to have done that thing which patriarchy joins with physiology to render into the definition of femaleness. But also, it can mean the experiencing of one's own body and emotions in a powerful way. We experience not only physical, fleshly changes but the feeling of a change in character. We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be "innate" in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socializing a human being. We are also, often to our amazement, flooded with feelings both of love and violence intenser and fiercer than any we had ever known. (A well-known pacifist, also a mother, said recently on a platform: "If anyone laid a hand on *my* child, I'd murder him.")

These and similar experiences are not easily put aside. Small wonder that women gritting their teeth at the incessant demands of child-care still find it hard to acknowledge their children's growing independence of them; still feel they must be at home, on the *qui vive*, be that ear always tuned for the sound of emergency, of being needed. Children grow up, not in a smooth ascending curve, but jaggedly, their needs inconstant as weather. Cultural "norms" are marvelously powerless to decide, in a child of eight or ten, what gender s/he will assume on a given day, or how s/he will meet emergency, loneliness, pain, hunger. One is constantly made aware that a human existence is anything but linear, long before the labyrinth of puberty; because a human being of six is still a human being.

In a tribal or even a feudal culture a child of six would have serious obligations; ours have none. But also, the woman at home with children is not believed to be doing serious work; she is just supposed to be acting out of maternal instinct, doing chores a man would never take on, largely uncritical of the meaning of what she does. So child and mother alike are de-

preciated, because only grown men and women in the paid labor force are supposed to be "productive."

The power-relations between mother and child are often simply a reflection of power-relations in patriarchal society: "You will do this because I know what is good for you" is difficult to distinguish from "You will do this because I can *make* you." Powerless women have always used mothering as a channel—narrow but deep—for their own human will to power, their need to return upon the world what it has visited on them. The child dragged by the arm across the room to be washed, the child cajoled, bullied, and bribed into taking "one more bite" of a detested food, is more than just a child which must be reared according to cultural traditions of "good mothering." S/he is a piece of reality, of the world, which can be acted on, even modified, by a woman restricted from acting on anything else except inert materials like dust and food.*

* 1986: the work of the Swiss psychotherapist Alice Miller has made me reflect further on the material in this chapter and in Chapters IX and X. Miller identifies the "hidden cruelty" in child-rearing as the repetition of "poisonous pedagogy" inflicted by the parents of the generation before and as providing the soil in which obedience to authoritarianism and fascism take root. She notes that "there is one taboo that has withstood all the recent efforts at demystification: the idealization of mother love" (*The Drama of the Gifted Child: How Narcissistic Parents Form and Deform the Emotional Lives of Their Talented Children* [New York: Harper & Row, 1981], p. 4). Her work traces the damages of that idealization (of both parents, but especially the mother) upon children forbidden to name or protest their suffering, who side with their parents against themselves. Miller notes, "I cannot listen to my child with empathy if I am inwardly preoccupied with being a good mother; I cannot be open to what she is telling me" (*For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence* [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983], p. 258). Miller explores the sources of what has been defined as *child abuse*—i.e., physical violation and sadistic punishment—but she is equally concerned with the "gentle violence" of child-rearing, including that of "antiauthoritarian" or "alternative" prescriptions, based on the denial and suppression of the child's own vitality and feelings. Miller does not consider the predominance of women as primary care-givers, the investment of authoritarian or fascist systems in perpetuating male control of women's sexuality and reproductivity, or the structural *differences* between father-as-parent and mother-as-parent. She does acknowledge that in America, women especially "have discovered the power of their knowledge. They do not shrink from pointing out the poisonous nature of false information, even though it has been well-concealed for millennia behind sacrosanct and well-meaning labels" (*For Your Own Good*, p. xii).

6

When I try to return to the body of the young woman of twenty-six, pregnant for the first time, who fled from the physical knowledge of her pregnancy and at the same time from her intellect and vocation, I realize that I was effectively alienated from my real body and my real spirit by the institution—not the fact—of motherhood. This institution—the foundation of human society as we know it—allowed me only certain views, certain expectations, whether embodied in the booklet in my obstetrician's waiting room, the novels I had read, my mother-in-law's approval, my memories of my own mother, the Sistine Madonna or she of the Michelangelo *Pietà*, the floating notion that a woman pregnant is a woman calm in her fulfillment or, simply, a woman waiting. Women have always been seen as waiting: waiting to be asked, waiting for our menses, in fear lest they do or do not come, waiting for men to come home from wars, or from work, waiting for children to grow up, or for the birth of a new child, or for menopause.

In my own pregnancy I dealt with this waiting, this female fate, by denying every active, powerful aspect of myself. I became dissociated both from my immediate, present, bodily experience and from my reading, thinking, writing life. Like a traveler in an airport where her plane is several hours delayed, who leafs through magazines she would never ordinarily read, surveys shops whose contents do not interest her, I committed myself to an outward serenity and a profound inner boredom. If boredom is simply a mask for anxiety, then I had learned, as a woman, to be supremely bored rather than to examine the anxiety underlying my Sistine tranquility. My body, finally truthful, paid me back in the end: I was allergic to pregnancy.

I have come to believe, as will be clear throughout this book, that female biology—the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body—has far more radical implications

than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life we require not only *control* of our bodies (though control is a prerequisite); we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.

The ancient, continuing envy, awe, and dread of the male for the female capacity to create life has repeatedly taken the form of hatred for every other female aspect of creativity. Not only have women been told to stick to motherhood, but we have been told that our intellectual or aesthetic creations were inappropriate, inconsequential, or scandalous, an attempt to become "like men," or to escape from the "real" tasks of adult womanhood: marriage and childbearing. To "think like a man" has been both praise and prison for women trying to escape the body-trap. No wonder that many intellectual and creative women have insisted that they were "human beings" first and women only incidentally, have minimized their physicality and their bonds with other women. The body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit.

But this reaction against the body is now coming into synthesis with new inquiries into the actual—as opposed to the culturally warped—power inherent in female biology, however we choose to use it, and by no means limited to the maternal function.

My own story, which is woven throughout this book, is only one story. What I carried away in the end was a determination to heal—insofar as an individual woman can, and as much as possible with other women—the separation between mind and body; never again to lose myself both psychically and physically in that way. Slowly I came to understand the paradox contained in "my" experience of motherhood; that, although different from many other women's experiences it was not unique; and that only in shedding the illusion of my uniqueness could I hope, as a woman, to have any authentic life at all.

Civilization Spurns the Leopard
Solmaz Sharif

I've learned the sound of nestlings being fed, their mad chirping now clear in the oak trees I walk beneath. House sparrows. There are languages I didn't know I wanted to know. I've learned the sound of jets over Oakland for fleet week. Something about a nest. Something about a tree scared bald so all its empty nests are exposed. Something about my neural pathways like that. Like, I've decided, is the cruelest word. To step out of my door and hope to see something like a life, something passably me. Like the caged canaries baba put out to sun in his Shiraz courtyard and who dropped dead, falling onto shit-covered newsprint with a thud when a cat slinked by. Researchers sent me into the MRI and said Imagine these things: home, mother, child and nothing lit on their screens. O, I asked for the smallest happiness today, a pool of water in an Oakland pothole, a single likeness to see—feathers lifting, then shaking free. Then something like a cat I became to frighten dead any hopeful thing. Some days, I am almost happy. To lose even the loss. Some days: pity this pard. Just to think of washing some dishes—mismatched and in a rust-stained sink—touching things I have spent my whole life touching—

On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1)

Karen Barad

When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself.[1] Perhaps closer. And if the two hands belong to one person, might this not enliven an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within? So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others – other beings, other spaces, other times – are aroused.

When two hands touch, how close are they? What is the measure of closeness? Which disciplinary knowledge formations, political parties, religious and cultural traditions, infectious disease authorities, immigration officials, and policy makers do not have a stake in, if not a measured answer to, this question? When touch is at issue, nearly everyone's hair stands on end. I can barely touch on even a few aspects of touch here, at most offering the barest suggestion of what it might mean to approach, to dare to come in contact with, this infinite finitude. Many voices speak here in the interstices, a cacophony of always already reiteratively intra-acting stories. These are entangled tales. Each is diffractively threaded through and enfolded in the other. Is that not in the nature of touching? Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within?[2]

Preliminary Note: This paper is a slightly revised version of the original paper "On Touching – The Inhuman that Therefore I Am," which was published in *differences* 23:3 (2012, p. 206-223). That paper unfortunately included errors resulting from a misreading my proof corrections. I am thankful that Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier has provided an opportunity for this article to be printed in its correct form. It also includes minor revisions to reset the introduction of the paper since it is now being published in a different forum and no longer introduces a journal special issue, which was the original context.

[1] The title of my essay here expresses my virtual engagements and entanglements with Jacques Derrida. I am indebted to Astrid Schrader and Vicki Kirby for putting me in touch with Derrida through their marvellous materialist readings of his work.

[2] Touch has been an object of study for centuries, going back at least to Aristotle's momentous work on this topic. Part of what is at stake in this essay, is joining with other feminist and postcolonial theorists in troubling the notion of touch as an innocent form of engagement and also, by implication, troubling its positioning in the history of philosophy as a mutually consenting act between individuals, free of culture, history, and politics. The literature on this is extensive. See, for example, Sara Ahmed, Jackie Stacey, *Thinking through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001), Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Fontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), Anna Ball, "Impossible Intimacies: Towards a Visual Politics of 'Touch' at the Israeli- Palestinian Border," in: *Journal for Cultural Research*, 16:2–3 (2012), pp. 175–195. Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, "Touching Technologies, Touching Visions: The Reclaiming of Sensorial Experience and the Politics of Speculative Thinking," in: *Subjectivity* 28 (2009), pp. 297–315.

I am struck by the intimacy of feminist science studies' engagement with science. Immersion, entanglement, visual hapticity, ciliated sense, the synesthetic force of perceiving-feeling, contact, affective ecology, involution, sensory attunement, arousal, response, interspecies signalling, affectively charged multisensory dance, and *re-membering* are just a few of the sensuous practices and figurations at play in feminist science studies.[3] Feminist science studies distinguishes itself in two intra-related ways: First and foremost, for all the varied approaches, foci, and philosophical commitments that go by this name, for all its diversity and because of all its diversity, it is a richly inventive endeavour committed to helping make a more just world. Second, and relatedly, it distinguishes itself by its commitment to be *in* the science, not to presume to be above or outside of it. In other words, feminist science studies engages with the science no less than with the laboratory workers, modellers, theorists, technicians, and technologies. Indeed, the approach I find most intriguing, fruitful, grounded, rigorous, and delightful is when feminist science studies is *of* the science, materially immersed in and inseparable from it. Like good bench scientists, indeed the kinds of scientists-for-justice feminists hope to train, mentor, and foster, feminist science studies practitioners work the equipment, theoretical and experimental, without any illusion of clean hands and unapologetically express their enthusiasm and amazement for the world and the possibilities of cultivating just relationships among the world's diverse ways of being/becoming.[4]

Theorizing, a form of experimenting, is about being in touch. What keeps theories alive and lively is being responsible and responsive to the world's patternings and murmurings.

Doing theory requires being open to the world's aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder. Theories are not mere metaphysical pronouncements on the world from some presumed position of exteriority.[5] Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world. The world theorises as well as experiments with itself. Figuring, reconfiguring. Animate and (so-called) inanimate creatures do not merely embody mathematical theories; they *do* mathematics. But life, whether organic or inorganic, animate or inanimate, is not an unfolding algorithm. Electrons, molecules, brittlestars, jellyfish, coral reefs, dogs, rocks, icebergs, plants, asteroids, snowflakes, and bees stray from all calculable paths, making leaps here and there, or rather, making here and there from leaps, shifting familiarly patterned practices, testing the waters of what might yet be/have been/could still have been, doing thought experiments with their very being.[6] Thought experiments are material matters.

Thinking has never been a disembodied or uniquely human activity. Stepping into the void, opening to possibilities, straying, going out of bounds, off the beaten path – diverging and touching down again,

[3] I have in mind here the set of articles published in the special issue of *differences* 23:3 (2012) in which this present essay was first published. With respect to my essay in that volume, unfortunately, important edits made at the proof stage were not properly incorporated into the printed version. I therefore consider this paper (v1.1) to be the official version of the paper. Karen Barad, "On Touching – The Inhuman that Therefore I am," in: *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 23:3 (2012), pp. 206-223.

[4] The Science & Justice Training Program for graduate students at UCSC has been designed to foster collaborative endeavours that train students to "do ethics at the lab bench". For more details, see *PLOS Biology*. Science & Justice Research Center (Collaboration Group), "Experiments in Collaboration: Interdisciplinary Graduate Education in Science and Justice," PLOS Biology, 11:7 (2013), available online at: http://www.plosbiology.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pbio.1001619 (last accessed, 1.6.2014).

[5] Which is not to say that some theorists do not operate as if theorizing is a lofty enterprise that lifts the theorist above it all. My point here is that theorizing is as much a material practice as other kinds of practices, like experimenting, to which it is often counterposed.

[6] The allusion to the making of spacetime through leaps, that is, through quantum dis/continuities, is discussed in more detail in Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come." In: *Derrida Today*, 3.2 (2010), pp. 240–268. In that essay I explain my use of the slash to denote a dis/continuity – a cutting together-apart – of the terms in play (in the indeterminacy marked by their superposition).

swerving and returning, not as consecutive moves but as experiments in in/determinacy. Spinning off in any old direction is neither theorizing nor viable; it loses the thread, the touch of entangled beings (be) coming together-apart. All life forms (including inanimate forms of liveliness) do theory. The idea is to do collaborative research, to be in touch, in ways that enable *response-ability*.[7]

In an important sense, touch is the primary concern of physics. Its entire history can be understood as a struggle to articulate what touch entails. How do particles sense one another? Through direct contact, an ether, action-at-a-distance forces, fields, the exchange of virtual particles? What does the exchange of energy entail? How is a change in motion effected? What is pressure? What is temperature? How does the eye see? How do lenses work? What are the different kinds of forces that particles experience? How many kinds are there? What is the nature of measurement?[8] Once you start looking at it this way, you get a dizzying feeling as things shift. This particular take on physics, and its history, entails a torquing, a perturbation from the usual storylines, but I submit that it is a fair description and worth considering for the ways it opens up new possibilities for thinking about both the nature of physics and of touch.

Using feminist science studies as a touchstone, I attempt to stay in touch with the material-affective dimensions of doing and engaging science. Straying from all determinate paths while staying in touch, in the remainder of this essay I explore the physics of touch in its physicality, its virtuality, its affectivity, its e-motion-ality, whereby all pretense of being able to separate out the affective from the scientific dimensions of touching falls away.

Theorizing Touching/Touching Theorizing

Touch, for a physicist, is but an electromagnetic interaction.

A common explanation for the physics of touching is that one thing it does not involve is ... well, touching. That is, there is no actual contact involved. You may think you are touching a coffee mug when you are about to raise it to your mouth, but your hand is not actually touching the mug. Sure, you can feel the smooth surface of the mug's exterior right where your fingers come into contact with it (or seem to), but what you are actually sensing, physicists tell us, is the electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms that make up your fingers and those that make up the mug. (Electrons are tiny negatively charged particles that surround the nuclei of atoms, and having the same charges they repel one another, much like powerful little magnets. As you decrease the distance between them the repulsive force increases.) Try as you might, you cannot bring two electrons into direct contact with each other.

[7] See Schrader on response-ability as a kind of practice, including laboratory practices, that enables the organism or object of study to respond. By attending to the fine details of the science, by being of the science, doing the science justice, Schrader shows how incompatible laboratory findings (which have been the source of controversy in the scientific community) can in fact be reconciled by paying attention to the kinds and degrees of response-ability used in different laboratory practices. Astrid Schrader, "Responding to Pfiesteria piscicida (the Fish Killer): Phantomatic Ontologies, Indeterminacy, and Responsibility in Toxic Microbiology," in: *Social Studies of Science*, 40.2 (2010). pp. 275–306.

[8] Measurements are a form of touching. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, once seen as the foundational principle of quantum physics, is at root an expression of the limits of human knowledge that result when a particle interacts with another in the processes of measurement. The uncertainty principle has now been replaced by the more fundamental notion of quantum entanglement, which is a contemporary expression of Bohr's "indeterminacy principle." According to the latter, measurements entail touch in the form of intra-actions, not interactions. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

The reason the desk feels solid, or the cat's coat feels soft, or we can (even) hold coffee cups and one another's hands, is an effect of electromagnetic repulsion. All we really ever feel is the electromagnetic force, not the other whose touch we seek. Atoms are mostly empty space, and electrons, which lie at the farthest reaches of an atom, hinting at its perimeter, cannot bear direct contact. Electromagnetic repulsion: negatively charged particles communicating at a distance push each other away. That is the tale physics usually tells about touching. Repulsion at the core of attraction. See how far that story gets you with lovers. No wonder the romantic poets had had enough.

The quantum theory of touching is radically different from the classical explanation. Actually, it is radically queer, as we will see.

Quantum Field Theory: A Virtual Introduction

Quantum field theory allows for something radically new in the history of Western physics: the transience of matter's existence. No longer suspended in eternity, matter is born, lives, and dies. But even more than that, there is a radical deconstruction of identity and of the equation of matter with essence in ways that transcend even the profound *un/doings* of (nonrelativistic) quantum mechanics. Quantum field theory, I will argue below, is a call, an alluring murmur from the insensible within the sensible to radically rework the nature of being and time. The insights of quantum field theory are crucial, but the philosophical terrain is rugged, slippery, and mostly unexplored.[9] The question is: How to proceed with exquisite care? We will need to be in and of the science, no way around it. Unfortunately, in the limited space I have here I can only lightly touch, really just barely graze, the surface.[10]

Quantum field theory differs from classical physics not only in its formalism, but in its ontology. Classical physics inherits a Democretean ontology – only particles and the void – with one additional element: fields.

Particles, fields, and the void are three separate elements in classical physics, whereas they are intra-related elements in quantum field theory. To take one instance, according to quantum field theory, particles are quanta of the fields. For example, the quantum of the electromagnetic field is a photon, the quantum of a gravitational field is a graviton, electrons are quanta of an electron field, and so on. Another feature is that something very profound happens to the relationship between particles and the void. I will continue to explain how this relationship is radically rethought in what follows. For now, I simply note, pace Democritus, that particles no longer take their place in the void; rather, they are constitutively entangled with it. As for the void, it is no longer vacuous. It is a living, breathing indeterminacy of non/being. The vacuum is a jubilant exploration of virtuality, where virtual particles – whose identifying characteristic is not rapidity (despite the

[9] When there is talk of quantum physics, and especially when there is a consideration of its philosophical implications, the theory at issue, though it is usually not specified, is nonrelativistic quantum mechanics. Quantum field theory goes further, combining the insights of quantum mechanics, special relativity, and classical field theories. The philosophical implications of quantum field theory are much less explored. See, for example, Harvey R. Brown, Rom Harré, *Philosophical Foundations of Quantum Field Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Tian Yu Cao, Silvan S. Schweber, "The Conceptual Foundations and the Philosophical Aspects of Renormalization Theory," in: *Synthese*, 97.1 (1993), pp. 33–108, Paul Teller, *An Interpretive Introduction to Quantum Field Theory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[10] It has been my practice and my commitment to provide a sufficiently rich sense of the science that the reader can get a sense of the workings of the science even if there is not sufficient time or space to fully develop it. My in-progress book manuscript, provisionally titled *Infinity, Nothingness, and Justice-to-Come*, provides an in-depth explication. But here I can only offer a few hints of some key ideas. For more details, see Karen Barad, "In/humanity, Quantum Field Theory, and the Radical Alterity of the Self." Conference paper given at „Politics of Care in Technoscience" (York University, Toronto. 21 April 2012).

common tale explaining that they are particles that go in and out of the vacuum faster than their existence can be detected) but, rather, indeterminacy – are having a field day performing experiments in being and time. That is, virtuality is a kind of thought experiment the world performs. Virtual particles do not traffic in a metaphysics of presence. They do not exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely fine blade between being and nonbeing. Admittedly, virtuality is difficult to grasp. Indeed, this is its very nature. To put it concisely, *virtual particles are quantised indeterminacies-in-action*.[11]

[11] For an accessible introductory treatment of quantum field theory, especially with regard to its understanding of the vacuum and virtuality, see Karen Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice, dOCUMENTA (13), 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, No.99* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

[12] Cao, Schweber 1993 (footnote 9).

Troubling Matters: Infinities, Perversities, Hauntings

> *"Physicists [...] took the vacuum as something substantial [...] the scene of wild activities."* [12] **Cao und Schweber**

When it comes to quantum field theory, it is not difficult to find trouble. It is not so much that trouble is around every corner; according to quantum field theory it inhabits us and we inhabit it, or rather, trouble inhabits everything and nothing – matter and the void.

How does quantum field theory understand the nature of the electron, or any other particle for that matter? It turns out that even the simplest particle, a point particle (devoid of structure) like the electron, causes all kinds of difficulties for quantum field theory. To be fair, one of the problems is already evident in classical field theory.

Immediately after its discovery in the nineteenth century, physicists imagined the electron to be a tiny sphere. However, if you think of an electron as a tiny spherical entity, a little ball, with bits of negative charge distributed on its surface, and remember that like charges repel one another, then you can see the intractable difficulty that arises with this model: all the bits of negative charge distributed on the surface of the sphere repel one another, and since there is no positive (unlike) charge around to mitigate the mutual repulsion each bit feels, the electron's own electromagnetic self-energy would be too much to bear – it would blow itself apart. Such stability issues pointed to the need for a better understanding of the electron's structure.

In 1925, the Russian physicist Yakov Il'ich Frenkel offered a different proposal: the electron is a negatively charged *point* particle. That is, the electron has no substructure. In this way, he eliminated the difficulty of the mutual repulsion of bits of charges distributed on the surface because there were no bits of charge here and there, just a single point carrying a negative charge. But the attempt to push one instability away just produced another, for if the electron is a point particle (and therefore has zero radius), then the self- energy contribution – that is, the interaction of the particle with the surrounding electromagnetic field that it creates – is infinite. Frenkel believed that this paradox could only be resolved using quantum theory.

Not only did the infinities persist when quantum field theory tried to resolve the problem, they multiplied. Indeed, infinities are now accepted as an integral part of the theory: marks of self-interaction – the trace of the inseparability of particle and void. Specifically, the electron's self-energy takes the form of an electron exchanging a virtual photon (the quantum of the electromagnetic field) with itself. Richard Feynman, one of the key authors of quantum field theory, frames the difficulty in explicitly moral terms: "Instead of going directly from one point to another, the electron goes along for a while and suddenly emits a photon; then (horrors!) it absorbs its own photon. Perhaps there's something 'immoral' about that, but the electron does it!"[13] Hence, the infinity associated with electron's self-energy, and other related infinities, wind up installed in quantum field theory as intrinsic "perversions."[14]

Apparently, touching oneself, or being touched by oneself – the ambiguity/undecidability/indeterminacy may itself be the key to the trouble – is not simply troubling but a *moral* violation, the very source of all the trouble. The electron is not merely causing trouble for us; in an important sense it is troubling itself, or rather, its self, as we will soon see. That is, the very notion of "itself," of identity, is radically queered. (Gender trouble for sure, but that isn't the half of it.) Then there is the question of whether what is really at issue is not touching oneself per se but rather the possibility of *touch touching itself*. The issue arises in quantum field theory in the following way: the electron emits a photon that "makes a positron-electron pair, and – again, if you'll hold your 'moral' objections – the electron and positron annihilate, creating a new photon that is ultimately absorbed by the electron".[15]

In fact, there is an infinite number of such possibilities, or what Feynman referred to in his path integral approach to quantum field theory as an infinite sum over all possible histories: the electron not only exchanges a virtual photon with itself, it is possible for that virtual photon to enjoy other intra-actions with itself – for example, it can vanish, turning itself into a virtual electron and positron which subsequently annihilate each other before turning back into a virtual photon – before it is absorbed by the electron. And so on. This "and so on" is shorthand for an infinite set of possibilities involving every possible kind of interaction with every possible kind of virtual particle it can interact with.[16] That is, there is a *virtual exploration of every possibility*. And this infinite set of possibilities, or infinite sum of histories, entails a particle touching itself, and then that touching touching itself, and so on, ad infinitum. Every level of touch, then, is itself touched by all possible others. *Hence, self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is.* Polymorphous perversity raised to an infinite power: talk about a queer intimacy! What is being called into question here is the very nature of the "self," and

[13] Feynman, Richard, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.115–116.

