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Editorial

We hereby present to you the 24th edition of the ESJP! Once again, we had the privilege of working with ambitious students. Sonia Shvets, Rutger Maaskant, and Coen ten Ham took on the challenge to subject themselves to the editorial processes of writing, rewriting, reading and re-reading, for their work to culminate into three interesting essays they can be proud of. Sonia managed to cut down her MA thesis from 20,000 words to a remarkable 6,686 words. That is quite an accomplishment, which she carried out in a distinctly personal, whimsical, way. It brought the ESJP to form – as far as I can tell- the largest editorial group in our journal's history, with 8 editors working on the paper bearing the perhaps all-too-fitting title 'the Downward Spiral'. I thus praise the authors for their effort, and must always write about our dedicated editors, whose hard work mirrors that of the author in a distant yet intrinsically connected way.

Our editorial group saw a lot of new faces this year! We welcomed Bo, Heloísa, Jakob, Kasper, Sterre, and Ties. I am very thankful for having you on board, with all your insights, energy, and quirks, that make you the lovely editors you are. Having only just joined the ESJP, Jakob went on to become a lead editor - a challenging task, let alone when your group is the largest in our journal's history. Jakob helped keep all editors from spiraling, and for this he has my gratitude. We cannot forget to thank the 'veteran' editors who collaborated once again for a new edition: Arwen, Cassandra, David, Jasper, Menno, Roan, and Rutger. I am happy to see you here again, 'usual suspects' of our journal. Similarly, I thank Arwen and David for their efforts as lead editors of their groups. Respectively, they worked on the unique essay by Coen ten Ham that elicited unanimous enthusiasm from our board, and the 'Accountability' paper - now revealed to be written by our fellow editor Rutger, who embodied the ESJP archetypical experience of 'editor who is also secretly the author', with all the required silence, and much grace. And, of course, I thank our interview editor Atal Katawazi for all the hard work he put in making our conversation with Dr. Christoph Brunner into a full, published interview, as I thank Christoph for his time and willingness in having this conversation with us. Six months after the interview, Atal and Christoph met again for a conversation that was heartfelt, but difficult. Their care and dedication brought us a text I am proud to include in this edition.

I have been editor-in-chief of the ESJP for three years, and this is my final edition. I am happy I did it, and I am happy I didn't have to do it alone. Always there for me, was the person I cannot thank enough: Caspar Smink, secretary of our journal, my friend. Caspar and I will say goodbye to you now, and we hope to have imparted a message of work and care. We carry over the torch to our veteran editor Jasper Peters, our new secretary, and to Heloísa Nerone, our new editor-in-chief. When Nathalie Maria Kirch was Editor-in-chief before me, she mentioned how scary it felt knowing you were responsible for finding someone you trusted to take over your position. Making me editor-in-chief, she placed her trust in me to put in the care, as she would, into the journal. I now understand how she felt, but above all I am happy to say: working with Heloísa made this decision easier, and trusting her - one of the easiest things in the world.

As you see me write about care in this final editorial note, I do so deliberately. Because in the end, all of this is just about care. Care is what the authors bring into their work, for us to tend to, caringly and carefully. From the professors that nominate papers ceaselessly every year, to our editors – we care for you, dear reader, to read these papers. Because they are interesting, because you maybe wouldn't have found them on your own, because we have all worked so much on them, and because they're just nice. I hope the reader enjoys reading this edition; with all the care it holds.

Georgina Aránzazu Dijkstra
Editor-in-chief

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About

The Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy (ESJP) is a double-blind peer-reviewed student journal that publishes the best philosophical papers written by students from the Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam and from the Humanities Programme of the Erasmus University College. Its aims are to further enrich the philosophical environment in which Rotterdam's philosophy students develop their thinking and bring their best work to the attention of a wider intellectual audience. Aside from serving as an important academic platform for students to present their work, the journal has two other goals. First, to provide members of the editorial board with the opportunity to develop their own editing and writing skills. Second, to enable students to realize their first official academic publication during their time as a student at ESPhil or the Humanities Department of the EUC. A new issue of the ESJP appears on our website every summer.

To ensure the highest possible quality, the ESJP only accepts papers that (a) have been written for a course that is part of the Erasmus University College or Erasmus School of Philosophy curriculum and (b) nominated for publication in the ESJP by the teacher of that course. Each paper that is published in the ESJP is subjected to a double-blind peer review process in which at least one other teacher and two student editors act as referees.

The ESJP encourages students to keep in mind the possibility of publishing their course papers in our journal, and to write papers that appeal to a wider intellectual audience.