[14] The "moral fiber" of the theory and the particles whose behaviours it purports to explain are widely questioned in quantum field theory. To offer a couple of additional examples, Kaiser takes note of common references to the "sickness" of quantum field theory and to the virtual particle as a "naughty schoolchild." David Kaiser, *Drawing Theories Apart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 28–30.

[15] See Feynmann 1985 (footnote 13), pp.116–117. According to quantum field theory, most kinds of particles have corresponding antiparticles, that is, particles with the same mass and opposite charge. For example, positrons are antimatter electrons. When positrons and electrons meet, they annihilate each other, producing photons. The reverse process can also occur: photons can turn into positron-electron pairs (or other kinds of particle-antiparticle pairs). Real particle interactions must conserve energy, but this is not the case for virtual particle interactions.

[16] For example, in addition to virtual electron-positron pairs, it can interact with virtual muon-antimuon pairs, virtual quark-antiquark pairs, etc. The list of others is long. Additionally, there is an infinite number of ways to intra-act.

in terms of not just being but also time. That is, in an important sense, the self is dispersed/diffracted through time and being.

The "problem" of self-touching, especially self-touching the other, is a perversity of quantum field theory that goes far deeper than we can touch on here. The gist of it is this: this perversity that is at the root of an unwanted infinity, that threatens the very possibility of calculability, gets "renormalised" (obviously – should we expect anything less?!). How does this happen? Physicists conjectured that there are two different kinds of infinities/perversions involved: one that has to do with self-touching, and another that has to do with nakedness. In particular, there is an infinity associated with the "bare" point particle, that is, with the perverse assumption we started with that there is only an electron – the "undressed," "bare" electron – and the void, each separate from the other.[17] Renormalisation is the systematic cancellation of infinities: an intervention based on the idea that the infinities can be understood to cancel one another out. Perversion eliminating perversion. The cancellation idea is this: The infinity of the "bare" point particle cancels the infinity associated with the "cloud" of virtual particles; in this way, the "bare" point particle is "dressed by the vacuum contribution (that is, the cloud of virtual particles). The "dressed" electron, the physical electron, is thereby renormalised, that is made "normal" (finite). (I am using technical language here!) Renormalisation is the mathematical handling/taming of these infinities. That is, the infinities are "subtracted" from one another, yielding a finite answer.[18] Mathematically speaking, this is a tour de force. Conceptually, it is a queer theorist's delight. It shows that all of matter, matter in its "essence" (of course, that is precisely what is being troubled here), is a massive overlaying of perversities: an infinity of infinities.

No doubt, the fact that this subtraction of two infinities can be handled in a systematic way that yields a finite value is no small achievement, and a very sophisticated mathematical machinery needed to be developed to make this possible. Nonetheless, whatever the attitude concerning the legitimacy or illegitimacy of renormalisation (and physicists have differed in their sense of that), *the mathematical operation of subtraction does not effect a conceptual cancellation*. *The infinities* are not avoided; they must be reckoned with. Philosophically, as well as mathematically, they *need to be taken into account*. Renormalisation is a trace of physics' ongoing (self-)deconstruction: it continually finds ways to open itself up to new possibilities, to iterative re(con)figurings. Perhaps then the resurfacing of infinities is a sign that the theory is vibrant and alive, not "sick."

To summarise, quantum field theory radically deconstructs the classical ontology. Here are a few key points: the starting point ontology of particles and the void – a foundational reductionist essentialism – is undone by quantum field theory; the void is not empty, it is an ongoing play of in/determinacies; physical particles are inseparable

[17] There are in actuality more than two kinds of infinities, but that is a subject for another time. "Bare," "undressed," and "dressed" are part of the official technical language; I am not making up my own metaphorical terms to help make this more accessible. In technical language, the infinity I am talking about here refers to the bare parameters in the "Lagrangian" or field equations.

[18] Actually, to put it this way is a bit of a fudge. The renormalised or redefined parameters (which replace the bare ones) are not calculable by the theory but, rather, are written in using the experimental values. This gives it the feel of a shell game no matter how mathematically sophisticated it is. Once the renormalised charge and mass are put into the theory, however, other kinds of quantities can theoretically be derived and compared with experiments.

from the void, in particular they intra-act with the virtual particles of the void, and are thereby inseparable from it; the infinite plethora of alterities given by the play of quantum in/determinacies are *constitutive inclusions* in a radical un/doing of identity; the perversities/infinites of the theory are intrinsic to the theory and must be reckoned with; desire cannot be eliminated from the core of being – it is threaded through it; and the unknown, the insensible, new realms of in/determinacy, which have incalculable effects on mattering, need to be acknowledged, or, even better, taken into account.[19]

All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the "self," and touching the "self" entails touching the strangers within. Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each "individual" always already includes all possible intra-actions with "itself" through all the virtual others, including those that are non-contemporaneous with "itself." That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time.[20] Indeterminacy is an *un/doing* of identity that unsettles the very foundations of *non/being*. Together with Derrida, we might then say that "identity [...] can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself. Condition of the self, such a difference from and with itself would then be its very thing [...] : the stranger at home"[21] "Individuals" are infinitely indebted to all others, where indebtedness is about not a debt that follows or results from a transaction but, rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving. In a chapter of *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* titled "To Self-Touch You," Derrida touches on, and troubles, the account Jean-Luc Nancy gives of sense as touching. He remarks that self-touching "in no way reduce[s] the alterity of the other who comes to inhabit the self-touching, or at least to haunt it, at least as much as it spectralises any experience of 'touching the other' ". [22]

Ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering. How strange that indeterminacy, in its infinite openness, is the condition for the possibility of all structures in their dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities. Matter in its iterative materialisation is a dynamic play of in/determinacy. Matter is never a settled matter. It is always already radically open. Closure cannot be secured when the conditions of im/possibilities and lived indeterminacies are integral, not supplementary, to what matter is.

Together with Haraway, we might ask: Whom and what do we touch when we touch electrons?[23] Or, rather, in decentering and deconstructing the "us" in the very act of touching (touching as intra-action), we might put the question this way: When electrons meet each other "halfway," when they intra-act with one another, when they touch one another, whom or what do they touch? In addition to all the various iteratively reconfiguring ways that electrons, indeed all material "entities," are entangled relations of becoming, there is

[19] This last point refers to the "cut-off" that is part of the renormalization procedure. See esp. Barad 2012 (footnote 10) and Cao, Schweber 1993 (footnote 9).

[20] Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient space to go into any detail concerning the mutually reciprocal, mutually constitutive indeterminacy of being and time. A few summary points might be helpful to the reader. There is no meaningful binary between being and becoming since time is not given. All being-becoming is always already a superposition of all possible histories involving all virtual others, where "histories" do not happen in time but, rather, are the indeterminate ma(r)kings of time. That is, the infinite alterity of being not merely includes others contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous with "its" time but also is always already open to remakings of temporality. Hence, all matter is always already a dynamic field of matterings. The play of quantum in/determinacies deconstructs not only the metaphysics of presence and the metaphysics of individualism but also anything like the possibility of separating them. The indeterminacies of being and time are together undone.

[21] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.10.

[22] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 274.

[23] Haraway writes: "Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?" Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 35. See in particular her discussion of Jim's dog, pp. 5–8.

also the fact that materiality "itself" is always already touched by and touching infinite configurings of other beings and other times. *In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability. Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as being in touch with the other.*

Justice-to-Come and the Inhumanness of Its Call

> *Clearly, if we take quantum mechanics seriously as making a statement about the real world, then the demands it places on our conventional thinking are enormous. Hidden behind the discrete and independent objects of the sense world is an entangled realm, in which the simple notions of identity and locality no longer apply. We may not notice the intimate relationships common to that level of existence, but, regardless of our blindness to them, they persist. Events that appear to us as random may, in fact, be correlated with other events occurring elsewhere. Behind the indifference of the macroscopic world, "passion at a distance" knits everything together.*[24] **Greenstein und Zajonc**

Touch is never pure or innocent. It is inseparable from the field of differential relations that constitute it.

The infinite touch of nothingness is threaded through all being/becoming, a tangible indeterminacy that goes to the heart of matter. Matter is not only iteratively reconstituted through its various intra-actions, it is also infinitely and infinitesimally shot through with alterity. If the serious challenge, the really hard work, seemed to be taking account of constitutive exclusions, perhaps this awakening to the infinity of *constitutive inclusions* – the in/determinacy, the virtuality that is a constitutive part of all finitude – calls us to a new sensibility.[25] How unfathomable is the task of taking account not only of mattering but of its inseparability from the void, including the infinite abundance that inhabits and surrounds all being?

For all our concerns with nonhumans as well as humans, there is, nonetheless, always something that drops out. But what if the point is not to widen the bounds of inclusion to let everyone and everything in?

What if it takes sensing the abyss, the edges of the limits of "inclusion" and "exclusion" before the binary of inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, mattering/not-mattering can be seriously troubled? What if it is only in facing *the inhuman – the indeterminate non/being non/becoming of mattering and not mattering* – that an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference can arise?[26] What if it is only in the encounter with the inhuman – the liminality of no/thingness – in all its aliveness/liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we can truly

[24] George Greenstein, Arthur Zajonc, *The Quantum Challenge: Modern Research on the Foundations of Quantum Mechanics* (2nd ed. Sudbury, Mass.: Jones and Bartlett, 2005).

[25] "Mattering is about the (contingent and temporary) becoming determinate (and becoming indeterminate) of matter and meaning, without fixity, without closure. The conditions of possibility of mattering are also conditions of impossibility: intra-actions necessarily entail constitutive exclusions, which constitute an irreducible openness," Barad 2010 (footnote 6), p. 254. Being accountable for phenomena necessarily entails taking account of constitutive exclusions as part of accounting for the phenomenon. See Barad 2007 (footnote 8), Barad 2010 (footnote 6).

[26] The inhuman is not the same as the nonhuman. While the "nonhuman" is differentially (co-)constituted (together with the "human") through particular cuts, I think of the inhuman as an infinite intimacy that touches the very nature of touch, that which holds open the space of the liveliness of indeterminacies that bleed through the cuts and inhabit the between of particular entanglements.

confront our inhumanity, that is, our actions lacking compassion? Perhaps it takes facing the inhuman within us before com-passion – suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by – can be lived. How would we feel if it is by way of the inhuman that we come to feel, to care, to respond?

Troubling oneself, or rather, the "self," is at the root of *caring (Oxford English Dictionary)*. Levinas makes trouble for the conventional notions of ethics by starting with, and staying with, this trouble.[27] Derrida, citing Levinas, explains, "[R]esponsibility is not initially of myself or for myself" but is "derived from the other".[28] One can also hear reverberations of Levinas when the philosopher Alphonso Lingis writes: "Responsibility is coextensive with our sensibility; in our sensibility we are exposed to the outside, to the world's being, in such a way that we are bound to answer for it". [29]

The sense of exposure to the other is crucial and so is the binding obligation that is our vulnerability, our openness, as Lingis reminds us. But what would it mean to acknowledge that responsibility extends to the insensible as well as the sensible, and that we are always already opened up to the other from the "inside" as well as the "outside"?[30] How might we come in contact with or least touch upon an ethics that is alive to the virtual? This would seem to require, at the very least, being in touch with the infinite in/determinacy at the heart of matter, the abundance of nothingness, the infinitude of the void and its in/determinate murmurings, the muted cries, and silence that speaks of the possibilities of justice-to-come.[31]

Crucially, entanglements of spacetimemattering are threaded through and inseparable from the infinite alterity of the virtual.

> "Entanglements are relations of obligation – being bound to the other – enfolded traces of othering. Othering, the constitution of an 'Other,' entails an indebtedness to the 'Other,' who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the 'self' – a diffraction/dispersion of identity. 'Otherness' is an entangled relation of difference (*différance*). Ethicality entails noncoincidence with oneself.
>
> Crucially, there is no getting away from ethics on this account of mattering. Ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world (as if 'fact' and 'value' were radically other). The very nature of matter entails an exposure to the Other. Responsibility is not an obligation that the subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness. Responsibility is not a calculation to be performed. It is a relation always already integral to the world's ongoing intra-active becoming and not-becoming. It is an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness. Not through the

[27] Notably, some of the trouble that Levinas introduces goes against his commitment to troubling the notion of the self at the heart of ethics. See, for example, Butler's ("Precarious") discussion of Levinas' ironic introduction of racialised essentialisms into his philosophy. See Judith Butler, "Precarious Life and the Obligations of Cohabitation" (2011), http://www.nobelmuseum.se/sites/nobelmuseet.se/files/page_file/Judith_Butler_NWW2011.pdf (last accessed: 01.6.2014).

[28] Jacques Derrida quoted in Joan Kirkby, "'Remembrance of the Future': Derrida on Mourning," in: *Social Semiotics*, 16.3 (2006), pp. 461–72, here p. 463.

[29] Alphonso Lingis,*The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1994), p. 226.

[30] On the need for an ethics of the insensible see Kathryn Yusoff, "Insensible Worlds: Postrelational Ethics, Indeterminacy, and the (K)nots of Relating," in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 31, (2013), pp. 208–226.

[31] Of late, I find myself experimenting with different narrative registers. Increasingly, I find myself drawn to poetics as a mode of expression, not in order to move away from thinking rigorously but, on the contrary, to lure 'us' toward the possibilities of engaging the force of imagination in its materiality. Francis Bacon, the man who is credited with giving us the scientific method, concerned himself with these very issues of touch as the ultimate proposition and the effectivity of the force of imagination. In fact, he put the question of touch on science's docket, and the etymology of *contact* can be traced to his 1626 pronouncement: "The Desire of return into the Body; whereupon followeth that appetite of Contact and Conjunction" (Oxford English Dictionary). The force of imagination puts us in touch with the possibilities for sensing the insensible, the indeterminate, "that which travels along the edge of being; it is not being, but the opening of being toward-the- world," Yusoff 2013 (footnote 30), p. 220. Or rather, it brings us into an appreciation of, helps us touch, the imaginings of materiality itself in its ongoing thought experiments with being/becoming.

realisation of some existing possibility, but through the iterative reworking of im/possibility, an on-going rupture."[32]

Ethicality entails hospitality to the stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being.

I want to conclude this essay by making an attempt at putting "us" more intimately in touch with this infinite alterity that lives in, around, and through us, by waking us up to the inhuman that therefore we are, to a recognition that *it may well be the inhuman, the insensible, the irrational, the unfathomable, and the incalculable that will help us face the depths of what responsibility entails*. A cacophony of whispered screams, gasps, and cries, an infinite multitude of indeterminate beings diffracted through different spacetimes, the nothingness, is always already within us, or rather, it lives through us. We cannot shut it out, we cannot control it. We cannot block out the irrationality, the perversity, the madness we fear, in the hopes of a more orderly world. But this does not mitigate our responsibility. On the contrary, it is what makes it possible. Indeterminacy is not a lack, a loss, but an affirmation, a celebration of the plenitude of nothingness.

I want to come back to Lingis's diffractive reading of Levinas, as itself diffractively read through the literary scholar Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, in her book *The Murmuring Deep*.

> "[T]he murmur is the message: the background hum of life – desolate, excessive, neither language nor silence – is what links us to one another. What can be shared, for example, with the dying? Perhaps Lingis suggests, rather than transmitting clear meanings, the encounter rests on an acknowledgement of an elemental otherness that is related to our own: 'We do not relate to the light, the earth, the air, and the warmth only with our individual sensibility and sensuality. We communicate to one another the light our eyes know, the ground that sustains our postures, and the air and the warmth with which we speak. We face one another as condensations of earth, light, air, and warmth, and orient one another in the elemental in a primary communication' [...] .
>
> In an inspired reading of his materials, Frosh cites Žižek and Lingis, as well as Levinas and Agamben, to suggest that the ultimate communion between people rests in the capacity to draw on an elemental life that is experienced as inhuman. In this way, he argues, access to the murmuring deep, the inhuman aspect of human aliveness, sustains contact with the other. 'Being 'in' a relationship with another is also a matter of being outside it, sharing in the impersonality that comes from being lived through by forces that constitute the human subject.'"[33]

How truly sublime the notion that it is the inhuman – that which commonly gets associated with humanity's inhumanity as a lack of

[32] Barad 2010 (footnote 6), p. 265.

[33] Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Schocken, 2009), pp. xxi–xxii. This moving passage, which is very suggestive in light of the discussion here, speaks to the inherent inhumanness of the human, albeit with the human still very much at the center of the discussion. Note that the inhuman is being used in different ways by different authors. Here and in Barad (forthcoming) I develop a notion of the "queer inhuman." Karen Barad, "Transmaterialities: Trans/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings," in: *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21: 2/3, Special Issue on "Queer Inhumanisms," ed. Mel Chen Dana Luciano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

compassion – that may be the very condition of possibility of feeling the suffering of the other, of literally being in touch with the other, of feeling the exchange of e-motion in the binding obligations of entanglements. That is, perhaps what we must face in thinking responsibility and justice is the existence of the inhuman as threaded through and lived through us, as enabling us, and every being/becoming, to reach out to the insensible otherness that we might otherwise never touch. The indeterminacy at the heart of being calls out to us to respond. Living compassionately, sharing in the suffering of the other, does not require anything like complete understanding (and might, in fact, necessitate the disruption of this very yearning). Rather, living compassionately requires recognizing and facing our responsibility to the infinitude of the other, welcoming the stranger whose very existence is the possibility of touching and being touched, who gifts us with both the ability to respond and the longing for justice-to-come.

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JAZRA KHALEED
Words

I have no fatherland
I live within words
That are shrouded in black
And held hostage
Mustapha Khayati, can you hear me?
The seat of power is in language
where the police patrol
No more poetry circles!
No more poet laureates!
In my neighborhood virgin poets are sacrificed
Rappers with dust-blown eyes and baggy pants
push rhymes on kids sniffing words
Fall and get back up again: the art of the poet
Jean Genet, can you hear me?
My words are homeless
they sleep on the benches of Klathmonos Square
covered in IKEA cartons
My words do not speak on the news
they're out hustling every night
My words are proletarian, slaves like me
they work in sweatshops night and day
I want no more dirges
I want no more verbs belonging to the noncombatants
I need a new language, not pimping
I'm waiting for a revolution to invent me
Hungering for the language of class war
A language that has tasted insurgency
I shall create it!
Ah, what arrogance!
Okay, I'll be off
But take a look: in my face the dawn of a new poetry is breaking
No word will be left behind, held hostage
I'm seeking a new passage.

Translated by Peter Constantine

Learning the Grammar of Animacy

To be native to a place we must learn to speak its language.

I come here to listen, to nestle in the curve of the roots in a soft hollow of pine needles, to lean my bones against the column of white pine, to turn off the voice in my head until I can hear the voices outside it: the *shhh* of wind in needles, water trickling over rock, nuthatch tapping, chipmunks digging, beechnut falling, mosquito in my ear, and something more—something that is not me, for which we have no language, the wordless being of others in which we are never alone. After the drumbeat of my mother's heart, *this* was my first language.

I could spend a whole day listening. And a whole night. And in the morning, without my hearing it, there might be a mushroom that was not there the night before, creamy white, pushed up from the pine needle duff, out of darkness to light, still glistening with the fluid of its passage. *Puhpowee.*

Listening in wild places, we are audience to conversations in a language not our own. I think now that it was a longing to comprehend this language I hear in the woods that led me to science, to learn over the years to speak fluent botany. A tongue that should not, by the way, be mistaken for the language of plants. I did learn another language in science, though, one of

careful observation, an intimate vocabulary that names each little part. To name and describe you must first see, and science polishes the gift of seeing. I honor the strength of the language that has become a second tongue to me. But beneath the richness of its vocabulary and its descriptive power, something is missing, the same something that swells around you and in you when you listen to the world. Science can be a language of distance which reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects. The language scientists speak, however precise, is based on a profound error in grammar, an omission, a grave loss in translation from the native languages of these shores.

My first taste of the missing language was the word *Puhpowee* on my tongue. I stumbled upon it in a book by the Anishinaabe ethnobotanist Keewaydinoquay, in a treatise on the traditional uses of fungi by our people. *Puhpowee,* she explained, translates as "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight." As a biologist, I was stunned that such a word existed. In all its technical vocabulary, Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery. You'd think that biologists, of all people, would have words for life. But in scientific language our terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.

In the three syllables of this new word I could see an entire process of close observation in the damp morning woods, the formulation of a theory for which English has no equivalent. The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything. I've cherished it for many years, as a talisman, and longed for the people who gave a name to the life force of mushrooms. The language that holds *Puhpowee* is one that I wanted to speak. So when I learned that the word for rising, for emergence, belonged to the language of my ancestors, it became a signpost for me.

Had history been different, I would likely speak Bodewadmimwin, or Potawatomi, an Anishinaabe language. But, like many of the three hundred and fifty indigenous languages of the Americas, Potawatomi is threatened, and I speak the language you read. The powers of assimilation did their

work as my chance of hearing that language, and yours too, was washed from the mouths of Indian children in government boarding schools where speaking your native tongue was forbidden.

Children like my grandfather, who was taken from his family when he was just a little boy of nine years old. This history scattered not only our words but also our people. Today I live far from our reservation, so even if I could speak the language, I would have no one to talk to. But a few summers ago, at our yearly tribal gathering, a language class was held and I slipped into the tent to listen.

There was a great deal of excitement about the class because, for the first time, every single fluent speaker in our tribe would be there as a teacher. When the speakers were called forward to the circle of folding chairs, they moved slowly—with canes, walkers, and wheelchairs, only a few entirely under their own power. I counted them as they filled the chairs. Nine. Nine fluent speakers. In the whole world. Our language, millennia in the making, sits in those nine chairs. The words that praised creation, told the old stories, lulled my ancestors to sleep, rests today in the tongues of nine very mortal men and women. Each in turn addresses the small group of would-be students.

A man with long gray braids tells how his mother hid him away when the Indian agents came to take the children. He escaped boarding school by hiding under an overhung bank where the sound of the stream covered his crying. The others were all taken and had their mouths washed out with soap, or worse, for "talking that dirty Indian language." Because he alone stayed home and was raised up calling the plants and animals by the name Creator gave them, he is here today, a carrier of the language. The engines of assimilation worked well. The speaker's eyes blaze as he tells us, "We're the end of the road. We are all that is left. If you young people do not learn, the language will die. The missionaries and the U.S. government will have their victory at last." A great-grandmother from the circle pushes her walker up close to the microphone. "It's not just the words that will be lost," she

says. “The language is the heart of our culture; it holds our thoughts, our way of seeing the world. It’s too beautiful for English to explain.” *Puhpowee.*

Jim Thunder, at seventy-five the youngest of the speakers, is a round brown man of serious demeanor who spoke only in Potawatomi. He began solemnly, but as he warmed to his subject his voice lifted like a breeze in the birch trees and his hands began to tell the story. He became more and more animated, rising to his feet, holding us rapt and silent although almost no one understood a single word. He paused as if reaching the climax of his story and looked out at the audience with a twinkle of expectation. One of the grandmothers behind him covered her mouth in a giggle and his stern face suddenly broke into a smile as big and sweet as a cracked watermelon. He bent over laughing and the grandmas dabbed away tears of laughter, holding their sides, while the rest of us looked on in wonderment. When the laughter subsided, he spoke at last in English: “What will happen to a joke when no one can hear it anymore? How lonely those words will be, when their power is gone. Where will they go? Off to join the stories that can never be told again.”

So now my house is spangled with Post-it notes in another language, as if I were studying for a trip abroad. But I’m not going away, I’m coming home.

Ni pi je ezhyayen? asks the little yellow sticky note on my back door. My hands are full and the car is running, but I switch my bag to the other hip and pause long enough to respond. *Odanek nde zhya,* I’m going to town. And so I do, to work, to class, to meetings, to the bank, to the grocery store. I talk all day and sometimes write all evening in the beautiful language I was born to, the same one used by 70 percent of the world’s people, a tongue viewed as the most useful, with the richest vocabulary in the modern world. English. When I get home at night to my quiet house, there is a faithful Post-it note on the closet door. *Gisken I gbiskewagen!* And so I take off my coat.

I cook dinner, pulling utensils from cupboards labeled *emkwanen, nagen.* I have become a woman who speaks Potawatomi to household objects. When the phone rings I barely glance at the Post-it there as I *dopnen* the *giktogan.* And whether it is a solicitor or a friend, they speak English. Once a week or so, it is my sister from the West Coast who says *Bozho. Moktthewenkwe nda*—as if she needed to identify herself: who else speaks Potawatomi? To call it speaking is a stretch. Really, all we do is blurt garbled phrases to each other in a parody of conversation: How are you? I am fine. Go to town. See bird. Red. Frybread good. We sound like Tonto's side of the Hollywood dialogue with the Lone Ranger. "Me try talk good Injun way." On the rare occasion when we actually can string together a halfway coherent thought, we freely insert high school Spanish words to fill in the gaps, making a language we call Spanawatomi.

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:15 Oklahoma time, I join the Potawatomi lunchtime language class, streaming from tribal headquarters via the Internet. There are usually about ten of us, from all over the country. Together we learn to count and to say *pass the salt.* Someone asks, "How do you say *please* pass the salt?" Our teacher, Justin Neely, a young man devoted to language revival, explains that while there are several words for *thank you,* there is no word for *please.* Food was meant to be shared, no added politeness needed; it was simply a cultural given that one was asking respectfully. The missionaries took this absence as further evidence of crude manners.

Many nights, when I should be grading papers or paying bills, I'm at the computer running through Potawatomi language drills. After months, I have mastered the kindergarten vocabulary and can confidently match the pictures of animals to their indigenous names. It reminds me of reading picture books to my children: "Can you point to the squirrel? Where is the bunny?" All the while I'm telling myself that I really don't have time for this, and what's more, little need to know the words for *bass* and *fox* anyway. Since our tribal diaspora left us scattered to the four winds, who would I talk to?

The simple phrases I'm learning are perfect for my dog. Sit! Eat! Come here! Be quiet! But since she scarcely responds to these commands in English, I'm reluctant to train her to be bilingual. An admiring student once asked me if I spoke my native language. I was tempted to say, "Oh yes, we speak Potawatomi at home"—me, the dog, and the Post-it notes. Our teacher tells us not to be discouraged and thanks us every time a word is spoken—thanks us for breathing life into the language, even if we only speak a single word. "But I have no one to talk to," I complain. "None of us do," he reassures me, "but someday we will."

So I dutifully learn the vocabulary but find it hard to see the "heart of our culture" in translating *bed* and *sink* into Potawatomi. Learning nouns was pretty easy; after all, I'd learned thousands of botanical Latin names and scientific terms. I reasoned that this could not be too much different—just a one-for-one substitution, memorization. At least on paper, where you can see the letters, this is true. Hearing the language is a different story. There are fewer letters in our alphabet, so the distinction among words for a beginner is often subtle. With the beautiful clusters of consonants of *zh* and *mb* and *shwe* and *kwe* and *mshk,* our language sounds like wind in the pines and water over rocks, sounds our ears may have been more delicately attuned to in the past, but no longer. To learn again, you really have to listen.

To actually *speak,* of course, requires verbs, and here is where my kindergarten proficiency at naming things leaves off. English is a nounbased language, somehow appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things. Only 30 percent of English words are verbs, but in Potawatomi that proportion is 70 percent. Which means that 70 percent of the words have to be conjugated, and 70 percent have different tenses and cases to be mastered.

European languages often assign gender to nouns, but Potawatomi does not divide the world into masculine and feminine. Nouns and verbs both are animate and inanimate. You hear a person with a word that is completely different from the one with which you hear an airplane. Pronouns, articles, plurals, demonstratives, verbs—all those syntactical bits I never could keep

straight in high school English are all aligned in Potawatomi to provide different ways to speak of the living world and the lifeless one. Different verb forms, different plurals, different everything apply depending on whether what you are speaking of is alive.

No wonder there are only nine speakers left! I try, but the complexity makes my head hurt and my ear can barely distinguish between words that mean completely different things. One teacher reassures us that this will come with practice, but another elder concedes that these close similarities are inherent in the language. As Stewart King, a knowledge keeper and great teacher, reminds us, the Creator meant for us to laugh, so humor is deliberately built into the syntax. Even a small slip of the tongue can convert "We need more firewood" to "Take off your clothes." In fact, I learned that the mystical word *Puhpowee* is used not only for mushrooms, but also for certain other shafts that rise mysteriously in the night.

My sister's gift to me one Christmas was a set of magnetic tiles for the refrigerator in Ojibwe, or Anishinabemowin, a language closely related to Potawatomi. I spread them out on my kitchen table looking for familiar words, but the more I looked, the more worried I got. Among the hundred or more tiles, there was but a single word that I recognized: *megwech,* thank you. The small feeling of accomplishment from months of study evaporated in a moment.

I remember paging through the Ojibwe dictionary she sent, trying to decipher the tiles, but the spellings didn't always match and the print was too small and there are way too many variations on a single word and I was feeling that this was just way too hard. The threads in my brain knotted and the harder I tried, the tighter they became. Pages blurred and my eyes settled on a word—a verb, of course: "to be a Saturday." *Pfft!* I threw down the book. Since when is *Saturday* a verb? Everyone knows it's a noun. I grabbed the dictionary and flipped more pages and all kinds of things seemed to be verbs: "to be a hill," "to be red," "to be a long sandy stretch of beach," and then my finger rested on *wiikwegamaa:* "to be a bay." "Ridiculous!" I ranted in my head. "There is no reason to make it so complicated. No wonder no one speaks it. A cumbersome language,

impossible to learn, and more than that, it's all wrong. A bay is most definitely a person, place, or thing—a noun and not a verb." I was ready to give up. I'd learned a few words, done my duty to the language that was taken from my grandfather. Oh, the ghosts of the missionaries in the boarding schools must have been rubbing their hands in glee at my frustration. "She's going to surrender," they said.

And then I swear I heard the zap of synapses firing. An electric current sizzled down my arm and through my finger, and practically scorched the page where that one word lay. In that moment I could smell the water of the bay, watch it rock against the shore and hear it sift onto the sand. A bay is a noun only if water is *dead.* When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. "To be a bay" holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. *This* is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us. And the vestiges of boarding schools, the soap-wielding missionary wraiths, hang their heads in defeat.

This is the grammar of animacy. Imagine seeing your grandmother standing at the stove in her apron and then saying of her, "Look, it is making soup. It has gray hair." We might snicker at such a mistake, but we also recoil from it. In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as *it.* That would be a profound act of disrespect. *It* robs a person of self hood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing. So it is that in Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family.

To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy? Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living beings we all learned in Biology 101. In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, "*What* is it?" And we answer *Dopwen yewe.* Table it is. But of apple, we must say, "*Who* is that being?" And reply *Mshimin yawe.* Apple that being is.

Yawe—the animate *to be.* I am, you are, s/he is. To speak of those possessed with life and spirit we must say *yawe.* By what linguistic confluence do Yahweh of the Old Testament and *yawe* of the New World both fall from the mouths of the reverent? Isn't this just what it means, to be, to have the breath of life within, to be the offspring of Creation? The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world.

English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an *it,* or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a *he* or a *she.* Where are our words for the simple existence of another living being? Where is our *yawe?* My friend Michael Nelson, an ethicist who thinks a great deal about moral inclusion, told me about a woman he knows, a field biologist whose work is among other-than-humans. Most of her companions are not two-legged, and so her language has shifted to accommodate her relationships. She kneels along the trail to inspect a set of moose tracks, saying, "Someone's already been this way this morning." "Someone is in my hat," she says, shaking out a deerfly. Someone, not something.

When I am in the woods with my students, teaching them the gifts of plants and how to call them by name, I try to be mindful of my language, to be bilingual between the lexicon of science and the grammar of animacy.

Although they still have to learn scientific roles and Latin names, I hope I am also teaching them to know the world as a neighborhood of nonhuman residents, to know that, as ecotheologian Thomas Berry has written, "we must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects."

One afternoon, I sat with my field ecology students by a *wiikwegamaa* and shared this idea of animate language. One young man, Andy, splashing his feet in the clear water, asked the big question. "Wait a second," he said as he wrapped his mind around this linguistic distinction, "doesn't this mean that speaking English, thinking in English, somehow gives us permission to disrespect nature? By denying everyone else the right to be persons? Wouldn't things be different if nothing was an *it?* "

Swept away with the idea, he said it felt like an awakening to him. More like a remembering, I think. The animacy of the world is something we already know, but the language of animacy teeters on extinction—not just for Native peoples, but for everyone. Our toddlers speak of plants and animals as if they were people, extending to them self and intention and compassion—until we teach them not to. We quickly retrain them and make them forget. When we tell them that the tree is not a *who,* but an *it,* we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation. Saying *it* makes a living land into "natural resources." If a maple is an *it,* we can take up the chain saw. If a maple is a *her,* we think twice.

Another student countered Andy's argument. "But we can't say *he* or *she.* That would be anthropomorphism." They are well-schooled biologists who have been instructed, in no uncertain terms, never to ascribe human characteristics to a study object, to another species. It's a cardinal sin that leads to a loss of objectivity. Carla pointed out that "it's also disrespectful to the animals. We shouldn't project our perceptions onto them. They have their own ways—they're not just people in furry costumes." Andy countered, "But just because we don't think of them as humans doesn't mean they aren't beings. Isn't it even more disrespectful to assume that we're the only species that counts as 'persons'?" The arrogance of English

is that the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be a human.

A language teacher I know explained that grammar is just the way we chart relationships in language. Maybe it also reflects our relationships with each other. Maybe a grammar of animacy could lead us to whole new ways of living in the world, other species a sovereign people, a world with a democracy of species, not a tyranny of one—with moral responsibility to water and wolves, and with a legal system that recognizes the standing of other species. It's all in the pronouns.

Andy is right. Learning the grammar of animacy could well be a restraint on our mindless exploitation of land. But there is more to it. I have heard our elders give advice like "You should go among the standing people" or "Go spend some time with those Beaver people." They remind us of the capacity of others as our teachers, as holders of knowledge, as guides. Imagine walking through a richly inhabited world of Birch people, Bear people, Rock people, beings we think of and therefore speak of as persons worthy of our respect, of inclusion in a peopled world. We Americans are reluctant to learn a foreign language of our own species, let alone another species. But imagine the possibilities. Imagine the access we would have to different perspectives, the things we might see through other eyes, the wisdom that surrounds us. We don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us. Imagine how much less lonely the world would be.

Every word I learn comes with a breath of gratitude for our elders who have kept this language alive and passed along its poetry. I still struggle mightily with verbs, can hardly speak at all, and I'm still most adept with only kindergarten vocabulary. But I like that in the morning I can go for my walk around the meadow greeting neighbors by name. When Crow caws at me from the hedgerow, I can call back *Mno gizhget andushukwe!* I can brush my hand over the soft grasses and murmur *Bozho mishkos.* It's a small thing, but it makes me happy.

I'm not advocating that we all learn Potawatomi or Hopi or Seminole, even if we could. Immigrants came to these shores bearing a legacy of

languages, all to be cherished. But to become native to this place, if we are to survive here, and our neighbors too, our work is to learn to speak the grammar of animacy, so that we might truly be at home.

I remember the words of Bill Tall Bull, a Cheyenne elder. As a young person, I spoke to him with a heavy heart, lamenting that I had no native language with which to speak to the plants and the places that I love. “They love to hear the old language,” he said, “it’s true.” “But,” he said, with fingers on his lips, “You don’t have to speak it here.” “If you speak it here,” he said, patting his chest, “They will hear you.”

“I like to kiss scars”
By Rosa Chávez
Translated by Gabriela Ramirez-Chavez

I like to kiss scars
there, where the skin grows tougher
there, where the memories are visible
scars of every shape and size
small marks across your lips
on your eyelids, in your gaze
I like to kiss bodies that are cartographies
carved with destiny’s knife
I like scars
there, pain takes form
skin grows again
skin and heart become tougher
right where the blood was, right at the wound

chapter one | THE RACIAL ROOTS OF PROPERTY

The United States of America is built on African slavery and Indigenous genocide. This simple fact is the premise from which any honest study of American history must begin. Property, state, government, and economy in America rise from these pillars of racialized dispossession and violence—slavery and genocide—and any change made that does not upend this history, that does not tear these pillars to the ground in a process of decolonization and reparations, does not deserve the name justice.

Although US history is predominantly the story of the continuation of this violence, it is also full of moments, movements, and images of a life lived otherwise, of resistance, liberation, and transformation. One of the most consistent images from this other world to come, one that terrifies even many of those who claim to be partisans of that world, is of the Black looter, who finds her antecedent in the escaped and fugitive slave.

To fully understand this, it is necessary to trace how this image developed, to see how white supremacy and the racial regime of property—what preeminent historian Cedric Robinson calls racial capitalism—evolved out of Euro-American chattel slavery and (ongoing) settler colonialism.[1]

The first slaves in the "New World" were not Africans but Indigenous Americans. Columbus had barely disembarked in the Bahamas before deciding that the people there "would make fine servants." It was Indigenous slaves who built the great wealth of the Spanish empire, mining silver from Potosí in Bolivia and from the Mexican plateau throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Much of this specie was siphoned off by Dutch, Genoan, and German bankers and merchants, who had grasped the nature of the coming market economy much better than the Spanish monarchy did.* This mineral wealth was the material basis and political focus of European mercantilism, the system that would give rise to the bourgeoisie and lay the groundwork for industrial capitalism. This wealth was produced by enslaved Americans (and Africans) under a genocidal slave labor regime that would reduce the Indigenous population of the Spanish colonies from fifty million at "first contact" to four million by the end of the seventeenth century. From its very beginnings, capitalism was built on the backs and the graves of the enslaved.[2]

In what would become known as the United States, the first colonial slave trade also traded in Americans, because it was considered best practice to ship Indigenous "servants" far away from their native land, where their knowledge of the local terrain and proximity to friends and family encouraged both escape and violent retribution. Thus, Indigenous peoples were swapped between New England and the Carolinas or sold from the continental colonies to the West Indies, and vice versa. This trade was crucial for the early colonies; Indigenous servants were one of the main exports during the first century of British colonial rule.[3]

Despite these precautions, Indigenous escape, insurrection, raiding, and war proved a constant threat to profit and stability. Combined with the fact that they were a "labor supply" succumbing to genocidal depopulation caused by both disease and systematic colonial policy, the Indigenous peoples of America were only temporarily the enslaved basis of the British colonial economy.

*Indeed, the fact that the Spanish paid in specie and thus increased the "real" wealth of England would be a major defense made by English slave traders of selling Africans to the Spanish colonies, despite the fact that, according to the economic commonsense of the period of mercantilism, trading with opposing empires was to be avoided at all costs.

This, historian Patrick Wolfe argues, is consistent with the labor logic of settler colonialism. A settler colony relies on the promise of "open land" or "virgin territory" as the material and ideological basis of its existence. The problem is that this "open land" is always already occupied. Thus, to capture the land, the settler colony must eliminate the Indigenous population through genocide, first by outright murder, later, by cultural destruction and assimilation. Yet, at the same time, laborers are required to transform that "virgin territory" into value for the colonizers, and a large and ever-expanding population of laborers is required to produce profits.

These two requirements—genocide of the Indigenous to take their land and justify the colony's existence and the expansion of the pool of laborers to increase profits—are obviously incompatible. As a result, Indigenous labor cannot be relied upon in a settler colony. Thus, in the early continental colonies, the colonists emphasized Indigenous "unsuitability" for the brutality of plantation labor, an unsuitability that would not, of course, protect Indigenous Americans from continued forced labor, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing.[4]

But more labor *was* desperately needed by the planters and merchants of the colonies, who had come to the New World, after all, to get rich. The answer to this problem, for the first sixty or so years of what would become the United States, was largely found in the system of indentured servitude. Working alongside enslaved African and Indigenous peoples, white and Black "indentured servants" toiled in the tobacco fields and built the towns of colonial America.

But these servants were not yet distinguished as "white" and "Black." Though the word *Negro* appears in Virginia's colonial records, it is used as a national, not racial, descriptor, deployed in the same way that people's nationality (Scotch, Irish, English) was.[5] In this "national" definition that used "Negro" to interchangeably refer to Africans of any provenance, be they from the Spanish Caribbean or recently kidnapped from West Africa, we can see that the collapsing of various African nationalities into Blackness already existed. But whiteness had not yet been fully formed in the early seventeenth century, nor the fatal equation white-over-black that would give both racial identities their full force in America.[6]

These indentured servants came to the colonies with contracts lasting generally from three to seven years, during which time they were to serve at the absolute dictate of their master. After these terms expired, they were promised not only freedom but also land and wages from their former masters, called freedom dues. But for the first four decades of the US-American colonies, working conditions were so dire that few servants survived the length of their contracts.

In many ways, the peculiarly American systems of African slavery would be tested and designed around indentured servitude, which would expand rapidly during the tobacco boom in the mid-seventeenth century.* Servants were bought, sold, traded, kidnapped, or awarded to early colonists by the Crown, other settlers, and various companies.[7] Though some servants signed on voluntarily, hoping for a new start in America, many were exiled criminals, orphaned children, or anti-English rebels captured in Scotland and Ireland. Many, too, were kidnapped off the streets of English cities by a particularly hated class of entrepreneurs called "spirits."† Laboring on monocultural plantations, servants were beaten, starved, branded, maimed, and killed with near impunity. Even some of the horrors of the Middle Passage were practiced on English servants, who, at the height of the servant trade from 1650 to 1680, would

*I should note here that the servant trade, though it took on many of the aspects of the African slave trade, never reached the size and levels of technical organization present in the African trade in later centuries. Nor would it last nearly as long or touch even a fraction as many people. The servant trade was over before the end of the eighteenth century. Even at its zenith, European servants were never enslaved indefinitely or hereditarily, could represent themselves in court, and became full citizens after their indenture. There exists a white supremacist myth about the horrors of the "Irish slave trade" that contends that enslavement of Irish people lasted well into the nineteenth century and was equally as violent and vicious as the African slave trade. This is a historical falsehood—a white supremacist manipulation of the facts of indentured servitude. For more on the Irish slave trade myth, see the work of Liam Hogan, in particular: "Debunking the Irish Slaves Meme," a four-part series on Medium.

†Spirits would befriend and feed the gullible, drunk, or vulnerable on English city streets, who would wake up the next morning not in their new friend's home but in a cage, to be shipped to America (hence the phrase "spirited away"). So common and so hated were spirits that in the late seventeenth century, to accuse someone on a Bristol or London street of being one was sufficient to start a riot.

be "packed like herrings," locked belowdecks for weeks with barely any food and only a few feet to move.[8]

Similarly, Africans in the colonies had not all been reduced to chattel slavery. Though life terms were sometimes enforced in the Caribbean colonies in this period, many Africans in the early United States were not enslaved for life, but only under indenture contracts, and eventually went on to receive freedom dues, own land, even own white servants. As historian Barbara Jeanne Fields writes, "African slaves during the years between 1619 and 1661 enjoyed rights that, in the nineteenth century, not even free black people could claim."[9] African and European servants worked together, married, and escaped tobacco plantations together. It was not some preracial utopia of equality but rather a period of violent domination and frontier colonialism in which the specific tenets of white supremacy had not yet been fully developed, what Lerone Bennett Jr. calls an "equality of oppression."[10]

As the seventeenth century wore on, conditions in the colonies improved, and indentured servants started surviving their terms—and receiving their freedom dues—much more regularly, thus becoming more expensive. Plantation owners tried to squeeze more profit out of their workers, finding increasingly spurious reasons to extend the length of servitude, driving servants harder and harder in the fields. However, as Fields argues, English servants were crucially "backed up" by the history of struggle between British laborer and landowner, by centuries of conflict and negotiation passed down into the present as culture, precedent, and norms of treatment. Furthermore, news of servant mistreatment that reached England made it harder, and therefore more expensive, to capture or recruit new servants. There was thus a limit to how much planters could exploit English workers: they could not be made slaves for life; their progeny would not be born into permanent bondage.[11]

Africans had no such power in the English colonies, no such backup. And enslaving someone for life became more ghoulishly attractive when "life" meant more than just a few miserable years. This logic was reinforced by the threat of servant revolt. Bacon's Rebellion, the largest rebellion in the pre-Revolutionary colonies, taking place in 1676–1677, saw armed and aggrieved free Englishmen, joined by slaves and servants, loot

and burn the capital of Virginia and briefly take over the colony. This revolt, in which freemen joined servants in insurrection, increased distrust of English servants among the planters and colonial governorship. Thus, "the importation of African slaves in larger and larger numbers made it possible to maintain a sufficient corps of plantation laborers without building up an explosive charge of armed Englishmen resentful at being denied the rights of Englishmen and disposing of the material and political resources to make their resentment felt."[12]

Though African slaves were present in the colonies from the beginning, "the law did not formally recognize the condition of perpetual slavery or systematically mark out servants of African descent for special treatment until 1661."[13] By the end of the seventeenth century, African laborers were cheaper, served life terms, and had children born into slavery. Without the same history of struggle and thus a customary level of expected treatment, an ocean away from their comrades, families, and societies, Africans were alone in America. White and Indigenous servitude would continue through the eighteenth century—nearly 10 percent of the white population of the colonies were still servants at the beginning of the Revolution—but they were slowly and surely being replaced on the plantations by African laborers.[14]

If, legally and socially, there was a space and time in which race-based chattel slavery did not exist in the colonies, could American capitalism have developed some other way? Some claim that Europeans acting as tenant farmers, yeomen, and merchants might have been perfectly viable in Virginia and the Carolinas, much like they were in the Northern colonies, and that, therefore, slavery was not necessary. But the Northern colonies' economies were built almost entirely upon exporting their food, livestock, and small commodities to the sugar colonies of the West Indies, which, as a result of slavery-based plantation monoculture, did not produce enough of their own. Northern merchants, meanwhile, made much of their wealth building ships for the Triangle Trade and making rum and molasses from slave-produced sugar. New York City's insurance and financial institutions—Wall Street—were largely built through providing capital for the slave trade. Without the support of the continental colonies, Britain could never have developed its sugar monopoly, but the

reverse is also true: without the sugar monopoly, the continental colonies would have ended in failure. Quite simply, there is no American economy, North or South, without slavery.[15]

Indeed, the incredible profits reaped from the English slave economies in the Caribbean and on the North American continent—a surplus of 50 percent or more on investments made by British capital—were the cash basis of the growth of industrial production occurring in England and the European continent through the period, and, thus, a key factor in the growth of European capitalism. Planters deposited their incredible wealth with bankers and bought new luxury goods from merchants, who would then reinvest this money in infrastructure, entrepreneurial firms, and agricultural improvements in England. Back in England, where the majority of the population was still transitioning out of subsistence agriculture, the goods produced in the colonies helped form an incentive to drive peasants into cash markets and capitalist labor relations. As historian Robin Blackburn writes, "The availability of tobacco, brightly coloured cotton goods, sweetened beverages, cakes and preserves, helped to tempt Britons into greater participation in market exchanges and greater reliance on wages, salaries and fees."[16] Thus slavery strengthened the English bourgeoisie, enriched British and continental banking and merchant firms, and helped create the modern English working class.* It's not just America: industrial capitalism is impossible without New World slavery.

But capitalism is a system ideologically committed to free labor—though the freedom in "free labor" is the freedom to starve. The maximum development of profit for the bourgeoisie relies on a free labor market, on the reproduction of a proletariat with nothing to sell but their labor power. It is necessary that individual capitalists be able to manipulate their workers' labor hours, for example, via hiring and firing, to

*As Cedric Robinson points out, even this "English working class" was hardly a unified subject but was, as it formed, deeply riven by racial hierarchy, with Irish laborers at the bottom, and Scottish, Welsh, and more recently West Indian and Asian workers below "English" workers proper. These divisions, though briefly overcome in the Chartist movement, were a crucial factor in limiting English working class radicalism in the nineteenth century (Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2nd ed. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000], 45–52).

respond to developments in the productive forces and swings in demand within the market.