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In this Issue

"We are left with a predicament: we are not just moving but flying through historical-affective time; at the same time, nothing new is revealed. We are stuck in loops." In **On A Downward Spiral,** Sonia Shvets offers us a new topology on historical-affective time, using the works of Walter Benjamin, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, and Mark Fisher.

In the paper **Accountability: *from Structure to Individual (and back)***, Rutger Maaskant argues how a system can and should be held accountable for the injustices that arise within it. For this, he contrasts the views of Robin Zheng and Sally Haslanger.

Coen ten Ham's **Humorloos en Hyperreëel Europa: *de vraag of dat erg is*** explores the novel 'Grand Hotel Europa' written by Ilja Leonard Pfeiffer, with the works of Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Rancière.

As part of the academic track '*From Theory to Practice'* of the MA Philosophy Now, Umut Derman Tacyldiz shares with us **The Friendliest Prison: *Social Media*** - an impression of his thesis, written and presented for a student-led symposium.

Affects, Aesthetics, and Activism: *An Interview with Dr. Christoph Brunner*. Our interview editor Atal Katawazi had two conversations with Dr. Christoph Brunner, creating a full interview and a prefatory note of reflection.

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On a Downward Spiral

Sonia Shvets

Author's remark

The present work is a condensed argument from my master thesis, which was written in 2022. I deal here largely with the state of emergency that people are subjected to, and with evaluation of violence. The ongoing genocide of Palestinians being carried out by the Israeli apartheid regime has made it clear that I have approached the topics of violence, emergency, and emancipation inadequately in the current work. I doubt that anyone in my place would feel otherwise.

I invite you to read this text critically, with the feeling and the knowledge of what is happening today in Gaza and West Bank: from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. My wish is for both you and I to gain novel insights by critical reading, and learn how self-assured theoretical thought can be, and how humbled it becomes faced with an incomprehensible tragedy.

Emotional landscapes
They puzzle me
Then the riddle gets solved
And you push me up to this
State of emergency
— Björk, *Jóga*

The distinct feeling I get from being in early twenties and talking with my peers is not only that of profound care and trust, but also of complete ironic desperation. Habitual conversations range from exasperated screaming matches about the impending climate catastrophe to complaining about running out of monthly food money. On particularly melancholic evenings, the conversations are often centered around our chronic illnesses, both physical and mental. Something is tremendously out of joint and, despite being elusive, this specter is palpable everywhere. The world is as if thickly veiled, and its concealed part can be felt through one's fingertips, one merely must reach out and try sensing it. I propose to follow this feeling and seek the possible answers through our senses and affective intuitions.

In an unfortunate way, Walter Benjamin's (1974) eighth thesis from *On the Concept of History* feels as relevant as ever: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule." (6) The state of peril we seem to inhabit, in other words, is universal: the housing crisis, the hyper-inflation, the mass mental unwellness hit minority groups disproportionally harder, but do not completely spare others (besides, arguably, the extra-wealthy). In invoking exception, Benjamin's diagnosis directly refers the reader to Carl Schmitt, who introduced the term "state of exception" in *Dictatorship*, in 1921, nineteen years before Benjamin wrote his eighth thesis. Schmitt's (2005) state of exception, in short, denotes the situation in which a sovereign – a dictator – suspends the legal norm (7), having judged that there exists "a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state" (6), since "there exists no norm that is applicable to chaos" (13). An unrepentant Nazi, Schmitt lived the incarnation of the state of exception: Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution stated that the sovereign could "take all measures he deems necessary for the restoration of public security and order when these are seriously threatened" (Hoelzl 2016, 243).

Benjamin likewise lived the exception, but did not survive it, killing himself in 1940 by overdosing on morphine under the threat of being repatriated back to Nazi Germany (Osborne and Charles 2021).

Taking the universality of Benjaminian emergency as a premise, one cannot be satisfied with its shallow reading. The particular emergency of the chthonic horror of the Nazi regime was one of the expressions of the permanently ongoing emergency. Its content was seemingly philosophically secondary to him in the sense that it was merely a specific way in which emergency manifested itself at a particular time. Its *structure* is primary and philosophically relevant since it allows it to persist in time and grow into the norm rather than an exception. Emergency being primarily something that is felt – peril, anguish, abjection – means that we are grappling not just with the question of politics, but the "temporal structure of political affect" (Hamacher 2001, 161): a feeling that is both political and informed by politics, that by virtue of its structure is preserved. There is a robust structure that props up the changing manifestations of the state of emergency. This clandestine foundation allows the emergency to persist through time as a face dancer, each time showing a different disguise. What this structure is, precisely, and how one can start thinking of dismantling it, is the central question of the present inquiry.