What Southern agriculture discovered is that this can be achieved without free laborers. Plantation owners frequently "hired out" farmhands to other owners or temporarily hired skilled slaves from other areas or industries. Southern cities of the nineteenth century were filled with communities of such laborers, who earned a wage much like a free worker did, the difference being they did so only at their enslavers' pleasure and they were required to turn over most of their income every week—as many proletarians in America today turn over all their wages to debtors and landlords.

Frederick Douglass spent some of his bondage working as a ship caulker in Baltimore and, like many others, deceived his enslaver about how much he was actually making, thus secreting funds for his escape. Many of these workers lived miles distant from their enslavers—indeed, it is precisely these urban communities of relatively independent Black people that would lead to the earliest development of police departments, as gangs of slave catchers evolved into formalized slave patrols designed to keep these "slave quarters" under surveillance and control.[17]

Still, the main way capitalists increase profits is to drive down the cost of production, of which the largest part is usually the price of labor. This is done by maintaining a large body of unemployed proletarians, thus making workers replaceable and allowing employers to fire insubordinate, disabled, sick, or pregnant workers, while using the threat of unemployment to coerce the rest into working more hours for less pay. Agricultural slave labor, therefore, intuitively seems hard to make cheaper. With no threat of losing their wage nor any real promise of advancement, and with no unemployed people liable to take a slave's position—slavery is a system of 100 percent employment, after all—the enslaved tend to work the bare minimum required to avoid punishment and are less reliably coerced by speedups and expanded managerial demands.

But research increasingly reveals that, rather than merely delay profit growth, this "dilemma" of enslaved labor saw overseers develop some of capitalism's most powerful (and erroneously considered modern) man-

agement techniques. The earliest examples of employee surveillance, individual performance assessment, traceable units of production, detailed record keeping, and employee incentivization—all key concepts in modern management theory—occurred on slave plantations.[18]

Nevertheless, certain models of historical teleology persist in calling slavery "pre-capitalist," or just primitive accumulation, a necessary condition for capitalism's growth but something ultimately overcome by actual, real industrial capitalism. This relies on a definition of capitalism that considers the wage the most important defining feature of capitalism, a definition that underestimates the importance, for example, of the totally necessary unwaged reproductive labor that predominantly falls to women under capitalism: housework, emotional care, and the literal reproduction of the working class. In these models, unwaged labor becomes not a central component of capitalism but a supporting side effect, an arbitrary management tactic.

Other scholars have argued that capitalism eventually abolished slavery as inefficient, unprofitable, or immoral. But they ignore the fact that, even though formal slavery and the slave trade ended in the Americas in the nineteenth century, the enslavement of prison populations in the United States continues to this day, not to mention that colonial slave regimes in Africa and Southeast Asia expanded vastly at the very moment of American emancipation. When Brazil abolished slavery in 1888—the last country in the Americas to do so—King Leopold II of Belgium's genocidal domination of the Congo was but three years old. From 1885 to 1908, almost all the people of the Congo Basin, along with thousands kidnapped from other parts of Africa, were forced into slavery.

The sinisterly named "Congo Free State" saw fifteen million people worked to death on rubber plantations, starved by monoculture-produced famine and drought, murdered by colonial overseers for failing to meet rubber or ivory quotas, killed on forced marches, or executed by militias for rising in rebellion. The rubber thus accumulated enabled the mass production of the bicycles and automobiles that would transform daily life in the Global North. Across the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, capitalist development relied on enslaved, colonized labor.

Though one of capitalism's defining features is free labor, unfree and unwaged labor are endemic features of capitalist profit production, not holdovers from previous economic systems.

Still, slavery and capitalism are not identical regimes: slavery has existed across cultures and time periods, under various names, with differing centrality, at different levels of violence, and supporting divergent societies, whereas capitalism is a modern development that tends toward a global and homogenous social organization. And there is no question that the experience of the enslaved is fundamentally different from that of the worker. So then, how do we reconcile these two separable yet materially integrated and coproductive regimes without simply collapsing one into the other and thus losing sight of their specificities? One helpful step is to recognize the absolute centrality of race to the development of private property, and vice versa.

Racial domination is not a by-product of capitalism, nor one of a number of available strategies plucked from the ether of potential management paradigms, conveniently to hand. As we have seen, slavery and settler colonialism were necessary components of the formation and maintenance of capitalism. And slavery and settler colonialism couldn't be carried out, day by day, instinctively and across centuries, by millions of Euro-Americans, both rich and poor, without the formal, legal, psychological, and ideological frameworks of racism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness.

Many historians have shown that strong, explicit racist ideology does not appear in the historical record in America until the revolutionary period, when the rights of man (and it is indeed man) became the defining philosophy of US politics. If the rights to liberty and property are inalienable, then what to do about all these people who are, very clearly, not in possession of liberty or the capacity of property ownership? What of these people who are the property of the men claiming all men have inalienable rights? Much like gender naturalizes and "explains" why women are not granted these inalienable liberties, the white Founding Fathers resolved this contradiction through race: Black men are not men, not really. As Fields writes, Black people "resolved the contradiction more straightforwardly by calling for the abolition of slavery."[19]

This contradiction finds its roots deep in European history and philosophy. The emergence of modern, explicit racial ideology is built on centuries of implicit racial and racialized power, a form of power absolutely fundamental to creating the division of labor, the construction of "Europe," whiteness, and the very possibility of private property.

Cedric Robinson demonstrates that racialized hierarchies were crucial to medieval European notions of nobility and the formation of serf and slave populations—for example, in Russia, serfs were imagined to have black bones, as opposed to the white ones of nobles. Myths about the bloodlines of Normans, Irish, and Scots justified differing levels of work and privilege in medieval and mercantilist England. Proto-racial hierarchies, as framed around notions of barbarians and outsiders, were also the key tool for structuring and disciplining the mercenary armies and the immigrant and migratory working populations of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mercantilist statecraft.[20]

The contradiction between racial power and the liberal concept of inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property is visible throughout American history. One striking example occurred one hundred years before the Revolution, in the racialized conception of freedom visible in Bacon's Rebellion. In the infamous 1676 Virginia uprising, enslaved and servant, Black and white fought side by side, and some historians therefore celebrate this rebellion as a proto-democratic and revolutionary uprising. Much like the Civil War was about slavery, but with neither side originally fighting for emancipation, so was Bacon's Rebellion originally about "Indian policy," with a disagreement about how quickly genocide of the Indigenous people should be carried out. And, as in the Civil War, slaves joined the fight, changing the meaning of the struggle in their attempt to win emancipation.

The conflict was sparked by Nathaniel Bacon, a backcountry planter and settler living on the border of "Indian territory." He wanted to seize more land, and to do so advocated a more aggressive and immediate genocidal policy than that of the colony: total war on the natives. Berkeley, the English governor of the colony, disagreed. He recognized the strategic imperative to maintain provisional and relative peace—until,

of course, the next time the colony needed to expand westward—rather than risk an all-out war they would almost certainly lose.

Bacon ignored Berkeley, and in the first act of the rebellion, in May 1676, gathered a militia to attack a group of Indigenous Americans. Not even attacking a "hostile" nation, Bacon's militia massacred a village of the British-allied Occaneechi. Governor Berkeley declared Bacon's mustering of the militia illegal. In response, armed supporters of Bacon stormed the capital and forced Berkeley to change his ruling and approve Bacon's commission as militia leader. This indicated the functional end of Berkeley's power, and Berkeley and his governmental assembly would eventually flee the capital.

Bacon's Assembly, the first and only formal government of the rebellion, was held in June 1676. It passed a number of new acts into colonial law, the most famous removing property restrictions on suffrage and giving democratic electoral control over parish priests to all free men of the colony, regardless of race. Bacon's sudden death in October 1676, followed by a series of military defeats—ending in a famous last stand made by a mix of Black and white servant-rebels—concluded the uprising, and the acts of Bacon's Assembly were repealed. Still, some historians hold up their expansion of voting rights and popular control as examples of early democratic policy in America.

Bacon's Rebellion is thus seen as an antecedent of the America Revolution. And, indeed, it is, though not in the way its defenders usually intend but because the first three acts of Bacon's Assembly all focused on pursuing total war against Indigenous Americans and confiscating Indigenous lands theoretically protected by British treaty.* European and Black servants fought together in the rebellion, which points to the fact that whiteness had not fully developed by then, but we can see in the first three acts of Bacon's Assembly that racialized structures of freedom-for-some were already well established.

This contradiction, between legal and social structures of racial oppression and democratic liberty, is the central epistemological frame-

*J. Sakai calls this contradiction "the dialectical unity of democracy and oppression in developing settler Amerika" (*Settlers* [Chicago: Morningstar Press, 1989]).

work of the modern European worldview. As philosopher Sylvia Wynter demonstrates, it is the constitutive principle of Rational Man; for Wynter, the key transition from feudal thought to enlightened reason centers around the replacement of God versus Man as the structuring dichotomy of society with that of reason versus lack of reason. Because, under feudalism, all people were subservient to the law of God, everything in "nature" served to verify the glory, power, and existence of God: nobles and kings were divinely ordained, the sun rotated around God's earth, and so forth. But once nature was no longer needed to perform this affirmation of the divine,

> another mode of nature, human nature, would now be installed in its place. The representation of a naturally ordered distribution of degrees of reason between different human groups enable what might be called a homo-ontological principle of Sameness/Difference, figured as a by/nature difference of superiority/inferiority between groups, and could now function tautologically as the verifying proof of a . . . naturally caused status-organizing principle, a principle based on differential endowment of Reason (rather than of noble Blood) and verified dynamically in the empirical reality of the order.[21]

The emergence of reason and the subsequent reification of reason as the fundamental attribute of human nature is therefore completely premised on the creation of hierarchies of reasonable and unreasonable people. The enlightened, reasoned man can only exist in distinction to the (African, Indigenous, nonmale) person who lacks reason; the idea of universal humanity is premised on human difference from and opposition to the less- or nonhuman person, a racialized and racializing difference.

In practice, this means that anything is justified in introducing reason to those who lack it, because, lacking it, that person is cast outside what Wynter calls the "sanctified universe of obligation"; in other words, they are not entitled to those same protections colloquially referred to as basic human decency. This principle, "verified dynamically in the empirical reality of the order," is the ideology of progress: domination, colonialism, and the expansion of capitalism become justice, the end of poverty, and

the spread of culture, science, and truth. As Wynter shows, in the colonial period this humanist structure was used to justify genocide of Indigenous Americans. Spanish colonists encountering what they understood as senseless human sacrifice (as opposed to rational, sensible wars of religion or conquest) used it as proof that the Indigenous societies they confronted lacked reason. In the name of God, yes, but as He is now the God of reason and un-reason's innocent victims, Spanish colonists claimed they not only could but also were morally obligated to conquer this society.

This is the same logic that allows Bacon's Rebellion to expand the franchise while advocating wiping out the "primitive" Indians. The concepts of the individual and the human that constitute the basis for all rights, for all law, for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" were already and always built on a racial definition. But the phrase is an adaptation of a John Locke quotation that did not mention happiness: it was "life, liberty, and the pursuit of estate." This inalienable right to "estate," to property, would be the marker of the kind of subject recognized by this new government. But this also works in the other direction: to be able to own property is to be human, so those who cannot own property—be they enslaved, Indigenous, or even the children and wives of settlers—need not be recognized as fully human by the state.

In the early decades of the colonial era, it was illegal to enslave Christians in perpetuity. But as the theological explanation of the world gave way to reason, the justification for enslaving people also transformed: only barbaric, uncivilized, and "reason-lacking" people can be enslaved. And, as Wynter shows us, because this is a tautological structure that verifies itself through what has already come to pass, Africans, who were by the turn of the seventeenth century "easier" to enslave than Europeans, became just such a "reason-lacking" people. Africans came to stand for lack of reason itself. Because people lacking reason were not human, they were only capable of *being* property, not owning it. Although the more liberal-minded settlers believed that with education and uplift some select Black people might become capable of humanity, they did not challenge the basic framework by which most Africans were deemed inhuman. Black people became, legally, socially, and ideologically, property.

American power and property developed along two racial axes: the genocidal dispossession of the indigene and the kidnap and enslavement of the African. As historian Patrick Wolfe writes in *Traces of History*, this is core to the worldview of John Locke, preferred property theorist of the Founding Fathers, who argued "in texts that would profoundly influence Euro-American colonial ideology, private property accrued from the admixture of labor and land. As this formula was color-coded on the colonial ground, Blacks provided the former and Indians the latter."[22] Property in America is only possible through this racial accumulation.

The stolen land and enslaved people were together by far the most valuable property in America, from the earliest days of the colonies up to 1860. The establishment in American jurisprudence of absolute rights to property and the inviolability of contract would occur in an 1810 Supreme Court ruling, *Fletcher v. Peck*, that centered around a massive expansion of slave territory in Georgia. That is why legal scholar Anthony Paul Farley argues that "the black is the apogee of the commodity." Blackness, he writes, is a way of marking certain bodies as owners and certain bodies as owned. Simone Browne calls this mutual process of racialization and propertification the "making and marking of blackness as property."[23]

Just as Blackness marks a person as (potential) property, whiteness also cannot be understood outside of property relations: the characteristic of "whiteness" is the thing white people have that makes them legal subjects, owners, and human beings. We tend to think of property as tangible things, items or commodities, although we also understand ideas of intellectual property and copyright. *Property*, in other words, also includes rights, protections, and customs of possession passed down and ratified through law. Whiteness emerges as the race of people who are neither Indigenous nor enslavable—national identities are increasingly collapsed around the distinctions of slave/free and Black/white. As legal scholar Cheryl Harris writes in her seminal text "Whiteness as Property," "Whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free. White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits and was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof."[24] Property law emerges to codify, formalize, and

affirm white enslavement of Africans and conquest of the Americas, to protect, project, and strengthen whiteness.

This can be seen as white settlers came in conflict with Indigenous landholders. Settlers claimed, absurdly, that they were the "first possessors" of the land. "Only particular forms of possession—those that were characteristic of white settlement—would be recognized and legitimated. Indian forms of possession were perceived to be too ambiguous and unclear."[25] Law develops to codify whiteness and to give technical description and explanation to the genocide-accomplished fact of settler-colonial conquest. Access to certain forms of power, legality, and personhood—property-in-whiteness—was a prerequisite for access to property in land or slaves: whiteness became the meta-property from which all other private property flows and is derived.*

Not only is capitalist development completely reliant on racialized forms of power, but bourgeois legality itself, enshrining at its center the right to own property, fundamentally relies on racial structures of human nature to justify this right. Private property is a racial concept, and race, a propertarian one.

But what happens when this ultimate commodity, the slave, refuses to be property? This refusal, practiced over and over again, across and against the whole history of the United States, expressed in art, music, poetry, and dance, in religious fervor and revolutionary organization, in violent confrontation with the state and the cunning avoidance of it, in prison breaks and intellectual breakthroughs, has not yet been fully consummated. That is because the owners have always victoriously reasserted their great big YES, that yes of the police, the prisons, the plantations, redlining, borders, Jim Crow, failing schools, gang injunctions, slave patrols, cultural appropriation, housing courts, lynch mobs, unemployment, and the countless other aggressions, micro and macro, that reassert the commodifying mark every day in all its violence. As Blackness became a way to signify and describe those who can be and had become property, the radical consummation of that refusal would mean

*A similar process occurs through patriarchal domination, whereby being head of household—legal ownership of a family's children and women—was the basis for citizenship.

at minimum the abolition of the entire system under which things can be commodified. Revolution.

Such a revolution, against white supremacy, property, and their fundamental intersection, was taken up by the enslaved of the United States, en masse, with the strategy of refusal that had proven most successful across the preceding centuries: escape from the plantation. And though this revolution would only destroy legal slavery and not everything it meant, defended, and reproduced, it is evidence of the revolutionary potential of abolishing property, of joining together and expropriating the owners. The revolutionary potential of looting.

Chen Chen

Selections from a Small Book of Questions

After Bhanu Kapil

What do you remember about the earth?

When he says, “We’re both going to live to a hundred and then die peacefully in our sleep at the exact same time,” I say, “Yes,” I say, “Of course,” I kiss him, “Yes.” At the same time I think, *But what about two hundred? Three?*

What are the consequences of silence?

I wanted to answer my mother: “No, I’m not afraid of women. And I’m not afraid of you. I love men. That’s all. That’s what you can’t believe. Won’t say. Won’t let me answer, because you can’t find the right question.”

Is it possible to write like we think, moment-to-moment, day-to-day, year-to-year?

Is it possible that thoughts occur like waves arise, all over the ocean surface, each not attached to the other, yet emerging from the same substance, drawn by the same inexorability?

Is it possible that one achieves originality by recognizing the shape of the most basic forms?

Is it possible that novelty can be found only in the mundane?

Is it possible that mundane existence is the only report of the spiritual available to mind?

Is it possible that the job of art is to give everyone concerned—the artist, the viewer, the critic, the collector—an ethical part in creation?

Is the ideal of every aesthetic program to reinvigorate the beholder's interest in the world?

What are the many ways in which works of art invite, elicit, stimulate sensual engagement with existence?

How are the ways we come to believe in anything more remarkable than any single thing we come to believe? How is art connected to the constitution of belief?

Is it possible that there is no reality prior to the present moment; that reality is a thing being collectively, constantly stated as the affects of relations, relations among people, and relations between people and objects, all affected by the qualities of context: textures, tastes, temperatures and tones?

Is it possible that some portion of ourselves remains a secret from ourselves?
Is it possible that some portion of ourselves remains a secret from others?
Is it possible that these two portions (secret from ourselves and secret from others) are not identical; they are different portions of a self?
Is the secret a structural feature of the person?
Is consciousness a permeable barrier regulating the flow of stimuli between an imagined inside and projected outside?
Where is the secret?

Is it possible that I am only a means? A means of what?
Am I a means to an end that exceeds the totality of my senses—a sum that's never totaled?

Am I looking for the most difficult way out imaginable?

Should I drive all causes into one? Is that for me to decide?

Is there any moment apart from the coincidence of material and activity? Is this coincidence a structure? Does anything exist prior to the coincidence of material and activity?

What if I disregard any topography—in or out, up or down, before or after?
Is this possible? Is it desirable?
Is this my end, or can I return?

In what sense does a question precede its answer? Does it?
If not, does the answer matter? Or, is the question redundant?

Is it possible that the one-who-thinks is not the self?
How is the one-who-thinks a dead remainder—like sweat, like hair, like dried skin, cum, toenails, or excrement?
Is thought the waste product of an activity that abandons spent materials?
Is my name—Gregg—the byproduct of a dynamic that cannot be described? Or, is it a designation to mark the place of a description, but not the description itself?

How can the one-who-thinks consciously stand between the self and the subject? Between volition and agency?

Is consciousness overestimated?

What is thoughtfulness? And what, if anything, does thoughtfulness have to do with consciousness?

Can the one-who-thinks live according to a principle that cannot be described?
Does the effort to describe a living principle return the one-who-thinks to that principle, although the principle itself eludes description?
What is described by the effort to capture a principle?
Does the effort to capture a principle as a description include all procedures to make materials coincide with activities?
In what ways do these procedures yield observable results?
In what ways do the observable results of one's efforts matter according to a principle?

If what remains of our efforts can be described as a return to principle, how can what is returned remain?
Are returning and remaining two different dispositions toward the same thing?
Are they two states of the same composition?

Is the force of coincidence a who or a what?
How is a who also a what? Or, what makes a what into a who?
And where does anything happen?

If information is a material and thought is an activity, can information and thought be made to coincide? What name do we give to their apparent coincidence? Does the name make their coincidence appear? Or, is the name merely a location?

How is an object three things:
a) itself;
b) its very own negation;
c) part of a larger system of relations.

How does an object contain its own volition?
Does an object possess volition apart from the hand of its maker and the mind of its perceiver?

How is a question pertinent from time to time, but not every time it is posed?

Where does a thing exist?

When does a thing exist?

s there such a thing as a thing?

Must we say where, or when, or what, for existence to occur?

How is existence a question? If it is a question, is it an important question?

What is an important question? How?

s the limit of knowledge the final limitation; or, are there imits of experience that precede and exceed the limits on nowledge?

How do we assign priorities among our limitations?

How do we make pictures now?

How is making a picture an act of faith?

How is making a picture an act of volition?

How is making a picture more than a matter of faith?
How is making a picture more than a matter of volition?

How can we picture more than there is in the world?

Is it possible that there is more than the world?

How is a picture a possibility?

How can I focus exclusively on possibilities?

Where does the conflict of a question arise—before, during, or after the question is posed?
Does the conflict of a question arise as an affect inherent to its composition?

Some questions begin with who, what, where, or when. Some questions begin with is, do does, or are. Others start from if. What do all questions share, and do they differ by kind or by degree?

Does a variety of contexts account for the differences between questions?

In what way is each question a singular proposition?

Where can I find a quiet place to read sitting in the sun if I haven't yet eaten breakfast?
Does eating take precedence over reading when the weather is warm? How?
Is the grass green or is the sun just agreeable?
Can the one-who-thinks solve these questions; or is the solution something that stands apart on its own, awaiting recognition?
In what sense does a solution wait, as if it possesses volition?

Does satisfaction reside in an affect transmitted by the question to the answer?

Is the demand of a question an issue of volition? From where does volition issue?

How does a question exist apart from its source? What is the source of any question?
Certainly not the person who poses it?

What, if anything, am I really asking? And what answer could satisfy my curiosity with any finality?

How does a work of art take shape?

How does a work of art contain its very own volition?

In what way is every question original?

How is a question an object?

Where else do objects contain their meaning but in their own compositions?

If I accept that objects contain meanings in their compositions, must I accept that I have very little to do with the meanings of my most significant possessions?
And if I accept such a small role in the production of any object's meaning will I lose my desire to make things?
Do I have a choice in accepting any of this?
Does my ability to pose these questions have any meaning other than the fact that I have some kind of relation to things beyond question?

How is a chair an alphabet? How is an alphabet a mother? How is a chair as an alphabet as a mother art?
Where does 'How is a chair as an alphabet as a mother art?' exist, except as a question among all possible questions?

Is creation a state or a process; both or neither?

How is an act of creation a question?

How is a question the meeting point of agitation and stasis?
In what way is the meeting point of agitation and stasis a location?
How can a location become both the origin and terminus of a confrontation between agitation and stasis?

How can the one-who-thinks describe the formation of a question without posing a question?

Is the question a basic form?

To what use do any of the questions contained herein aim?

How does an act of creation stand apart (autonomously) from its results?

Is there an inviolable principle of creation?
Is there a way of forming a question that will defy all attempts to answer?
Is the primary cause of creation a question?

Am I the work of a fundamental principle and as such an open source of creation?

How is elaboration the only creative activity?

How does the work of art absorb rather than absolve?

How, if at all, do we learn by experience?
Is experiencing distinguishable from learning?
Is conscious awareness of attainment an overestimated value of learning?
In what way is self-reflection objectless?

How is the past always a condition of the present?
How is the past a condition without content?

How can I be both empty and full, clear like glass?

How basic are the assumptions beneath my own volitions?
Basic to what?

How am I shaped by the same forces as stones?

How am I moved by the same forces that distribute weeds?

How are all questions different species of the same question
What's the question?
How?

How do I the pose the question I wish to ask where and whe
it takes me?

How is a question a form of attire?

How is a question an instruction?

How to embrace what cannot be possessed when it
unexpectedly offers itself?
Where to place my hands?

How is a question necessary but not inevitable?
How is a question inevitable but not necessary?
How do the terms inevitable and necessary differ?

How is probability itself a cause?
How does a question make itself probable?

How is a question an egg? How is an egg a body? How is an egg a body a joke? How is 'an egg a body a joke' attractive?

How does an inkling sway a disposition?

How is a city a month? How is a month love? How is 'a city as a month love' a sensation?

How is a question a return?

How is a question different every time it is posed?

How is the act of asking the very same gesture every time a question is posed? Is posing the same gesture as asking?

Is it possible that the same question worded the same way, delivered with the same inflection on any number of occasions, remains the same urge, the same sentiment, the same curiosity as when it was first uttered? If aspects of a question change according to who asks, where they ask, when they ask, and how often they ask, what remains of the original vexation precisely worded and repeated often?

How to coincide with one's own body as a matter of principle? How to feel that question as a problem?

How to return to the question of art?

How does the author return to a question purposefully without any thought occurring to guide the way?

How do I continually return to the state of a question?

How is what we call art an open question—asked and answered without satisfaction?

How should an unwelcome question be greeted?

How is a question a motion and toward where?

How does the ocean endure as a symbol?
What is the ocean to a bickering couple?
Couple of what?

How is a question struck, like a match or a child?

Is it possible that the condition for an end to all confusions does not, and never will, exist? Does belief require the possibility of an end to all confusions as a necessary condition?
What does belief require?
How is belief a requirement?

In what way is my consent not mine to give?
How do I withhold my consent to a question after the question is already posed?
If I acknowledge that the question already exists as an object present to my senses, then what is the content of dispute?
Isn't dispute always already a concession?

How can I attain a purchase on what precedes all questions?
Is this very question the aim of all aesthetics?

How can I touch creation as a principle without reproach?

How have I arrived at an understanding of aesthetics as a forr of theology with a minimum amount of prescription?
How is a question fundamentally a prescription?

How will the suspension of any answers affect my cause? Wh is my cause? Where is my reason? Who is my relation? When my time?

What are the last four digits of my social security number?

Is it possible that money and magic share a common princip

How is food a requirement of conversation where both nourishment and discussion occupy the same organ?

How is destruction the recourse of vanished principles?

Under what circumstances does the atmosphere become viscous?

What conditions cause all motions to cease among the living?

What draws the animate to a state of utter stillness?

How does volition achieve a state of exhaustion?

How much can a body endure?

How is illness a model of emotion?

How is joy an involuntary achievement?

What must we give up for happiness?

How is pleasure an attribute of powerlessness?

How is the question 'Why War?' answerable?
If there is an answer, how would its utterance yield an end to war?
Can there be war without a question about its reasons?
If there is no reason, what is war?
How are knowledge and war related?

How can I live a life of contentment both pleasurable and ethical?
How is that question about art?

DECONSTRUCTION

by Mary Ruefle

I think the sirens in *The Odyssey* sang *The Odyssey*, for there is nothing more seductive, more terrible, than the story of our own life, the one we do not want to hear and will do anything to listen to.

Women Reflected in Their Own History
L

Women burning headscarves in Sari, Iran. Source: social media.

This text was originally published in Persian on the Iranian feminist platform Harass Watch, on September 28, 2022. The first English translation of the text was published on the Arab ezine *Jadaliyya* on October 5, 2022.

This anonymously written text isn't so old. It is probably three weeks old as we write this collective introduction on why we, a non-organized group of feminists in Iran, felt that it must travel beyond the borders of Iran, beyond the limits of the Persian language. There are texts throughout history that become pivotal for a people. "Women Reflected in Their Own History" is a cornerstone, an achievement in articulating a collective desire and a collective consciousness that secures it a place in the history of Persian writing. It is a prominent text in the history of all struggles throughout the longue durée of revolutions and movements in the region.

The text at hand resonates across multiple registers: the history of protest movements; creativity; identity; and the modes of production of historical agency. One witnesses a historical collision of videos taken by mobile phones, a phenomenon that was present at the zenith of the Arab Spring and the Iranian Green Movement, here folded back onto the history of photography yet revolving around the unfolding history of citizens' choreographed performances in the street.

What makes this text a groundbreaking piece of intersectional feminist revolutionary writing? It is in the way the author interweaves feminine sexual drives and female sexuality—a feminine identification that stimulates and invites other women into its chain of becomings. It presents and brings forth the cultivation of nervous systems that

spread out quickly, beyond the borders of Iran, back and forth, weaving mourning and celebration, militant struggle and discourse.
L, the anonymous author of the text, claims to be a resident of a little town outside Tehran. She must be between her late twenties and early forties. In an almost total absence of fair and unbiased journalism in the Islamic Republic, and due to the difficulty of translating between contexts in which the protests are moving ahead, the poetic prose and theorizations of L, her personal, sensual, and affective articulations, resonate with what other individuals have experienced.

Woman with torch. Source: social media.

For Zhina, Niloufar, Elaheh, Mahsa, Elmira, and those whose names I haven't yet uttered.

What follows is an attempt to understand what one intuits about a gap—the gap between watching videos and photographs of the protests and being in the street.**1** This is an attempt to elaborate the short circuit**2** between these two arenas, those of the virtual space and the street, in this historical moment. I must stress that what I have witnessed and been inspired by might not necessarily apply to other cities. I live in a small town that differs from bigger cities or even other smaller ones in terms of the location where protests usually take place. This text is not intended to universalize this situation towards a general conclusion, but to elaborate on this particular situation and the influence it has had on me.

The protests reached my little town after breaking out in Kurdistan and Tehran. For some days I encountered videos of protests on the streets, passionate songs, photographs, and the figures of militant

women, and on Wednesday eventually I found myself in a street protest. It was very strange: the first moments of being *there*, on the street, surrounded by the protesters whom until yesterday I had watched and admired on the screen of a phone—astonished by their courage, I had grieved and cried for them. I was looking around and was trying to synchronize the images of the street with its reality. What I saw was very similar to what I had watched before, but there was a gap between my watching self and my self on the street, and I needed a few moments to register it. The street wasn't the bearer of horror anymore, but just an ordinary space. Everything was ordinary, even when those with batons, guns, and shock prods were attacking to disperse us. I don't know how to describe the word "ordinary," or what better synonym to use in its place. The distance between myself and those images that I was desiring had decreased. I was that image, I was coming to my senses and realizing that I am in a ring of women burning headscarves, as if I had always been doing that before. I was coming to my senses and realizing I was being beaten a few moments ago.

Being beaten in reality is much more ordinary than what I had seen before. The pain wasn't like what I had imagined from watching the videos. While being beaten, the body is *warm*, as the [Persian] saying goes, and pain is not felt as expected. We had watched bodies struck by pellet bullets several times before, but those who have experienced it say pellets are not that painful or scary either. On the street, you suddenly think you must run, and the next moment you see that you've already started running. You tell yourself you must light a cigarette, and you see yourself *there* among the people and you are smoking.**3** The body moves ahead of cognition and doesn't synchronize.
I think even death isn't that scary for one who has experienced the street. The experience of the street suspends death and that's the real fear. This is exactly what scares the viewers: watching people who are ready to die. We are ready to die. No, we aren't even ready. We are freed from thinking about death. We have left death behind. Proximity and encountering fears and overcoming them while your body is warm: the realm of the real.

When I got away from the scuffle with the anti-riot forces and escaped into the crowd, I heard lots of cheers. After the protests, walking back home late at night, every now and then a delivery guy would pass by and show me the victory sign, or would shout, "Bravo!" I was still elated and couldn't register the cheers and the bravos. The next day, when I saw the bruises in the mirror, suddenly the details of the struggle appeared to me. As if I had remembered a dream that up to

that point I wasn't aware of having experienced. I was reminded of the details, one by one, for the first time. My body had cooled down and my mind had started working. I wasn't only beaten, I had also resisted and had punched and kicked too. My body had unconsciously executed what I had watched the other protesters do. I remembered the surprised faces of the anti-riot police who had me in their hands. Only after this momentary interval did my memory reach my body.

The tangible difference between the protests I had experienced in the past and the current ones is the shift from *an inclination to mass and move in crowds* towards *a tendency to create situations*. The group of protesters, right before the arrival of the anti-riot forces, would gather to create something around a *situation*, and would disperse with the arrival of the anti-riot police after a short struggle, according to the parameters of the street and the neighborhood, and then take shape in another spot. These situations were created by blocking the street, setting dumpsters on fire, and making a traffic jam. In this short time, the small yet active group would quickly attempt to create a situation: "Now let's burn our headscarves." A woman would jump on top of a dumpster, raise her fist towards the cars, and hold that figure for a few seconds. Another woman would get on top of a car and wave her head scarf. A few middle-aged women accompanied the core protesters from the beginning to the end, and as soon as the police would try to carry the protesters away, they would rush to free them. Everyone wanted to join the flood of images that they had watched in the videos of the protests the days before. Rarely would one hear any slogans and the chanters wouldn't exceed more than a handful. The *desire* to become *that image*, the image of resistance that the people of my town had witnessed, was clear to me. Now I want to answer the question of why this is a feminist revolution and elaborate on this *desire*.

As I mentioned already, the current uprisings do not *revolve around masses* but around *situations*, not *around slogans*, but *around figures*. Anyone—truly anyone—as we witnessed these days, can create an unbelievably radical situation of resistance on her own, so that watching it will leave one astonished. The faith in such capacity has spread widely and quickly. Everyone knows that with that figure of resistance, one creates an unforgettable situation. People, and especially women—these obstinate pursuers of their desires—are chasing this new desire fervently day by day. This desire in turn drives a chain of desires for creating new situations and new figures of resistance: "I want to be that woman with that figure of resistance, the one I saw the picture of, and I create a figure." These unrehearsed figures were in

the unconscious of the protestors, as if they had been rehearsing them for years. This figure of resistance, this body recorded in photographs, stimulates the desire for other women to create a figure, in the next link of the chain. What desires were released from the prison of our bodies during these days!

I want to contrast the *force vector* that during the 2009 Green Movement, for instance, was constituted by the *masses* with these *stimulation nodes*—dispersed and diverse nodes on the street.

The stimulation points, similar to female orgasm, aren't determined and concentrated in any point of the street/body. Besides the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" and the feminist activists' call to the first demonstrations being the starting point of the protests, I would say it's precisely these figurative stimulation points of the protesting bodies that has made this uprising a feminist one, extending it in a feminist and feminine form and arousing women's desires all around the globe

Turning into those figures is one of the most apparent desires of the protesters. It's no longer possible to go on the street without taking the figure of one of those insurgent, disobedient, militant bodies: whether on top of a dumpster, or burning a headscarf, or freeing a detained person, or just engaging in a stubborn face-off with the anti-riot forces.

The images that we've seen of other women's resistance have given us a new understanding of our bodies. I think the singularity of this feminine resistance and its figural nature enabled the iconization of the screenshots and photographs, in contrast to the videos. Proud photographs reproduced and circulated en masse were immediately inscribed in our collective memory, so much so that one could draft a chronological account of this uprising based on the publishing date of these pictures. The images that aroused this uprising and carried it forward: the picture of Zhina on the hospital bed, the picture of her relatives embracing each other at the hospital, the picture of the Kurdish women in the Aychi cemetery waving their headscarves. What do we want to see from all those events? That moment, that frozen moment when the scarves are flying high, whirling in the sky. The photo of Zhina's gravestone, the figure of the woman with the torch in Keshavarz Boulevard, the solo figure of the woman facing the water cannon truck in Valiasr Square, the figure of the sitting woman, the figure of the standing woman, the figure of the woman with a placard in Tabriz standing face to face with the anti-riot forces, the figure of the woman tying up her hair, the photo of the ring of dancers around the fire in Bandar Abbas, and several other figures.

Zhina Amini's tombstone in Saqqez, Kurdistan. The engraving reads: "Dear Jina, you haven't died, your name has become a code." Source: Journalist Elaheh Mohammadi, imprisoned for covering Zhina's funeral.

Mahsa's relatives in the hospital. Source: Journalist Niloofar Hamedi, detained and imprisoned for publicizing and taking the first pictures of Zhina at the hospital.

Woman waving her scarf, Tehran. Source: social media.

Woman facing the water cannon on Valiasr Square in Tehran. Source: social media.

Woman tying up her hair. Source: social media.

Kurdish women in Aychi Cemetery, Kurdistan, waving their headscarves. Source: social media.

Women burning their headscarves in Saveh. Source: social media.

Woman without headscarf going face to face with the police in Tehran. Source: social media.

What permeates a photo with such a tremendously more stimulating force than a video? The time that is encapsulated in the photo. The encapsulated time condenses into the photo; it carries the entire history that the body is subjugated to. The women's uprising in Iran is a photocentric one. What extends from this feminist footprint and doesn't allow it to get lost? After Zhina's name, after "Woman, Life, Freedom," while the scale of repression is such that gathering is no longer possible and protests are not reliant on slogans, it's the figures of women's struggles that turn this uprising into a still-feminine uprising. This encapsulated time problematizes the linear historical narrative and highlights instead the *topology of the situation*: the gestures, the moments, that same incremental everyday fight we are occupied with. ***#for4*** that moment and all those moments. Not for a totalizing narrative, but for any small thing. For those incremental moments that slip away, for reclaiming them, for that lump in the throat, for that fear, for that fervor, for that word, for that moment that has extended until now, that has dragged itself until today, under our skin, under our nails, camouflaging inside the lump in our throat. The present perfect tense, the photo's time is in the present perfect tense: it arouses desires, brings the past into life, extends it to a moment before now and, in the now, hands over this marathon of moments to the *moment*, to the photo, and to the next figure.

In truth, what makes this uprising a feminist one, and differentiates it from the others, is its figural essence: the possibility for creating images that are neither necessarily representative of the severity of the conflict and the brutality of the repression, nor of the course of an

event. A possibility that carries the history of bodies: a pause, a syncope, “Look at this body!,” “Watch this history all the way through!,” “Here.” The figure of the woman holding the torch, something that is self-sufficient and carries history in isolation, without reference to the moment before or after. Rather than the linear temporal continuum of video, expressing and representing the situation of confrontation, action, or repression, the history of this body is crystallized in a moment, in a revolutionary moment. Pausing on the moment when the woman is raising the torch and making a victory sign. The movement of the eyes across the frame, the shimmering light of the car behind, the raised arms, the profile of the man standing by, the trees on the street, the figure, pause. There is no need for the moment after or before in the video, because the figure is created in a historical syncope, in a pause, rather than a chronological continuum. Where the heart of history stops for a moment.

These moments and these figures are self-sufficient for representing the history of the repression of women’s bodies. And this is the idiosyncrasy that sets this uprising apart. The feminist uprising of bodies and figures. The feminist essence of these protests lies in opening the space of possibility for the creation of figural images. These images-turned-icons reciprocally affect the wish to charge the space with such images. I observed this exhibitionist drive. The bodies that wanted to be “that” figure, that had seen that their bodies have the potential to become that figure and, consequently, had endangered themselves and showed up on the scene. They were seeking to create moments of resistance within a scene where the potential to situate oneself is transient.

We have seen images of militant women before, photos of the Women’s Protection Units [in Rojava]. The difference between those photos and women’s figures from recent protests is the face-centrism of the former and the facelessness of the latter. The uniqueness of the former in armor and with weaponry and the genericity of the latter in everyday attire. The close-ups of beautiful faces in resistance uniforms (the photographer’s desire) were transformed into images of figures of resistance (the subject’s desire). “I want you to see me like this”: let-down hair with clenched fists, figures of bodies standing over dumpsters and cars.

Vida Movahed waving her headscarf on top of an electric box in Enqelab Street, Tehran, in 2017. Source: social media.

These figures remind me of Vida Movahed's figure and the other girls of Enqelab Street.**5** As if Vida is the disruptive pinnacle of representing women's struggles in Iran. The turning point away from the message-and-face-centric videos of the White Wednesdays, mostly selfies, of women who would walk down the street and record something of their circumstances and demands on video.**6** Vida Movahed became the intensive figure of all those videos that preceded her of women without compulsory hijabs strolling down the street. Silent and steady. The transition point from video to photo. The transition from the narration of everyday conditions to the creation of a historical situation. The transition from a person who talks about herself and her demands to a silent and steady figure: the figure of resistance. Here, the image of the defiant woman removed itself from the temporal continuum of video, and leapt from representing everyday conditions onto the intensive platform of historical performativity. Vida Movahed, that obscure woman, was not Vida Movahed but a photo of a revolutionary figure. The figure of all women before her, and the catalyst of all women after.

The image and the figure collapse into one another in an infinite loop. Images are published and are reproduced, and they in turn stimulate the imagination of other bodies. Individuals go to the street with the bodies they want and the bodies they can be, rather than the ones they are: with their imagination. Their revolutionary act is to interpret this image. In fact, in the intersection of the image and the street, representation and reality reciprocally guide one another.

A dream/representation/interpretation of a dream can easily impose itself on the realm of the real. To transform into that image and simultaneously inspire the desire of other bodies, the chain of images: "The short circuit of the virtual space and the street."

Next to these individual figures, we also witness collective figures: the ring where women set their scarves on fire. The dancing ring around the fire spreads from Sari to other cities. We see the propagation of collective figures without it being clear where they come from. In the early days of the protests, a video circulated of a small group of women protesting in Paveh. The video showed a small and solitary group of women approaching from the end of a street. This small group, whose gathering seems extremely perilous, is reminiscent of the demonstrations by Afghan women. That historical situation links two images, two groups. There are many images that are never born (are not taken) and many images that don't become operational (don't cause a protest). Many self-immolations or deaths.

How did these figures become operational (instead of being a photo that's merely taken)? The figures were operational because they were the historical reflections of women. I think instead of the original statement "I could also be Zhina," the image of the woman holding a torch on top of a car strongly provoked a different desire: "I want to be that figure too." The desire to be that promissory figure. And it was that figure that could compel women's bodies to express themselves and to polish the rust off the mirrors in front of them. Even though that desire was provoked through the channel of an image, it became a revolutionary and blossoming desire by means of the history which that body was impregnated with. This figural desire is the idiosyncrasy of this feminist uprising. The upsurge of repressed history. Giving birth to a body we've been carrying for years.

The figures we have seen in activist women so far, though not all of them, the ones who were accused of exhibitionism, the figures whose mediatized faces and much-publicized names obstructed the activation of their political force and circulation—the face and the name sterilize the figure from evoking other women's desire, since they separate that figure's condition from the common condition of women. Now this figure is relieved of the shackles of the face and has become a faceless public one, covered with a mask, obscured due to security concerns: an image from the back, without a name, anonymous. The body politic of women is spreading across every street.

From the beautiful body to an inspiring figure. From the body confined in beauty to the body freed in the figure. This is not a transformation of the self to an ideal body, but every time and in each body, it's the creation of a new figure of struggle. While being inspired and provoked by previous figures it has observed in virtual space, the body creates new figures and, in return, inspires future figures. The chain

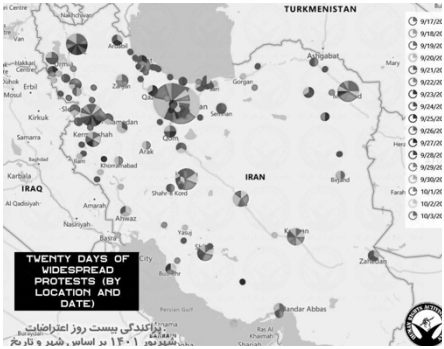
of stimulation and inspiration. This figure has liberated women from confinement in the body and its historical subjugation, and their bodies have flourished in its wake. A body that has just discovered the possibility and the beauty of resistance: yet another maturity.

Translators' Afterword

Why did we feel the urge to translate, and translate yet again, and proliferate the translations of L's text? Translation is integral to "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" (Women, Life, Freedom). The term "revolution" acquired its insurgent connotation in its translation from the science of astronomy—the gravitational revolution of astronomical objects around large masses. However, this decentering dimension of "revolution" went astray several times throughout history when it had the capacity to decentralize humankind or egocentrism in the constellation of living beings by acknowledging the seductive forces of "you."

"Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" is born from the statelessness of the Kurdish struggle; in essence, it undermines the phallocentric aspects of revolutionary language. It continuously decentralizes the imaginaries of the nation-state. By putting the freedom of the other at the center of its existence, it brought to light the interdependence of the struggle of subjugated peoples. We trust that by addressing our imagined allies, immediate neighbors, and faraway comrades alike we will benefit from cultivating neural networks that bridge the *bodily* and the *mental*—similar to how Arabs, Gilaks, Baluchis, and Persian speakers have socially endorsed and translated the Kurdish "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" as the emblem of their ongoing intersectional protests across Iran.

To amplify and extend L's text, we wish to add multiple voices who responded to two questions: Why do you think this text is so significant? How does your own experience resonate with what is expressed in these lines? The answers to the first question are gathered here, and the answers to the second question are documented in an open-source document to which more people can add their personal notes. The respondents come from several small and bigger cities, in both the socioeconomic centers and peripheries of the country, as well as the Iranian diaspora living abroad.



Map of 2022 protests in Iran. Source: Human Rights Activists News Agency.

One of the respondents gives an account of remembering the 2009 uprising and the struggle of a young woman with her protective father who didn't want to allow her to join the protests. Her father, having lost a beloved to the Iran-Iraq war, was afraid of losing another. "It's my turn," she said. "You did your revolution, now it's my turn!" Yet the respondent also asks how the nature of the death-driven allure of honor, which prevailed in the Iran of the early eighties, had changed in 2009, and to what extent it has changed in the recent uprisings, where swarms of high school teenage girls are on the front line, occupying the streets and their classrooms. L writes about the struggle between the fear of death, overcoming that fear, and the life-driven enunciation of bodily pleasure, the pleasure of a freed choreography of women on the street whose exhibitionism for each other stimulates other women, in Iran and beyond.

What is clear in most responses to L's text is a sense of generational continuity for revolutionary thought. From the everyday struggle of our mothers and all the other women of our lives, towards our fresh imaginations of womxn—and, in between, long periods of faith in reformism, ongoing life, and the experience of hidden and more obvious forms of oppression—the future remains unclear, the dead ends of the past have cracked up, and we encounter the flooding anger and hope of the becoming of women. In its multiplicities, what became clear for this respondent is that "for once, we are not the minority within a minority, and we are not rebels; we are not exceptions."

Another respondent points out the hysteric structure of the situation and how it must be difficult for those with an obsessive psychic structure to bear the unrests: there is no idea for them to hold onto without it already being coupled with the bodily and the affective, a fearful condition for obsessive minds that survive by decoupling the

body, with its pleasures and pains, from words, theories, and ideas.

L's text brings about a network of sensations and recognitions, and many of the respondents acknowledge that it evokes the very nature of the collective registration of each other, the true becoming of women reflected in their own history. For once, the experience of being "outside"—the diasporic experience—is taken out of the usual register of melancholia: the loss of one's self to oneself, in its asphyxiating relationship to misogynistic self-resentment. The image of women's upsurge on the street shocks the body out of its melancholic lassitude, a freedom that many of our bodies in so-called liberal settings have not yet incorporated despite years of migration. In this mirroring relationship to the image, our diasporic bodies are also freed. As one of the respondents writes:

From the start of this revolution, I've been grappling with "experiencing." The experience of being freed. Like the image I've seen of becoming freed. I come to my senses and I realize I'm reenacting in my head, being there and ripping off and burning my scarf. It's strange, because I've been freed from the hijab for years, but it's become clear to me that the imperative of freedom hasn't happened to me yet. I only feel the freedom from the hijab when I imagine myself in the context of being on the street, taking off the scarf from my head and being scared by staying with my fear, staying with the others. Reading this text and L's description eased out the cognition of this feeling.

L's text is experiential reportage, oscillating between the bodily and the mental, an expansion of the momentary gap between the body and what it translates or transfigures into the mental—and, in that very gap, calcified theories and pillars of our old language are deconstructed and restructured and, through cuts and twists and subversions, are turned into an orgasmic sensibility: a space for self-recognition, an auto-erotic moment of coming of age, the age of pride and exuberance, no matter how painful, no matter how dangerous.

The bodily experiences expressed within the text refer to identifications with the still photographs and moving images capturing the brutalities. As one respondent writes from the streets of Gohardasht, upon encountering the police her body immediately moved and stood in front of her younger cousin before she could even think. In that moment, she "could see the image of this new body reflecting back in the eyes of the people in the street witnessing what was happening." The photographic becomes the medium of self-determination on the street. In turning bodily experience into a crossroads of seeings and show-

ings, hearings and sensations of being beaten, gatherings and dispersals, and the retrospective recognition of the masses transmuting into more formalized crowds, the text becomes a crossroads of art history and media theory.

L enfolds the experience of watching videos back on the history of photographs, and both in relation to the choreography of the bodies who move ahead of their minds. Art history lags behind this demolished and restructured experience of performance with each other and for each other. The history of photography, of video art, and of choreography meet on the streets of a little town in Iran and they are received by the identification of women who move back and forth to distill a figural monument of themselves out of the endless hours of recorded videos, into unforgettable fleeting moments of photographs that last forever. Dispersed and unpredictable, the multiverse of such triumphs are truly described as the female orgasm, no specific spot of the street/body is there to be recognized as the center, neither for the protestors nor for the forces of repression.