The Myth of Progress

Having introduced Benjamin's eight thesis from *On the Concept of History* as foundational to the understanding of emergency, let us turn to the text to start the unraveling of the analysis. The departure point of the text is the critique of the method of viewing history. This is not an idle task, as the lens through which one regards the past influences one's emotional disposition in the present, and consequently one's potentiality towards political action. Foregoing strictly materialist analysis, Benjamin (1974) stresses the importance of immaterial, "spiritual" factors in the class struggle, as only these can ever allow to fruitfully question the authority of the ones who have been winning through history, the rulers (3). The importance of this questioning cannot be overstated because it is the "enemy [that] has not ceased to be victorious" (Benjamin 1974, 4). It is our historicizing approach to the past that has contributed to this unending domination of oppressors, the emergency situation. The writers of historicism, unlike historical materialists, regard events of the past in a vacuum: they are treated as being disconnected from the present. The naïveté of this attitude is not harmless, as Benjamin (1974) writes: "The astonishment that the things we are experiencing in the 20th century are 'still' possible is by no means philosophical. It is not the beginning of knowledge, unless it would be the knowledge that the conception of history on which it rests is untenable" (6). In other words, historicism has led us to believe that unthinkable atrocities are left behind in the debris of history. Not only does this allow for their repetition, but precludes one from obtaining historical knowledge, from learning our lesson. This naïveté stems from the assumption that the unfolding of history brings about inevitable progress from the barbaric to the enlightened. The propagated illusion of the ontological necessity of linear progress is taught to us incessantly (Benjamin 1974, 9–10).

The futility of the idea of progress is expressed eloquently in Benjamin's (1974) discussion of the Angel of History. Referencing Klee's work *Angelus Novus*, he paints its narrative picture. The Angel of History is always looking backwards, caught up by the wind that inevitably carries him forward, while he is unable to turn around and look at what he is carried towards. Instead, he sees constant ruin just behind him, one catastrophe unfolding after another (Benjamin 1974, 6–7). The disasters occur precisely because of the inability to glimpse into the future – the Angel's failure to turn his head in the direction he is being carried to. How are we to prevent a catastrophe if we do not know that we are approaching it until we are already in the midst of it, the emergency situation itself in full swing? This illusion of progress thus must be shattered, lest we never gain the possibility to look forward and see the cataclysm from afar. If normality is sick, it must be broken with its antithesis – the exception. Benjamin does not propose what could stand in as this

exception in the *On the Concept of History*. However, his earlier work, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, bears distinct parallels with it, from which one can extrapolate a possible candidate that is capable of 'exploding' the normalcy of the linear progress, therefore ending the oppressive reign of this illusion, coinciding with the reign of the rulers.

Divine Violent Intervention

From the wave of socialist revolutions in the 20th century, it is clear that violence was employed to disrupt the norm of oppressive regimes, effectively being employed as the exception I am seeking. Benjamin concerned himself with evaluating violence in *Toward the Critique of Violence*, making it possible to assess whether, according to him, it can be effective as such a disruptive exception. For that to be determined, however, one must first elaborate on how Benjamin conceived of emergency – the thing to be disrupted – in this text.

One can begin to answer this question by considering why violence is monopolized by law. Unsurprisingly, the state fears – and should fear – that the employment of violence overcomes the existing legal situation, changing the juridical status quo. Benjamin (2021) calls this intrinsic characteristic of any violence its law-positing character (45). All violence being law-positing means that even if the perpetrator is pursuing supra-legal means, the enacted violence in turn will establish new laws that the new rulers will strive to preserve. Nothing is eternal on earth, and new law-positing violence will be enacted, once again changing the legal status quo. The problem formulated by Benjamin (1974) remains: the "enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (4), since those newly in power – presiding over the oppressive conditions – are the heirs of those who have been victorious before them (5). The perceived linear progress in this way corresponds to the fictitious change in the juridical status-quo. While every variation may be presented as a step from less to more perfect, the root of the problem remains: the downtrodden remain just that, and the enemy does not cease being victorious.

Following the outlined logic, it seems there is no way out of this oppressive loop of violence: even if someone else 'wins' they perpetuate a new order preserving the newly formed legal situation through inherently violent means. What is left is to ask for Benjamin (2021) is: what if one would not try "winning", which implies utilizing violence for certain ends? What if violence is employed not *in order to* change the juridical situation, but as an expression of an affect? Expression precludes functional intentionality and therefore resists becoming the newest iteration of the chain of violence. In moving away from violence as a means, what Benjamin (2021) is seeking is the evaluation of violence in itself. This is only possible if one abandons the legal framework, since the "most elementary basic relation in every legal order is the one between ends and means" (Benjamin 2021, 39).