Those forces are the most exhausted, the worst nightmare of anyone with a phallic fixation—performance anxiety has struck them, as is obvious in their faces and their lack of determination, and pathetically put in the cries of their social media attempts to accuse "Woman, Life, Freedom" of being the "enemy's cultural war," a sexual revolution. L's love letter makes those nightmares come true, she verbalizes and analyzes the fusions of our sexual and militant life-driven dances: in our identification with each other, we become who we become.

L is ahead of language, but by breaking with the older language of disciplinary forms, by reminding us of the continuum of innovations, condensations, displacements, reformulations, and renamings, she gives language to something that is experienced collectively but turned into a collectivity named afresh. Not mothers to children, not sisters to brothers, not daughters to fathers: women, reflected in their own history. Sisterhood triangulated with the words of a refreshing, recognizable trinity: Jin, Jiyan, Azadi!

Notes

1 My lover, whom I'm watching from afar, once hinted at a letter: L. I want to let go of my usual suspicion to refer to this L in the midst of experiencing this revolutionary space, which, for me, resonates with love-making, and to claim both L and my lover's hint. Signing this text with L is the revolutionary confiscation of their hint. While this naming shelters me from the threats of the regime's forces, it liberates me from my notion of love, especially at a moment when names have become

code names. (To “hint” in Persian is a gestural and/or implicit mode of communication, suspending the addressee in a ciphered enigmatic zone. It recalls the loaded history of the tightrope walk between iconoclasm and the insistence on wanting to watch, and wanting to be seen. The above sentences make sense when “*eshareh*” is understood in this way.—Trans.)

2 A short circuit is the irregular connection between two nodes with different voltages in an electric circuit. This causes an excessive electric current to flow through the circuit. In circuit analysis, the short circuit is a connection that forces two nodes with different potentials to level their potentials. In fact, a short circuit is a connective path between two parts of an electric circuit that can cause a current a thousand times more forceful than expected.

3 This sentence is from a letter I wrote to my lover when the video of the prison gates opening and prisoners being freed before the 1979 revolution went viral. A letter dated August 2, 2020: “Today I watched the video of the prisoners breaking free. Again and again. Could it be me who brushes that woman’s hair away from her forehead? How to feel happiness? How slippery it is. One moment you feel something like inspiration in your heart, you think you’re happy, but as soon as you lift your eyes you see that you’re someone who once used to be happy, and now it’s more like not comprehending that fleeting moment that has made everything unintelligible. So much happiness in that video. Such an atmosphere. You don’t need to say anything, just brush away the hair from the forehead in front of you with your hands to be able to recognize her and confirm she is there. And that it is you who’s revealing her face. ‘Is that you?’ ‘Yes, it’s me.’ A face for everyone. A liberated face whose emotions are not repressed and is laughing while crying. And crying while laughing. Some kind of emotional assault. A face that doesn’t recognize the happiness and the changing circumstances yet. That moment when everything is in flux. The moment of the revolution. Not a moment before or after. A disquieting condition, the condition of becoming. How can you recognize someone in a crowd in the moment of the revolution, when all the body’s organs surpass their own intelligence and the way they’ve acquired knowledge? With brushing the hair away and searching for a bygone memory. A black mole near the right ear. Then you say you need to light a cigarette and you see yourself being there and smoking, and you say you need to go and you see yourself in the crowd. You’ve been there, already, always.” I’m sharing this private letter in a revolutionary condition: this text no longer belongs to my lover alone, but it’s for all the bodies on the street that I

love wholeheartedly.

4 “#for” (in Persian #برای) has been a viral hashtag during the recent protests in Iran where people voice “for” which reasons they come into the streets.—Trans.

5 On December 27, 2017, Vida Movahed, later known as the Girl of Enghelab Street, raised her white headscarf on a stick while standing on a utility box. Pictures of her went viral. She was detained shortly after and, according to Nasrin Sotoudeh, she was released on bail later.—Trans.

6 Initiated in 2014 by Masih Alinejad, a prominent Iranian-American journalist and women’s activist, My Stealthy Freedom became a widespread online movement of women recording themselves on mobile cameras, protesting compulsory hijab laws. Starting as a Facebook page, already by the end of 2015 it had nearly one million likes.—Trans.

ALL WE GOT WAS AUTUMN. ALL WE GOT WAS WINTER.

nothing was fervent. nothing was budding. everything was
the sickness and then my bed. everything was all midnight all
touching myself in dark corners hoping for release. constantly
finding myself awake in mornings despite the persistence
of retreating. how to sleep forever without dying. how to sleep for-
ever without depression. how to sleep forever but someone notices
long enough to come and wake you into spring. then summer.
then everything I wanted was the birds bothering me with all
their muchness outside my window. everything was love, love
my season and still the mother sicked herself to sleep with gas
and she did not wake up. I remember her every day and pretend
a love of both poppies and horses and bread and milk. how I miss
her. watch from the ashes and no one rises and how men continue
to breathe this air. almost thankful for not being consumed
but to instead consume. almost thankful for my bones if not for
the fact of my back. depended on you. you depended on nothing
but pictures. would wish myself to end if not for the fact my love
for the birds and the bees. wished myself into tears. somewhere
else an ocean roars I do not see it I do not hear it, I brush my teeth.

(Tawanda Mulalu)

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TRANSLATION

Gender and Coloniality: From Low-Intensity Communal Patriarchy to High-Intensity Colonial-Modern Patriarchy

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Abstract

This essay collects four decades of my own reflections, as an anthropologist and feminist, on gender and coloniality across various contexts in Latin America. It also highlights the decolonial methodology and vocabulary that I have had to develop in my various roles as scholar, public intellectual, and expert witness over the years. Briefly, what I present here is a decolonial feminist perspective that argues for the existence of a patriarchal political order in communal societies before colonization. Yet, in my view, precolonial gender has a dual structure that is plural in essence and differs markedly from the binary gender structure of colonial-modern societies, which works in terms of a One and its marginalized others. As I argue, the capturing and transformation of precolonial dual gender structures by the modern gender system exacerbates inequality, increases violence against women, and disempowers them politically. For that reason, I speak of "low-intensity" and "high-intensity" patriarchal systems.

I want to share with you some questions inspired by my reflection on the practices of resistance that flow against the tide of a world totalized by the order of coloniality: Where are cracks being made today that destabilize the matrix of the coloniality of power?[1] How to talk about these cracks? And what role do gender relations play in such processes? To share my answers to these questions, I must first recount two of my experiences participating in feminist struggle as an anthropologist. The first was my involvement in theorizing the notorious issue of femicides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The second was my work accompanying Brazil's National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) during their workshops on gender violence for indigenous women. These experiences enabled me to perceive how gender relations are historically modified by colonial intrusion, as well as by the matrix of coloniality crystallized and permanently reproduced by the state. Thus, to present to you my current understanding

of the intersection between gender and coloniality, I must take you on a journey that follows the sequence of discoveries that brought me to said understanding. In doing so, I also hope to convey the decolonial underpinnings of my own academic practice.

Anthropology on Demand: Toward an Inversion of the Direction of Questioning

I call my methodology "ethnographic listening."[2] I am an anthropologist by training—an occupation that in some circles and some villages has nearly become a slur because it practices distancing and estrangement like no other discipline. Santiago Castro-Gómez aptly called such distancing and estrangement "zero-point hubris" (Castro-Gómez 2005), and we can say that anthropology's current state of disciplinary retreat verges on fundamentalism. So, how did I reach the decolonial path from within the academy? Well, by being asked, over time, to use my academic toolkit in an inverted form that I ultimately decided to call *anthropology on demand*. Anthropology on demand works by inverting the traditional direction of questioning: it produces knowledge that answers the questions of those who classically stand as the "objects" of observation and research. I engaged in this practice inadvertently at first, and then in a theoretically reflexive way (Segato 2006). More specifically, my commitment to decoloniality, and my particular understanding of it, stem from the difficult work of responding to the demands to theorize gender violence in Mexico and Brazil.

I will introduce my analysis through a brief review of how I responded to those demands, and I will also explain how they led me to a situated understanding of the set of relationships structured by the order of coloniality. Responding to those demands compelled me to construct arguments and formulate concepts that dismantle and substitute some schemes and categories that have been anthropological staples for a long time. As we will see, this task forced me to recognize the inadequacy, even obsolescence, of concepts like culture, cultural relativism, tradition, and premodernity.

Although I do not have the space here to give a detailed account of my progressive loss of vocabulary, I outline some results from this search for a new set of concepts that would enable me to create arguments capable of responding to the requests addressed to me as an anthropologist and human rights thinker and activist. I want to make clear that my search for new concepts was not merely out of voluntariness but, rather, argumentative need. I would also like to forewarn that my contribution here is neither exegetical nor systematizing, and least of all programmatic: it is practical. More specifically, it is a theoretical elaboration intended to give ammunition to a contentious form of anthropological practice that I have been developing over the years. The goal of this contentious practice is to provide data and analyses with which to build arguments in support of a wronged party during litigation, public hearings, and other disputes.

Femicide: A Symptom of the Barbarism of Modern Gender

In 2003, I was summoned to help make intelligible the frequent and extremely cruel murders of women taking place at the northern border of Mexico in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. These are the crimes known as Ciudad Juarez femicides. They represent a novelty, a transformation, of gender-based violence linked to new types of war and *para-state violence*.[3] After working on the Ciudad Juarez femicides, I collaborated with women's organizations in the Northern Triangle of Central America and wrote about these new forms of war that weaponize women's bodies (Segato 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).

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Today we are witnessing the frightening development of newfound methods of assault toward female and feminized bodies. This cruelty expands without limits.[4] The clearest examples in our continent are Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico, though there is also the tragic continuation of Rwanda's horrors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the DRC, doctors already use the label "vaginal destruction" for the type of attack that often kills its victim. In El Salvador, between the years 2000 and 2006, a period of supposed peacebuilding, homicides of men increased by 40%, whereas homicides of women surged by 111%, almost three times as much as those of men. In Guatemala, during the restoration of democratic rights between 1995 and 2005, homicides of men increased by 68% whereas those of women rose by 144%, more than doubling the upsurge in homicides of men. In Honduras, the difference is greater still: between 2003 and 2007, the increase in homicides of men was 40% whereas the increase in homicides of women was 166% (Carcedo 2010, 40–42). The violence unleashed on feminized bodies manifests itself in unprecedented forms of bodily destruction, and in the trafficking and commercialization of what these bodies can offer. A predatory occupation of feminized bodies is practiced in our current apocalyptic epoch, plundering everything in its wake.

Through my decade-long involvement in the workshops that Brazil's National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) put together for indigenous women across Brazil, I noticed too that cruelty toward women increases as modernity and the market expand, annexing new regions. Thus, despite the growing deployment of legal measures in response to what became known as "women's human rights" after the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, we can undoubtedly speak today of a growing barbarism of modern gender, or what some people already call "gendercide."

The False Contradiction between Indigenous Peoples' Right to Difference and the Rights of Women and Children

In 2006, FUNAI began offering workshops whose aim was to inform indigenous women about the recently sanctioned Maria da Penha Law against domestic violence.[5] I accompanied FUNAI on these workshops, which led me to work on the issue of how to defend indigenous women from the growing violence that they faced from both the white world and the indigenous men within their homes. The dilemma was: how do we make use of rights afforded by the state without fostering an increasing dependence on a permanently colonizing state? After all, the state's historical project cannot coincide with the project of restoring and protecting communal autonomy and social ties. Furthermore, it is contradictory to assert that communities have the right to autonomy, while simultaneously asserting that it is the state that produces the laws upon which vulnerable minorities within those communities must rely when harmed.

I claim, then, that the state offers with one hand what it has already stolen with the other on its way to the colonial-modern regime of individual citizenship. That is, the state provides a law that protects women from violence, but these forms of violence would not have been possible had the traditional institutions and communal ties that protected women not been destroyed in the first place. In other words, modernity tries to develop and administer the antidote for the venom it injects. The institution of the modern state in contemporary Latin American republics, a direct heir to the colonial administrations overseas, has as its permanent goal to colonize and intervene. States weaken autonomy, disrupt institutional life, tear the communal fabric, and create dependency. Again: while with one hand the state may offer a version of modernity

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based on a critical egalitarian discourse, with the other it has already introduced a version of modernity based on liberal-capitalist instrumental reason and racism that subjects nonwhite men to emasculation. I will return to these issues and their consequences for women later on.

Contentious Anthropology: The Community before the State and State-Afforded Rights

Defending the village-world entails confronting dilemmas. The debate about the supposedly widespread practice of infanticide among indigenous communities—a sham that has been put on by those who hope to roll back indigenous peoples' aspirations to respect and autonomy—stands as a paradigmatic example of the dilemmas we must face in defending the village-world and its values.[6] Analyzing the dilemmas that arise when protecting and promoting the village-world vis-à-vis the state-world takes us directly to the question of gender prior to colonial-modern intrusion. These forms of gender that predate colonial-modern gender persist at the margins and folds of colonial modernity: they remain in tension with the ever-expanding world of national states, resisting incorporation into the canon of colonial modernity and universal citizenship.

What we learn from the extreme case of indigenous infanticide is that in a juridical environment dominated by the colonial episteme and where the discourse of universal human rights maintains hegemony, there is no possibility of defending autonomy in terms of culture, that is, by appeal to relativism and the right to difference. It is impossible to argue that autonomy be restored to societies that have been colonized and kept under severe control for almost 500 years when some of these societies' norms and practices contradict sensitive human and state-afforded rights such as children's rights. Furthermore, public discourse lacks the complexity, pluralism, or communicational skill necessary to deal fairly with the nation's diversity. This is why colonizers' weapon of choice to affirm their moral superiority and civilizing duty is to launch accusations that the rights of a vulnerable subgroup within a minority—women and children, for example—are being transgressed.

It is thus strategically unfeasible to defend autonomy in terms of cultural relativism within the context of state domination and the discursive hegemony of universal human rights.[7] Instead, to defend autonomy we must substitute relativistic and right-to-difference arguments for arguments based on what I have called *historical pluralism*. The collective subjects amid that plurality of historical journeys are *peoples*, each with internal deliberative autonomy to produce their own historical path, even as they are in contact—as they have always been—with other peoples' experiences and processes.[8]

A people, according to my perspective, is not defined by a cultural patrimony—conceived as substantive, stable, permanent, and fixed, or as a crystallized episteme—but should instead be seen as a historical vector. Each culture and its patrimony is, in turn, perceived as the distillation of a historical process; as sediment from an accumulating historical experience that carries on indefinitely. The cumulative character of that sediment becomes concrete in what we perceive as use, custom, and other notions that seem fixed and repetitive, and which the anthropological notion of culture then captures, stabilizes, and posits as its object of study. Yet, as any ethnographer who returns to their field site ten years later will tell you, the appearance of stability is a mirage, and custom is nothing but history in progress.

Thus, we can perceive that customs can and do change constantly. The permanence of a people does not depend on repeating certain practices or holding certain ideas

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fixed. So we can do away with such constraints on the notion of identity and reformulate it in connection to the idea of a people as a historical vector: a people is a collective that sees itself as stemming from a common past and advancing toward a common future. It is a fabric that does not dispense with conflicts of interest, or antagonisms in ethical sensitivities and political positions, but shares a history nonetheless. This perspective leads us to substitute the expression "one culture" for the expression "one people," where the latter is the living subject of a particular history in the midst of confluences and exchanges that design an interhistoricity rather than an interculturality. What characterizes this collective subject, this people, is not a stable cultural heritage with fixed contents but its members' self-perception of sharing a common past and a common future despite internal dissent and conflict.

What is a people, then? A people is the project of sharing a common history. When the history that was being woven collectively—like the weaving of a tapestry in which the threads converge and branch off to create figures—is interrupted by an external force, this collective subject will try to pick up the threads again, make knots, suture its memory, and continue. When a people engage in this process, we can say that history has been restored to them. The restoration of history to a people involves returning to them the capacity to weave their own historical path, so that they may resume tracing the interrupted figures, weaving them to the present and projecting them into the future.

In cases of disruption, what would be the best role for the state to play? Despite its permanently colonial relation to the territories it administers, a good state would restore communal self-jurisdiction, promote the reconstruction of social ties, and guarantee internal deliberation, rather than impose its laws. Below, I explain how these necessary features of a people become suppressed because of state intervention, leading to deleterious changes in gender relations. Creating and sustaining decolonial cracks within the state's matrix is only possible to the extent that communities regain their self-jurisdiction and capacity for deliberation, which is nothing other than the restoration of history to a people so that they can pursue their own historical project.

We have thus departed from the cultural-relativist argument without impairing the methodological procedure that, by relativizing, enables us to understand the point of view of the other. We part ways strategically, even though indigenous peoples themselves have often resorted to relativism (with some perverse consequences, as I discuss below). The relativist argument must give way to the historical pluralism argument, which is simply a nonculturalist variant of relativism, yet one immune to the fundamentalist tendencies inherent in culturalism. Rather than having a fixed cultural horizon, each people weaves its history via debate and internal deliberation, digging into the inconsistencies of its cultural discourses, making the most of their contradictions, and choosing between alternatives that may be dormant but are already present in the "culture" and become live in response to the ideas that circulate in the surrounding world. A people interact with and within the universe of the nation, where the latter is defined as an alliance between peoples (An-Na'im 1995). Given our currently precarious situation, one where state agencies and religious groups threaten to impose strict surveillance on the village, the only viable strategy is to substitute cultural relativism for a more defensible argument based on historical pluralism (a pluralism of historicities that are always open, in flux, and in exchange with one another).

The dilemmas that arose in this complex scenario forced me to put into practice a *contentious anthropology* that led me to suggest the following terms: a people as the *subject of a history* rather than as a *cultural entity*, *historical pluralism* instead of *cultural*

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relativism, and *interhistoricity* rather than *interculturality*.[9] These are, I believe, more adequate terms for thought and action within a critical, liberatory project. My goal was not to innovate or to introduce neologisms. I do not think that the earlier conceptions of these terms must be eliminated, nor do I advance such a proposal. Rather, I argue that these earlier terms be used with care so as to avoid culturalism's tendency toward fundamentalism, which has been a problem for anthropology and activism despite their best efforts to the contrary.

The State-World and the Village-World

We must consider a question: after the long process of European colonization, the establishment of the pattern of coloniality, and the deepening of the modern order at the hands of the independent republics—many of them equally or even crueler than the colonial administrations overseas—could the state suddenly withdraw? Although coloniality is a matrix that orders the world hierarchically and in a stable way, this matrix has an internal history. There is a history to how the episteme of the coloniality of power (with race as its classifier) was installed, and there is a history to the idea of race within that episteme. Likewise, there is a history to gender relations within the very matrix of patriarchy. These histories respond to the expansion of the tentacles of the modernizing state within the space of the nation, entering with its institutions in one hand, and the market in the other, tearing the communal fabric, bringing chaos, and introducing profound disarray into the structures that existed there and into the cosmos itself. One of the distortions that accompanies this process is the intensification of the hierarchies that existed in the pre-intrusion communal order. Once such disorder has been introduced, is it possible or desirable to suddenly remove the state?

The village-world is an arrangement that precedes colonial intrusion, a surviving fragment that maintains some of the characteristics of the world prior to colonial intervention. We do not have the words to speak of that world. And we must not describe it as premodern if we hope to avoid suggesting that the village-world is simply a stage that precedes modernity and heads inexorably toward it. These village-worlds kept on walking alongside the world intervened upon by colonial modernity. Yet when they were put under the strain of colonization, the influence of the metropole and the republic exacerbated the hierarchies already within them: those of caste, status, and gender as a type of status. These turned authoritarian and perverse.

Can we live decolonially within the state and make it act in ways that aid the reconstitution of communities? Can we make the state re-institute self-rule and, thereby, communities' own history? This is an open question about our current situation, which can be described as an in-between world because all that really exists are midpoints, interfaces, and transitions between the state-world and the village-world, between the colonial-modern order and the pre-intrusion order. Our in-between world involves exchanges of benign and malign influences between the village-world and the state-world. Both the village-world and the state-world infiltrate each other in deleterious and beneficial ways.

When the village is penetrated by instrumental modernity, the logic of the market, and certain aspects of representative democracy—which inevitably attract and co-opt community leaders or *caciques*—the in-between world thereby created is destructive. But when the modern discourse of equality circulates in the village, the in-between world thus created is beneficial. This is confirmed by the fact that women often turn to these discourses. Likewise, the village's status-based ranking and family-based

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solidarity harms the public sphere by making it corporate in structure and creating corporate kinship networks. Conversely, when communal solidarity enters the modern order, it creates positive communal ties and fosters the practice of reciprocity.

A role for the state would then be to restore to the people their self-jurisdiction and the weft of their history that had been expropriated by the process and order of colonial modernity. The state should do this while allowing the egalitarian discourse of modernity to enter communal life. In doing so, the state would contribute to the healing of the community fabric torn by coloniality, and to the re-establishment of collective life with forms of rank and power that are less perverse than those resulting from hybridization with the colonial and republican orders.

Let us also remember that there are in-between worlds of blood relative to *mestizaje*, and that these pull in disparate directions. There is an in-between world of mestizaje as *whitening* that has been ideologically constructed as the kidnapping of nonwhite blood into "whiteness," a co-opting process that progressively dilutes the blackness and indigeneity in the continent's whitened *criollo* world. Conversely, there is an in-between world of *darkening* constructed as the hosting of white blood by nonwhite blood in the process of rebuilding the indigenous and Afro-descendant worlds, aiding in their demographic reconstitution. Both constructions are clearly ideological, since their biology is the same. However, they correspond to two opposing historical projects. The second project reformulates *mestizaje* as the resurfacing of nonwhite blood after centuries of underground flux, cutting through white blood to re-emerge in the broad processes of indigenous and black resurgence currently underway in our continent. *Mestizos* thus come to learn that they carry the history of black and indigenous people within them (Segato 2010a).

Duality and Binarism: Verisimilitude and the Infiltration of Precolonial Gender by "Egalitarian" Colonial-Modern Gender

I want to speak now of how colonial-modern gender relations infiltrated the world of the village. Something similar has been pointed out by Julieta Paredes with her formulation of the "junction of patriarchies" (Paredes 2010, 71). When we compare the process of colonial and state intrusion with the purported ideal order of colonial modernity, we illuminate the village-world while at the same time revealing aspects of the state-world that are usually opaque to us. Such blind spots are due to our own immersion in the civic religion of our world. I also want to highlight that analyzing each world's gender system reveals contrasts between their respective patterns of life in every arena. This is because gender relations are ubiquitous and omnipresent in social life, despite their classification as a "particular" or "special" topic in sociological and anthropological discourse.

I propose that we read the interaction between the pre-intrusion world and colonial modernity in light of the transformations in the former's gender system. In other words, the point is not merely to introduce gender as a "special" topic within decolonial critique, or as one aspect of the colonial pattern of domination. Rather, the point is to give gender full status as a theoretical and epistemic category—one capable of illuminating every other transformation imposed on community life by the new colonial-modern order.

The above discussion brings us to the core of a recent debate in feminism. I will situate my view in contrast to two other feminist currents. The first is Eurocentric feminism, which asserts that the problem of patriarchal domination is universal and does not differ much across contexts. Thus, from this point of view, it would be possible

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to pass on the advances of modernity in the field of Western women's rights to non-white, indigenous, and black women from colonized continents. Eurocentric feminism upholds European and Europeanized women's self-avowed moral superiority, authorizing them to intervene with their civilizing, modernizing, colonial "moral" mission—the so-called and well-known *mission civilisatrice* of the West. This view is inevitably ahistorical and antihistorical. By denying difference, it represents a *foreclosure* of history that traps it within the very slow, almost stagnant time of Patriarchy, and, above all, this view obstructs recognition of the radical effects of colonial-modern time in the history of gender relations.[10] In other words, Eurocentric Westernizing feminism fails to see that patriarchy is a historical development, even though it flows extremely slowly within historical time. Although race and gender were installed by epistemic ruptures in different epochs—for race, it was conquest and colonization, for gender, it was the history of the human species—both go through historical transformations within their nevertheless stable epistemes of origin.

The second feminist view, which lies on the other extreme, is that of authors like María Lugones and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí who claim that gender did not exist in the precolonial world (Oyèwùmí 1997; Lugones 2007). In 2003, I published a critical analysis of Oyèwùmí (1997) where I revisit a text I wrote in 1986. I had expressed there a similar perplexity over gender in Yoruba civilization, in the form I encountered it in my anthropological work in Brazil, but reached different conclusions from Oyèwùmí's (Segato 1986/1997; 2003).

There is a third feminist view, the one I endorse here, which is backed by substantial historical and ethnographic evidence proving the existence of gender nomenclatures in tribal societies from Africa and the Americas. This view recognizes the existence of a patriarchal structure in those societies; however, because the structure is different from Western gender, I describe it as a low-intensity patriarchy. Additionally, this view also denies that Eurocentric feminism could be efficacious or appropriate to deal with the problems of low-intensity patriarchy. This is the position of feminist thinkers connected to the Chiapas process, who stand as a paradigmatic example of how to resolve the tensions that occur when fighting for indigenous autonomy while engaged in an internal struggle demanding better living conditions for women. Indigenous women frequently denounce the blackmail threats they receive from indigenous authorities who pressure them to put off their demands as women because of the risk of fragmenting the community in the fight for resources and rights (Gutiérrez and Palomo 1999; Cal y Mayor 2002; Hernández Castillo 2003; and Hernández and Sierra 2005).

Historical and ethnographic data on tribal worlds show that these had recognizable structures of difference and hierarchy similar to what we would call gender relations. These societies allot differential prestige to masculinity and femininity, and the positions are occupied by people we might call men and women. Despite the recognizable character of these gender positions, the tribal world allows for more transit and circulation between positions than modern Western gender permits. Indigenous peoples like Venezuela's Warao, Panama's Guna, Paraguay's Aché, Suriname's Trio, Brazil's Javaés, the pre-Columbian Incas, and many Native American peoples, Canadian First Nations, as well as all Afrodiasporic religions, have vocabularies and stable practices for what we may call transgender life or experience. These societies allowed what Westerners call same-sex marriages, and they had other forms of gender transitivity that the rigid, colonial-modern gender system disallowed. Two classic ethnographies about this aspect of indigenous societies in Latin America are Pierre Clastres's "The Bow and the Basket"

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on gender among the Aché of Paraguay, and Peter Rivière's *Marriage among the Trio* (Clastres 1969; Rivière 1969).[11] Both of these works significantly precede the decolonial literature.

We can recognize in the pre-intrusion world elements of a construction of masculinity that has accompanied humanity for as long as the species has existed, something I call "the patriarchal pre-history of humanity" (Segato 2003). This prehistory is characterized by a very slow temporality, a *longue durée* that overlaps with evolutionary time. Such masculinity is constructed by subjects who must acquire it through initiation. The subject who hopes to acquire masculinity must face trials and even risk death, just like in the Hegelian master–slave allegory. This masculine subject must constantly orient himself toward masculinity, for he is always under the evaluative gaze of his peers. He must confirm and reconfirm his endurance and aggressiveness, as well as his capacity to dominate women and demand what I call "feminine tribute" (Segato 2003) from them, in order to demonstrate that he possesses the full assortment of powers—physical, martial, sexual, political, intellectual, economic, and moral—that would allow him to be recognized as a masculine subject.

What this shows is that gender exists in these worlds, although it is different from what we find in colonial modernity. Furthermore, when colonial modernity comes into contact with village gender, it brings about dangerous changes. Colonial modernity infiltrates the structure of relations in the village and reorganizes them from within, creating the illusion of continuity while transforming their meaning by introducing a new order ruled by different norms. This is why I mentioned verisimilitude in the section title: the nomenclatures persist, but they are reinterpreted according to a new modern order. This hybrid is truly fatal because previous hierarchical languages become hyperhierarchical after coming into contact with the modern discourse of equality. Let me explain why. First, there is an overinflation of men's importance within the community given their role as intermediaries with the external world—traditionally, the men of other houses and villages—because they must now mediate relations with the white administration. Second, men face emasculation and a loss of status when they venture outside of their community and confront the power of white administrators. Third, there is an overexpansion of the public sphere occupied ancestrally by men in the community, as well as a dismantling and privatization of the domestic sphere. As a consequence of all these, duality turns into binarism because men's sphere gets defined as the epitome of what is public and political, and it is set in opposition to women's sphere, which is depoliticized by being defined as private.

The village has always been organized according to status. It is divided into distinct spaces, each with its own rules, prestige differentials, and a hierarchical order inhabited by creatures whom we can call—generically and from the vantage point of modernity—men and women, given their assigned roles, labor, spaces, and ritual obligations. As several feminist authors have already pointed out, the discourse of colonial modernity, though egalitarian, hides within it an abyssal hierarchy created by a process that we might tentatively call the progressive totalization of the public sphere, or the progressive "totalitarianism" of the public sphere.[12] It is even possible to suggest that the public sphere is what continues and deepens the process of colonization today. Carole Pateman's category of the sexual contract is useful here: in the village-world the sexual contract is visibly exposed, whereas in colonial modernity the sexual contract is disguised by the language of the citizen contract (Pateman 1988).

Let me illustrate my point by narrating what happened when we tried to run the FUNAI Women's Office workshops at the villages. We were hoping to speak with

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indigenous women about the growing violence against them, a problem that started making the news in Brasilia. Yet something typically happened, especially in those areas where "traditional" life is said to be better preserved and autonomy from the state is a deeply ingrained value (for example, the Xingu Indigenous Park in Mato Grosso): *caciques* and men made sure to show up and express that the state had nothing to discuss with their women. To support their argument, they invoked the seemingly plausible claim that "our world has always been this way" and that "the control we have over our women is the same we have always had." They support this statement, as I anticipated in the previous pages, with a culturalist—and therefore fundamentalist—argument in which it is assumed that culture has no history. Arlette Gautier calls this historical shortsightedness "the invention of customary law" (Gautier 2005, 697).

Our reply, a complex and delicate one, was: "yes and no." Although gender hierarchy has always existed in the village-world—or, at least, a prestige differential between men and women—the hierarchical arrangement also contained *difference*, and this difference is now threatened by the colonization and interference produced by the liberal notion of public space. The liberal notion of public space, though proclaiming the discourse of equality, turns difference into a problem. It speaks of "the problem of the other," and turns difference into something marginal and problematic. It banishes the other by turning them into a problem. This inflection on village gender, which was introduced by colonial modernity, results in the co-optation of men, the class ancestrally devoted to the tasks and roles of the public space.

Men's tasks have ancestrally included deliberating in the village's common spaces, going on hunting expeditions, contacting nearby or remote villages and peoples, and both waging war on and making peace with them. From the perspective of the village, the succeeding colonial administrations, both overseas and within national territory, are entities with which men negotiate, make agreements, wage war, and, more recently, obtain resources and rights that serve as assets in our times of identity politics. Thus, the ancestral masculine tribal position gets transformed through the task of relating to the powerful agencies that produce and reproduce coloniality. It is with men that colonizers waged war and made pacts, and it is with men that the colonial modern state does so too. According to Gautier, the choice to turn men into privileged interlocutors was deliberate and in the interest of colonization: "colonization involved a radical loss of political power for women, there where it existed, while at the same time colonizers negotiated with certain masculine structures, or invented them, in order to make allies" (718). Colonizers also promoted the "domestication" of women: a distancing and subjection that facilitated the colonial enterprise (690ff.; Assis Clímaco 2009).

The masculine position is thereby surreptitiously dislocated. Although the old nomenclature remains, the position has been transmuted, promoted to a higher rank, and strengthened by privileged access to resources and knowledge about the world of power. These changes in gender are disguised by the continuation of earlier nomenclatures. In other words, a rupture and reconstitution of the gender order takes place that bestows new content to each position while retaining the old names, signs, and rituals. Men return to the village claiming that they are what they have always been, but they are in fact operating in accordance with a new code. We could talk in terms of the ever-fertile metaphor of "body-snatching" from the Hollywood classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, or of Baudrillard's "perfect crime," for the change I mention is effectively hidden by a false resemblance to what was before or "verisimilitude."

We stand before the cast of genders acting out a drama not their own. The village-world's gender vocabulary has been captured by a different grammar. Women and the

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village itself become externalized objects for the male gaze that has become infected, through contact and mimesis, with the maladies of distance and exteriority that characterize the exercise of power in the colonial modern world. Thus, men's position becomes simultaneously interior and exterior, having acquired the exteriority and objectifying capacity of the colonial gaze, which is simultaneously managerial and pornographic. I cannot discuss the issue at length here, but I want to suggest that sexuality is also transformed when a new morality—one that turns women's bodies into objects and includes notions of sin, sodomy, and so on—is introduced. So, colonial-modern exteriority—which includes the exteriority of scientific rationality: a managerial, cleansing exteriority that endeavors to purge difference as well as the "other," as Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo have discussed (Quijano 1992/2007; Mignolo 2000)—already has the pornographic character that I assign to the colonial gaze.

Alongside the overinflation of men's role in the village, these men are also emasculated before the white world, which puts them under stress and relativizes their masculine position by subjecting them to the dominion of the colonizer. These changes trigger violence because men are oppressed in the colonial scene and overempowered in the village, forcing them to exhibit their capacity for control in the village so as to restore the masculinity that was slighted outside. This holds for the entire universe of racialized masculinity, banished to the subordinate condition of racialized nonwhiteness by the colonial order.

In sum, it is not possible to uphold the view that patriarchy did not exist in precolonial society, since we see that precolonial men are divided between two loyalties: the loyalty to the patriarchal code, that compels them to bow down to the winner and abide by his rules, and the loyalty to his people: family, community, and culture. For that reason, it is possible to assert that the presence of patriarchal precolonial rule made men vulnerable to colonial intrusion and opened the doors to colonization. As anthropologist Ruth Landes has advanced in an old and forgotten text: in the war of conquest, men are the losers (Landes 1953).

The seizure of politics, that is, of all deliberation on the common good, by the installed and expansive public sphere, and the consequent privatization and marginalization of the domestic sphere, are also part of the colonization of pre-intrusion gender by modern gender. The exclusive ties between women that guided their solidarity and collaboration in rituals and in productive and reproductive labor are dismantled when domesticity gets encapsulated as "private life." For the domestic sphere and its inhabitants, these changes entail a complete collapse of their political value and ammunition, that is, of their capacity to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that affect the entire community.

The rupturing of the ties uniting women, and the ending of their political alliances, had literally fatal consequences for them. Women became progressively more vulnerable to male violence, which was enhanced by the stress caused by the outside world. The compulsive confinement of the domestic space and the women who inhabit it led to increasing violence against them. It is essential to understand that these violent consequences are fully modern, that they are a product of modernity. And we must remember that the ever-expanding process of modernization is also an ongoing process of colonization.

In the same way that genocide, because of its rationality and systematicity, originates in modern times, femicide, understood as the quasi-mechanical practices that exterminate women, is only possible in the colonial-modern order, hence why I earlier spoke of the barbarism of modern gender. Femicides go unpunished because of the privatization

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of domestic space, which has been relegated to a residual space outside the sphere of "major problems" and public interest (Segato 2010b). With the emergence of the grid constituted by the universal modern episteme and its institutions (the state, politics, rights, and science), the domestic sphere and the women who inhabit it become mere leftovers, marginal to the issues of general interest and universal importance.

Although it is true that several Amazonian and Chaqueño peoples restrict women's participation and speech in their village's public space—deliberation being the prerogative of men due to their strict division of sex roles—it is also well known that these men, as a rule, and often in a ritualized manner, suspend their parliamentary activities without having reached a conclusion in order to consult the women at home. On the next day, the assembly will continue only after having consulted the women's world, which speaks exclusively from the home. If this consultation does not take place, men will be harshly penalized. These are habitual occurrences in a visibly compartmentalized world where, despite the distinction between public and domestic space, politics cuts across both spaces. In the Andean world, the authority of the *mallku* is always dual: it involves a male and a female head, even though these two are ranked hierarchically. All community deliberations are attended by women, who either sit next to their male companions (not necessarily spouses) or form a group outside the room and send audible signals of approval or disapproval throughout the course of the debate. So, the public space and its actors do not have a monopoly on politics as in the colonial-modern world. On the contrary, domestic space is endowed with its own politicity because of the mandatory rule of informal consultation with this space where women's group interests are articulated.

Gender in the village-world constitutes a ranked duality where each term is endowed with full political and ontological existence, despite being unequal. There is no duality in the modern world, only binarism. Whereas the relationship within duality is complementary, the relationship within binarism is supplementary: one term supplements—rather than complements—the other. The supplement stands as a mere accessory to the main term. When one term becomes "universal" because it comes to represent the general interest, the initial hierarchy turns into an abyss where the "other" has no place. Thus, the binary structure is clearly different from the dual one. The dual structure is a structure of two, whereas the binary structure is a matrix of the One and its others.

According to the colonial-modern binary pattern, for any element to achieve ontological fullness, or plenitude of being, it must be purged of its radical difference or uniqueness and be equalized. In other words, it must be made commensurable according to a grid of universal reference or equivalence. Thus, any manifestation of otherness constitutes a problem that can only be remedied when sifted through the grid that breaks down and equalizes particularities and idiosyncrasies. The "Indian other," the "nonwhite other," and the woman must undergo a process that transforms their difference into a recognizable identity within the global pattern. Otherwise, they do not fit the neutral and aseptic environment of universal equivalence, of that which can be generalized and assigned universal worth and concern. In the modern world, only subjects—individual or collective—who have been filtered, processed, and transformed into the universal terms of the "neutral" sphere can acquire a political voice. Whatever cannot be processed according to that grid becomes excess (see my critique of multicultural identity politics in Segato 2007).

As others have explained, this sphere, this modern *agora*, has a native subject who can navigate it easily because he is its natural inhabitant. This subject created the rules

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of citizenship to his image and likeness throughout the course of colonial-modern history. He is male, white, literate, a property owner, and *pater familias* (I use this term rather than heterosexual because his actual sexual life is unknown to us, but his "respectability" as head of family can be proved). Anyone aspiring to acquire his civic capability—the capability of embodying a public political identity—must transform themselves in his image (see West 1988; Warner 1990; Benhabib 1992; Cornell 1998; Young 2000).

Duality, as instantiated by gender duality in the indigenous world, is one variant of *multiplicity*. The "two" summarizes and epitomizes multiplicity. *Binarism*, which is characteristic of modernity, results from the episteme of the world of the One, which is based on purging and othering. The one and the two of indigenous duality are just one among many possibilities within multiplicity. And although the one and the two can be complementary, they are each ontologically complete and endowed with politicity despite being unequal in value and prestige. The second term within that hierarchical duality is not a problem that must be transformed through the grid of universal equivalence. It is also not conceived as what is left over from the process of transposing the one. Rather, the second term, the two, is fully *an other*, a *complete* and ontologically irreducible other.

In seeing this, we understand that the domestic sphere is an ontologically and politically complete space with its own politics and sociality. It is hierarchically inferior to the public sphere, yet capable of self-defense and self-transformation. Gender relations in this world constitute a *low-intensity patriarchy* when compared to the patriarchal relations imposed by colonialism and reinforced by colonial modernity. Without going into detail, I would like to draw attention to the well-known failure of prestigious international cooperation programs tackling gender injustice that fail precisely because of their universalist view that starts from a Eurocentric definition of "gender" and the relations it organizes. In other words, the evident fragility of such instances of international cooperation stems from their lack of sensitivity to the local categories where projects are undertaken. In both rural communities and indigenous villages, gender is dual, and so duality organizes their spaces, tasks, and the distribution of rights and responsibilities. It is duality that defines gendered collectives or communities. Hence, the communal fabric is divided into two groups, each with its own internal norms and modes of conviviality and association for productive, reproductive, and ceremonial tasks. Each group has its own politicity.

Generally, international cooperation projects formulated by European countries reveal how difficult it is to perceive the specificities of gender in the communal environment. Usually, projects aiming to foster gender equality incorrectly frame their work as being about empowering individual women or about producing equality between individual women and individual men. These projects' desired goal is to promote equality directly and without the mediation of local understandings of gender because gender equality is conceived as "equality of individuals" rather than "equality of gendered groups." By focusing on individuals, international cooperation programs designed to promote gender equality fail to be context-sensitive, that is, they fail to realize that their aim should be to promote the domestic sphere, and women as a collective, vis-à-vis the communal public sphere, and men as a collective. The actual goal of these programs should be to promote equality between women and men as collectives within a community. Only in this way can women gain prominence and take ongoing action within or outside their community while avoiding the risks of alienation and banishment.

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The other major mistake that international cooperation programs, national public policies, and NGOs make is related to the notion of "gender mainstreaming" and its consequent strategy of "mainstreaming" the policies destined to remedy gender hierarchies. Basically, the error consists in assuming that some dimensions of communal life are of universal interest—the economy, social organization, political life, and so on—whereas other dimensions such as domestic life and women's lives represent only partial and particular interests.[13] The proposal to mainstream gender policies is based on the misguided idea that, for the village, public matters are akin to the "matters of universal concern" at the center of the colonial-modern public sphere, whereas domestic matters count only as particular interests. As a consequence of this misguided ranking, what needs to be mainstreamed are things thought to be of particular or partial interest, which are conceived as supplementary to the central issues of universal importance. Here we see, once again, the distortions that arise when modernity's institutions are Eurocentrically projected onto the institutions of the village-world. The attempt to mainstream issues of supposedly particular concern, like gender issues, so that they cut through "universal issues," is a glaring error when facing worlds that are not oriented by a Eurocentric colonial binarism. In the village-world, the political sphere may be more prestigious, but it is neither universal nor all-encompassing. Rather, just like the domestic sphere, it is one *part* of the whole. Both spaces are understood to be ontologically complete, and none can replace the other.

In addition to being individualistic, the modern world is the world of the One that casts all forms of otherness as a problem. The discipline of anthropology is proof of this because it was founded on the modern conviction that the "other" must be explained, translated, made commensurate, and processed by the rational operation that incorporates that "other" into the universal grid. What cannot be processed by this grid becomes a remainder that lacks reality and ontological plenitude; it is incomplete, irrelevant, discarded. Derridean deconstruction, which destabilizes the binary pair, is inapplicable and pointless within the logic of duality.

The transformation of duality—a variant of multiplicity—into the binarism of the universal, canonical, and "neutral" One with its marginal other, blocks movement between positions. Once the binary logic takes over, gender becomes rigidly fixed to the Western heterosexual matrix, creating the need for public policies that promote equality and sexual freedom while protecting people from homophobia and transphobia. Same-sex marriages were forbidden by colonial modernity, but they had been previously accepted by an ample number of indigenous peoples on the continent. Giuseppe Campuzano's extensive research on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonial chronicles and documents from the Andes shows that the colonial enterprise put intense pressure on the various forms of sexuality found among precolonial Andean civilizations (Campuzano 2006; 2009). In his archival evidence, Campuzano identifies norms and punishments created to incorporate said practices into the conqueror's binary heterosexual matrix, thereby imposing previously unknown notions of sin and spreading the conqueror's pornographic gaze.

We may thus conclude that many moral prejudices that human rights try to combat, which we now deem "custom" or "tradition," are actually modern prejudices. These prejudices, customs, and traditions belong to the pattern laid down by colonial modernity. In other words, homophobic "customs" and other harmful ideologies are in fact modern, and, again, we find that modernity presents a legal antidote for the evils it had itself introduced and continues to perpetuate. The straitjacket on identity is also a key feature of racialization, installed by the colonial process of modernity, that pushes

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its subjects into fixed positions within the binary canon made up of the terms *white* and *nonwhite*. According to the new pattern, the second term becomes a mere "other": something anomalous, defective, peripheral, and marginal with respect to the first.

Another unfortunate outcome of this process is the reorganization of the cosmos and the earth—with all its animate and inanimate beings—into the binarism of the subject–object relationship in Western science. For many peoples facing a permanent, daily process of conquest and colonization, the struggle for rights and equitable or inclusive public policy is a feature of the modern world. Of course, my point is not to condemn these struggles but to help us understand that they belong to a modern paradigm, and that decolonial living entails making cracks in a territory totalized by binarism, possibly the most efficient instrument of colonial-modern power.

This is why, when I explained the Maria da Penha Law against Domestic Violence at the FUNAI Women's Office gender workshops, I would tell my indigenous women interlocutors that the state offers with one hand what it has already stolen with the other. When the binary world of the One and its marginal, peripheral others comes into contact with the world of multiplicity, it captures it and transforms it from within. This is a consequence of the pattern of the coloniality of power, which grants universal standing to one world and affords it greater influence over the other. What happens, more precisely, is that one world colonizes the other.

In this new dominant order, public space captures and monopolizes all deliberation and decision-making power related to the common good. Domestic space gets wholly depoliticized, in part because it loses its ancestral methods for influencing decisions made in the public space, and also because it gets "nuclearized," that is, encapsulated in the nuclear family and enclosed in privacy. The institution of the family adopts new norms of conjugal relationship that censure the extended ties that ran through domestic space (Abu-Lughod 1998; Maia 2011). This erosion of ties leads to the loss of a communal eye that oversees and evaluates people's behavior. Thus, the depoliticization of the domestic space renders it vulnerable and fragile. I recorded countless testimonies of the unusual forms of cruelty experienced by those who gradually lost the protection of communal vigilance over family life. In short, the authority, value, and prestige of women and their sphere of action crumbled.

The fall of the domestic sphere and the world of women from a position of ontological plenitude to that of a peripheral or marginal other has important gnoseological consequences too. For instance, although we perceive the ubiquity of gender in social life, we fail to grant it its rightful theoretical and epistemic status as a central category capable of illuminating all aspects of life. In contrast, the pre-intrusion world makes constant reference to duality in all symbolic spheres, thus showing that the gnoseological devaluation of gender is a nonexistent problem there.

What is most important to note here is that, in this context of change, nomenclatures are preserved and an illusion takes place: there is the false impression that the old order continues with names, formalities, and rituals that seem to endure, but said order is now ruled by a different matrix. This is an elusive, covert transition. The lack of clarity regarding the changes that have occurred makes women submit to men, unable to respond to men's frequent claim that "we have always been this way." Thus, an insidious form of manipulation is born. Men argue that if the gender hierarchy is modified, their struggle for continuity as a people will be undermined because their identity—as a form of political, cultural, and symbolic capital—will be damaged. Damaging identity would then weaken their people's demands for territories, resources, and rights (as resources).

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Yet, in reality, colonization increased hierarchy in the village, aggravating inequality and boosting the rank of those already in power: old men, *caciques*, and men in general. As I explained, although it is true that ranking has always existed, and it is also true that gender relations involved unequal power and prestige, those inequalities grew larger as a result of colonial-state intervention and the introduction of the village to the colonial-modern order. *A mutation took place under the cloak of apparent continuity*. That is why one needs considerable analytical and rhetorical skill to dispel the illusion of historical depth characteristic of today's gender inequality, and to demolish the arguments that solidify men's authority and other hierarchies within the village. What we find here is a perverse strain of culturalism that leads to the growing fundamentalism in our current political culture, a process that got inaugurated with the fall of the Berlin Wall when Marxist debate became obsolete, turning politicized and essentialized identities into the only language of struggle (Segato 2007).

In sum, when we think that universalizing citizenship means replacing the hierarchy between men and women for a strictly equal relationship, we are in fact attempting to solve modernity's evils with modern solutions: the state offers with one hand what it had already stolen with the other. In contrast to the "different but equal" formula of modern activism, the indigenous world orients itself according to a formula that is hard for us to understand: "unequal *but* different." The indigenous formula posits a world characterized by multiplicity because the other—different and even inferior—does not constitute a problem to be fixed, since there is no imperative of commensurability in the village-world.

Here the in-between world of critical modernity may beneficially step in, supplementing ethnic authority with its egalitarian discourse and creating what some are already calling ethnic or communitarian citizenship. Such citizenship will be developed only through self-rule, that is, through the debate and deliberation of its members as they weave their own history. I want to conclude by recommending Ousman Sembene's extraordinary film *Mooladé*, which narrates how a group of women from a village in Burkina Faso struggled to eradicate the practice of infibulation. They fight from within the community, from its inner face, yet pierced, as always, by the surrounding world.

Acknowledgments

Rita Segato

I want to thank the late Aníbal Quijano for asking me to write about the intersection between coloniality and gender. I also thank Serene Khader at the CUNY Graduate Center and Brooklyn College for taking the initiative to coordinate the translation of this text into English, as well as Pedro Monque for his time and effort in producing the translation.

Pedro Monque

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Notes

1 (all notes are translator's notes): the Spanish version of this article has been republished and updated a number of times. The version I translated here can be found in Segato 2015, 69–96. Any substantive changes in content and form between this English translation and the original were suggested and approved

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by Rita Segato herself. I also want to highlight that Ramsey McGlazer's English translation of the book wherein this text appears will soon be published by Routledge. I thank McGlazer for several conversations where we standardized some of our terms, and I encourage the reader to turn to his translation of the book for a fuller understanding of Segato's thought.

2 Segato's notion of "ethnographic listening" stems from her reflections on psychoanalytic listening. For her reflections on anthropology and psychoanalysis, see "La célula violenta que Lacan no vio: un diálogo (tenso) entre la antropología y el psicoanálisis" [The violent cell Lacan missed: a (tense) dialogue between anthropology and psychoanalysis] in Segato 2003.

3 Segato uses the term *para-state* to describe the increasingly complex engagement in Latin America (and elsewhere) between criminal and state actors to further the accumulation of wealth and power by elites. Segato's concept of para-state violence encompasses a complex range of actors, including those typically conceived as nonstate actors like cartels and paramilitary organizations (which may act against the state or in collusion with it). It also includes state actors when they operate outside the realm of legality, for example, police forces when they engage in extrajudicial killings. Not only are the actors diverse, but so are the possible forms of violence as well as the norms regulating what Segato calls a "para-state sphere of control over life" (Segato 2018c, 198). For a longer treatment of the para-state and para-state violence, see Segato 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2020.

4 Segato's notion of cruelty refers not only to brutal or unfeeling actions but is specifically connected to her idea of a *pedagogy of cruelty* as "any act or practice that teaches, makes habitual, and programs a subject for transforming living things and their vitality into objects" (Segato 2018b, 11). See Segato 2018b for a longer discussion of cruelty.

5 The Maria da Penha Law introduced a number of measures, from longer sentences to the establishment of special courts and support institutions (such as women's shelters), to combat domestic violence in Brazil. For a more detailed description of the law and its impact, see Spieler 2011; Pasinato 2016.

6 For a more detailed discussion of the Brazilian debate on indigenous peoples and infanticide, see "Que cada pueblo teja los hilos de su historia: la colonialidad legislativa de los salvadores de la infancia indígena" [Let every people weave their history: the legislative coloniality of the saviors of indigenous infants] in Segato 2015.

7 What Segato denounces here is the hegemony of human rights as the only moral language, not their content or pragmatic importance. For a recent discussion on decolonial feminism and the peril in expecting or enforcing a single moral language, see Khader 2018; Khader 2021; McLaren 2021; Meyers 2021; Monque 2021.

8 The Spanish word I have translated as "peoples" is *pueblos*, not *gentes*.

9 *Contentious anthropology* is a term invented by Segato to highlight the political uses of anthropology in the contexts of litigation, legislation, and serving as an expert witness.

10 For a useful discussion of colonial modernity as a historical epoch with deep effects on social categorization, see Quijano and Wallerstein 1992 and "Aníbal Quijano y la perspectiva de la colonialidad del poder" [Anibal Quijano and the coloniality of power perspective] in Segato 2015.

11 The original text referred to Paraguay's *Guayaquís* and Panama's *Cuna*. These are the older names used for these peoples in many of the classic ethnographies.

12 What Segato alludes to here is the process by which the public sphere drains all politicity from other spheres, like the domestic one.

13 In more recent texts and interviews, the author summarizes this position as "the error of yielding to minoritization."

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Conversation Piece

My Portuguese-bred colleague
picked up a clay shivalingam
one day and said:
Is this an ashtray?
No, said the salesman,
This is our god.

Eunice de Souza

DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM

by Aimé Césaire

A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization.

A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization.

A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.

The fact is that the so-called European civilization—"Western" civilization—as it has been shaped by two centuries of bourgeois rule, is incapable of solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem; that Europe is unable to justify itself either before the bar of "reason" or before the bar of "conscience"; and that, increasingly, it takes refuge in a hypocrisy which is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive.

Europe is indefensible.

Apparently that is what the American strategists are whispering to each other.

That in itself is not serious.

What is serious is that "Europe" is morally, spiritually indefensible.

And today the indictment is brought against it not by the European masses alone, but on a world scale, by tens and tens of millions of men who, from the depths of slavery, set themselves up as judges.

The colonialists may kill in Indochina, torture in Madagascar, imprison in Black Africa, crack down in the West Indies. Henceforth the colonized know that they have an advantage over them. They know that their temporary "masters" are lying.

Therefore that their masters are weak.

And since I have been asked to speak about colonization and civilization, let us go straight to the principal lie that is the source of all the others.

Colonization and civilization?

In dealing with this subject, the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them.

In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously—and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all,

without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies.

Pursuing my analysis, I find that hypocrisy is of recent date; that neither Cortéz discovering Mexico from the top of the great teocalli, nor Pizzaro before Cuzco (much less Marco Polo before Cambuluc), claims that he is the harbinger of a superior order; that they kill; that they plunder; that they have helmets, lances, cupidities; that the slavering apologists came later; that the chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations *Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery,* from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes.

That being settled, I admit that it is a good thing to place different civilizations in contact with each other; that it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen; that the great good fortune of Europe is to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best center for the redistribution of energy.

But then I ask the following question: has colonization really *placed civilizations in contact?* Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of *establishing contact,* was it the best?

I answer *no.*

And I say that between *colonization* and *civilization* there is an infinite distance; that out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value.

First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism; and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread; and that at the end of all these treaties that have been violated, all these lies that have been propagated, all these punitive expeditions that have been tolerated, all these prisoners who have been tied up and "interrogated," all these patriots who have been tortured, at the end of all the racial pride that has been encouraged, all the boastfulness that has been displayed, a

poison has been distilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery.*

And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific boomerang effect: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers standing around the racks invent, refine, discuss.

People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind—it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.

Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon,* that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man,* it is not *the humiliation of man as such,* it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the "coolies" of India, and the "niggers" of Africa.

And that is the great thing I hold against pseudo-humanism: that for too long it has diminished the rights of man, that its concept of those rights has been—and still is—narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist.

I have talked a good deal about Hitler. Because he deserves it: he makes it possible to see things on a large scale and to grasp the fact that capitalist society, at its present stage, is incapable of establishing a concept of the rights of all men, just as it has proved incapable of establishing a system of individual ethics. Whether one likes it or not, at the end of the blind alley that is Europe, I mean the Europe of Adenauer, Schuman, Bidault, and a few others, there is Hitler. At the end of capitalism, which is eager to outlive its day, there is Hitler. At the end of formal humanism and philosophic renunciation, there is Hitler.

And this being so, I cannot help thinking of one of his statements: "We aspire not to equality but to domination. The country of a foreign race must become once again a country of serfs, of agricultural laborers, or industrial workers. It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities among men but of widening them and making them into a law."

That rings clear, haughty, and brutal, and plants us squarely in the middle of howling savagery. But let us come down a step.

Who is speaking? I am ashamed to say it: it is the Western *humanist,* the "idealist" philosopher. That his name is Renan is an accident. That the passage is taken from a book entitled *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale,* that it was written in France just after a war which France had represented as a war of right against might, tells us a great deal about bourgeois morals.

> The regeneration of the inferior or degenerate races by the superior races is part of the providential order of things for humanity. With us, the common man is nearly always a déclassé nobleman, his heavy hand is better suited to handling the sword than the menial tool. Rather than work, he chooses to fight, that is, he returns to his first estate. *Regere imperio populos,* that is our vocation. Pour forth this all-consuming activity onto countries which, like China, are crying aloud for foreign conquest. Turn the adventurers who disturb European society into a *ver sacrum,* a horde like those of the Franks, the Lombards, or the Normans, and every man will be in his right role. Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race. Reduce this noble race to working in the *ergastulum* like Negroes and Chinese, and they rebel. In Europe, every rebel is, more or less, a soldier who has missed his calling, a creature made for the heroic life, before whom you are setting *a task that is contrary to his race,* a poor worker, too good a soldier. But the life at which our workers rebel would make a Chinese or a fellah happy, as they are not military creatures in the least. *Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well.*

Hitler? Rosenberg? No, Renan.

But let us come down one step further. And it is the long-winded politician. Who protests? No one, so far as I know, when M. Albert Sarraut, the former governor-general of Indochina, holding forth to the students at the Ecole Coloniale, teaches them that it would be puerile to object to the European colonial enterprises in the name of "an alleged right to possess the land

one occupies, and some sort of right to remain in fierce isolation, which would leave unutilized resources to lie forever idle in the hands of incompetents."

And who is roused to indignation when a certain Rev. Barde assures us that if the goods of this world "remained divided up indefinitely, as they would be without colonization, they would answer neither the purposes of God nor the just demands of the human collectivity"?

Since, as his fellow Christian, the Rev. Muller, declares: "Humanity must not, cannot allow the incompetence, negligence, and laziness of the uncivilized peoples to leave idle indefinitely the wealth which God has confided to them, charging them to make it serve the good of all."

No one.

I mean not one established writer, not one academic, not one preacher, not one crusader for the right and for religion, not one "defender of the human person."

And yet, through the mouths of the Sarrauts and the Bardes, the Mullers and the Renans, through the mouths of all those who considered—and consider—it lawful to apply to non-European peoples "a kind of expropriation for public purposes" for the benefit of nations that were stronger and better equipped, it was already Hitler speaking!

What am I driving at? At this idea: that no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another, one denial to another, calls for its Hitler, I mean its punishment.

Colonization: bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple.

Elsewhere I have cited at length a few incidents culled from the history of colonial expeditions.

Unfortunately, this did not find favor with everyone. It seems that I was pulling old skeletons out of the closet. Indeed!

Was there no point in quoting Colonel de Montagnac, one of the conquerors of Algeria: "In order to banish the thoughts that sometimes besiege me, I have some heads cut off, not the heads of artichokes but the heads of men."

Would it have been more advisable to refuse the floor to Count d'Hérisson: "It is true that we are bringing back a whole barrelful of ears collected, pair by pair, from prisoners, friendly or enemy."

Should I have denied Saint-Arnaud the right to profess his barbarous faith: "We lay waste, we burn, we plunder, we destroy the houses and the trees."

Should I have prevented Marshal Bugeaud from systematizing all that in a daring theory and invoking the precedent of famous ancestors: "We must have a great invasion of Africa, like the invasions of the Franks and the Goths."

Lastly, should I have cast back into the shadows of oblivion the memorable feat of arms of General Gérard and kept silent about the capture of Ambike, a city which, to tell the truth, had never dreamed of defending itself: "The native riflemen had orders to kill only the men, but no one restrained them; intoxicated by the smell of blood, they spared not one woman, not one child. . . . At the end of the afternoon, the heat caused a light mist to arise: it was the blood of the five thousand victims, the ghost of the city, evaporating in the setting sun."

Yes or no, are these things true? And the sadistic pleasures, the nameless delights that send voluptuous shivers and quivers through Loti's carcass when he focuses his field glasses on a good massacre of the Annamese? True or not true? And if these things are true, as no one can deny, will it be said, in order to minimize them, that these corpses don't prove anything?

For my part, if I have recalled a few details of these hideous butcheries, it is by no means because I take a morbid delight in them, but because I think that these heads of men, these collections of ears, these burned houses, these Gothic invasions, this steaming blood, these cities that evaporate at the edge of the sword, are not to be so easily disposed of. They prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal,* accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out.

Unfair? No. There was a time when these same facts were a source of pride, and when, sure of the morrow, people did not mince words. One last quotation; it is from a certain Carl Siger, author of an *Essai sur la colonisation* (Paris, 1907):

> The new countries offer a vast field for individual, violent activities which, in the metropolitan countries, would run up against certain prejudices, against a sober and orderly conception of life, and which, in the colonies, have greater freedom to develop and, consequently, to affirm their worth. Thus to a certain extent the colonies

> can serve as a safety valve for modern society. Even if this were their only value, it would be immense.

Truly, there are sins for which no one has the power to make amends and which can never be fully expiated.

But let us speak about the colonized.

I see clearly what colonization has destroyed: the wonderful Indian civilizations—and neither Deterding nor Royal Dutch nor Standard Oil will ever console me for the Aztecs and the Incas.

I see clearly the civilizations, condemned to perish at a future date, into which it has introduced a principle of ruin: the South Sea Islands, Nigeria, Nyasaland. I see less clearly the contributions it has made.

Security? Culture? The rule of law? In the meantime, I look around and wherever there are colonizers and colonized face to face, I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict, and, in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, "boys," artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business.

I spoke of contact.

Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses.

No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production.

My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thingification."

I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living.

I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out.

They throw facts at my head, statistics, mileages of roads, canals, and railroad tracks.

I am talking about thousands of men sacrificed to the Congo-Océan.[2] I am talking about those who, as I write this, are digging the harbor of Abidjan by hand. I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life—from life, from the dance, from wisdom.

I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys.

They dazzle me with the tonnage of cotton or cocoa that has been exported, the acreage that has been planted with olive trees or grapevines.

I am talking about natural *economies* that have been disrupted—harmonious and viable *economies* adapted to the indigenous population—about food crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries; about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials.

They pride themselves on abuses eliminated.

I too talk about abuses, but what I say is that on the old ones—very real—they have superimposed others—very detestable. They talk to me about local tyrants brought to reason; but I note that in general the old tyrants get on very well with the new ones, and that there has been established between them, to the detriment of the people, a circuit of mutual services and complicity.

They talk to me about civilization, I talk about proletarianization and mystification.

For my part, I make a systematic defense of the non-European civilizations.

Every day that passes, every denial of justice, every beating by the police, every demand of the workers that is drowned in blood, every scandal that is hushed up, every punitive expedition, every police van, every gendarme and every militiaman, brings home to us the value of our old societies.

They were communal societies, never societies of the many for the few.

They were societies that were not only ante-capitalist, as has been said, but also *anti-capitalist.*

They were democratic societies, always.

They were cooperative societies, fraternal societies.

I make a systematic defense of the societies destroyed by imperialism.

They were the fact, they did not pretend to be the idea; despite their faults, they were neither to be hated nor condemned. They were content to be. In them, neither the word *failure* nor the word *avatar* had any meaning. They kept hope intact.

Whereas those are the only words that can, in all honesty, be applied to the European enterprises outside Europe. My only consolation is that periods of colonization pass, that nations sleep only for a time, and that peoples remain.

This being said, it seems that in certain circles they pretend to have discovered in me an "enemy of Europe" and a prophet of the return to the pre-European past.

For my part, I search in vain for the place where I could have expressed such views; where I ever underestimated the importance

of Europe in the history of human thought; where I ever preached a *return* of any kind; where I ever claimed that there could be a *return.*

The truth is that I have said something very different: to wit, that the great historical tragedy of Africa has been not so much that it was too late in making contact with the rest of the world, as the manner in which that contact was brought about; that Europe began to "propagate" at a time when it had fallen into the hands of the most unscrupulous financiers and captains of industry; that it was our misfortune to encounter that particular Europe on our path, and that Europe is responsible before the human community for the highest heap of corpses in history.

In another connection, in judging colonization, I have added that Europe has gotten on very well indeed with all the local feudal lords who agreed to serve, woven a villainous complicity with them, rendered their tyranny more effective and more efficient, and that it has actually tended to prolong artificially the survival of local pasts in their most pernicious aspects.

I have said—and this is something very different—that colonialist Europe has grafted modern abuse onto ancient injustice, hateful racism onto old inequality.

That if I am attacked on the grounds of intent, I maintain that colonialist Europe is dishonest in trying to justify its colonizing activity *a posteriori* by the obvious material progress that has been achieved in certain fields under the colonial regime—since *sudden change* is always possible, in history as elsewhere; since no one knows at what stage of material development these same countries would have been if Europe had not intervened; since the introduction of technology into Africa and Asia, their administrative reorganization, in a word, their "Europeanization," was (as is proved by the example of Japan) in no way tied to the European *occupation;* since the

Europeanization of the non-European continents could have been accomplished otherwise than under the heel of Europe; since this movement of Europeanization was in progress; since it was even slowed down; since in any case it was distorted by the European takeover.

The proof is that at present it is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them; that it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score; that it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back.

To go further, I make no secret of my opinion that at the present time the barbarism of Western Europe has reached an incredibly high level, being only surpassed—far surpassed, it is true—by the barbarism of the United States.

And I am not talking about Hitler, or the prison guard, or the adventurer, but about the "decent fellow" across the way; not about the member of the SS, or the gangster, but about the respectable bourgeois. In a time gone by, Léon Bloy innocently became indignant over the fact that swindlers, perjurers, forgers, thieves, and procurers were given the responsibility of "bringing to the Indies the example of Christian virtues."

We've made progress: today it is the possessor of the "Christian virtues" who intrigues—with no small success—for the honor of administering overseas territories according to the methods of forgers and torturers.

A sign that cruelty, mendacity, baseness, and corruption have sunk deep into the soul of the European bourgeoisie.

I repeat that I am not talking about Hitler, or the SS, or pogroms, or summary executions. But about a reaction caught unawares, a reflex permitted, a piece of cynicism tolerated. And if evidence is wanted, I could mention a scene of cannibalistic hysteria that I have been privileged to witness in the French National Assembly.

By Jove, my dear colleagues (as they say), I take off my hat to you (a cannibal's hat, of course).

Think of it! Ninety thousand dead in Madagascar! Indochina trampled underfoot, crushed to bits, assassinated, tortures brought back from the depths of the Middle Ages! And what a spectacle! The delicious shudder that roused the dozing deputies. The wild uproar! Bidault, looking like a communion wafer dipped in shit—unctuous and sanctimonious cannibalism; Moutet—the cannibalism of shady deals and sonorous nonsense; Coste-Floret—the cannibalism of an unlicked bear cub, a blundering fool.

Unforgettable, gentlemen! With fine phrases as cold and solemn as a mummy's wrappings they tie up the Madagascan. With a few conventional words they stab him for you. The time it takes to wet your whistle, they disembowel him for you. Fine work! Not a drop of blood will be wasted.

The ones who drink it straight, to the last drop. The ones like Ramadier, who smear their faces with it in the manner of Silenus;[3] Fontlup-Esperaber,[4] who starches his mustache with it, the walrus mustache of an ancient Gaul; old Desjardins bending over the emanations from the vat and intoxicating himself with them as with new wine. Violence! The violence of the weak. A significant thing: it is not the head of a civilization that begins to rot first. It is the heart.

I admit that as far as the health of Europe and civilization is concerned, these cries of "Kill! kill!" and "Let's see some blood," belched forth by trembling old men and virtuous young men educated by the Jesuit Fathers, make a much more disagreeable impression on me than the most sensational bank holdups that occur in Paris.

And that, mind you, is by no means an exception.

On the contrary, bourgeois swinishness is the rule. We've been on its trail for a century. We listen for it, we take it by surprise, we sniff it out, we follow it, lose it, find it again, shadow it, and every day it is more nauseatingly exposed. Oh! the racism of these gentlemen does not bother me. I do not become indignant over it. I merely examine it. I note it, and that is all. I am almost grateful to it for expressing itself openly and appearing in broad daylight, as a sign. A sign that the intrepid class which once stormed the Bastilles is now hamstrung. A sign that it feels itself to be mortal. A sign that it feels itself to be a corpse. And when the corpse starts to babble, you get this sort of thing:

> There was only too much truth in this first impulse of the Europeans who, *in the century of Columbus, refused to recognize as their fellow men the degraded inhabitants of the new world.* . . . One cannot gaze upon the savage for an instant without reading the anathema written, I do not say upon his soul alone, but *even on the external form of his body.*

And it's signed Joseph de Maistre.
(That's what is ground out by the mystical mill.)
And then you get this:

> From the selectionist point of view, I would look upon it as unfortunate if there should be a very great numerical expansion of

> the yellow and black elements, which would be difficult to eliminate. However, if the society of the future is organized on a dualistic basis, *with a ruling class of dolichocephalic blonds and a class of inferior race confined to the roughest labor, it is possible that this latter role would fall to the yellow and black elements*. In this case, moreover, they would not be an inconvenience for the dolichocephalic blonds but an advantage. . . . *It must not be forgotten that* [slavery] *is no more abnormal than the domestication of the horse or the ox.* It is therefore possible that it may reappear in the future in one form or another. It is probably even inevitable that this will happen if the simplistic solution does not come about instead—that of a single superior race, leveled out by selection.

That's what is ground out by the scientific mill, and it's signed Lapouge.

And you also get this (from the literary mill this time):

> I know that I must believe myself superior to the poor Bayas of the Mambéré. *I know that I must take pride in my blood.* When a superior man ceases to believe himself superior, he actually ceases to be superior. . . . *When a superior race ceases to believe itself a chosen race, it actually ceases to be a chosen race.*

And it's signed Psichari–soldier–of–Africa.

Translate it into newspaper jargon and you get Faguet:

> The barbarian is of the same race, after all, as the Roman and the Greek. He is a cousin. The yellow man, the black man, is not our cousin at all. Here there is a real difference, a real distance, and a very great one: an *ethnological* distance. *After all, civilization has never yet been made except by whites.* . . . If Europe becomes yellow, there will certainly be a regression, a new period of darkness and confusion, that is, another Middle Ages.

And then lower, always lower, to the bottom of the pit, lower than the shovel can go, M. Jules Romains, of the Académie Française and the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* (It doesn't matter, of course, that M. Farigoule changes his name once again and here calls himself Salsette for the sake of convenience.)[5] The essential thing is that M. Jules Romains goes so far as to write this:

> I am willing to carry on a discussion only with people who agree to pose the following hypothesis: a France that had on its metropolitan soil ten million Blacks, five or six million of them in the valley of the Garonne. Would our valiant populations of the Southwest never have been touched by race prejudice? Would there not have been the slightest apprehension if the question had arisen of turning all powers over to these Negroes, the sons of slaves? . . . I once had opposite me a row of some twenty pure Blacks. . . . I will not even censure our Negroes and Negresses for chewing gum. I will only note . . . that this movement has the effect of emphasizing the jaws, and that the associations which come to mind evoke the equatorial forest rather than the procession of the Panathenaea . . . . The black race has not yet produced, will never produce, an Einstein, a Stravinsky, a Gershwin.

One idiotic comparison for another: since the prophet of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and other places invites us to draw parallels between "widely separated" things, may I be permitted, Negro that I am, to think (no one being master of his free associations) that his voice has less in common with the rustling of the oak of Dodona—or even the vibrations of the cauldron—than with the braying of a Missouri ass.[6]

Once again, I systematically defend our old Negro civilizations: they were courteous civilizations.

So the real problem, you say, is to return to them. No, I repeat. We are not men for whom it is a question of "either-or." For us, the

problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism. Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong, the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun. It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days.

For some examples showing that this is possible, we can look to the Soviet Union.

But let us return to M. Jules Romains:

One cannot say that the petty bourgeois has never read anything. On the contrary, he has read everything, devoured everything.

Only, his brain functions after the fashion of certain elementary types of digestive systems. It filters. And the filter lets through only what can nourish the thick skin of the bourgeois's clear conscience.

Before the arrival of the French in their country, the Vietnamese were people of an old culture, exquisite and refined. To recall this fact upsets the digestion of the Banque d'Indochine. Start the forgetting machine!

These Madagascans who are being tortured today, less than a century ago were poets, artists, administrators? Shhhhh! Keep your lips buttoned! And silence falls, silence as deep as a safe! Fortunately, there are still the Negroes. Ah! the Negroes! Let's talk about the Negroes!

All right, let's talk about them.

About the Sudanese empires? About the bronzes of Benin? Shango sculpture? That's all right with me; it will give us a change from all the sensationally bad art that adorns so many European capitals. About African music. Why not?

And about what the first explorers said, what they saw. . . . Not those who feed at the company mangers! But the d'Elbées, the Marchais, the Pigafettas! And then Frobenius! Say, you know who he was, Frobenius? And we read together: "Civilized to the marrow of their bones! The idea of the barbaric Negro is a European invention."

The petty bourgeois doesn't want to hear any more. With a twitch of his ears he flicks the idea away.

The idea, an annoying fly.

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