Human rage is an example of such a violence as a manifestation (Benjamin 2021, 54). It is doubtful that anyone has ever been under the illusion that their road rage would make a faulty driver pay for their blunders. Myths are rich with examples of violence as manifestation of the existence of gods. The angered Greek deities did not use their wrath as a means, but as an announcement of their presence. In the case of Prometheus, for example, the punishment he suffers from the gods does not leave him without "the hope of one day bringing a new law to human beings." (Benjamin 2021, 55) If the gods used their violence as a means, would not the end be the complete annihilation of any chance of humans gaining fire? Would not the proper means then be the immediate execution of Prometheus? The violence inflicted on him is therefore a reminder, not a tool. Mythic violence thus brings with it not annihilation, but the laying down of new boundaries, in which the rights of the counterparts are codified; it is a law-positing act. The phenomenon of laying down the new boundaries is precisely where the locus of the critique of violence is to be found. Condemning violence when the new rights are unequally distributed between the parties is easy

enough. However, there is a "demonic-ambiguous" character even to the "equality" that could be established under new laws. This is expressed by Anatole France as mentioned by Benjamin (2021): "Poor and rich are equally forbidden to spend the night under the bridge." (46) The lawmakers are the powerful ones, whose violence was strong enough to establish new laws. Hence, they are the ones who will in the end benefit. The gods who spare the lives of the transgressors are inevitably more powerful than the ones they punish, they maintain their dominance, always ready to strike the mortals down again. Mythic violence, therefore, cannot be the exception we seek to break the normalcy of the state of emergency.

Is there anything left that can shake up the Angel of History from his free-floating in the stream of as if predetermined historical time? We are to seek an answer in the antonyms of the utilized notions: God as opposed to myth, and law- annihilation as opposed to law-positing. The Pantheon punished Prometheus for attempting to give people – the disadvantaged – fire. God's violence, divine violence, in stark contrast, strikes the privileged ones, like Korah's horde.[11] The defining trait of divine violence is its law-annihilating character, since it radically sets it apart from its mythic counterpart. Benjamin's (2021) phrasing is crucial: "[…] it strikes them unannounced, without threat, and does not stop short of annihilation." (57) It is not a threatful manifestation like mythic violence, but rather annihilation in its immediacy and evanescence, paradoxically bloodless and devoid of cruelty. Destruction presupposes some remnants, the ruins, the blood. Annihilation is the disappearing into thin air under the momentary strike of divine violence, which is why Benjamin (2021) also calls it pure violence. Pure violence exists for the sake of the living, not for the violence itself. The punished ones are not kept alive to suffer and "be taught a lesson," since only the interests of the ones they oppressed are relevant (Benjamin 2021, 57-58). The clearest, most radical example of such a striking is revolutionary violence, the killing of oppressors (Benjamin 2021, 58): it annihilates both the tyrants and the laws serving them.

Benjamin (2021) effectively posits divine violence, by virtue of its annihilating character, as the force capable of deposing oppressive cycle of violence perpetuated by the old and new rulers alike (60). This breaking through the normal is the exact quality of divine violence that makes it relevant to our previous consideration of *On the Concept of History*. The introduction of the divine exception, it seems, requires us to halt the free-floating in the historical current. If the illusion of the progress of time and history is the norm, then the disruption of this is the divine exception. Divine violence implies grabbing the present moment, realizing the now in a movement of breaking the illusory linearity of historical-affective time. The importance of the present moment, its coming forth from the countless moments of the past and bearing their mark, is clear from Benjamin (1974) quoting Lotze: "Among the most noteworthy characteristics of human beings belongs… next to so much self-seeking in individuals, the general absence of envy of each present in relation to the future." (2) Simply speaking, one's happiness stems from the present, not from the imagined future. This is also true for any political, emancipatory action, since the present is the source of all affects, not just happiness. Criticizing German social democrats of his time, Benjamin states that their insistence on positing the current class struggle as the pre-condition of the emancipation of the *future* generations essentially drained the movement of any revolutionary thunder. What fires up the affects that are not merely noble, but instrumental in class struggle, are the "pictures of enslaved forebears" (Benjamin 1974, 9). Something that we can call a revolutionary affect is mustered, therefore, by what could have been: the unrealized happiness from the past, that informs our state in the present (Hamacher 2001, 161-62). "The happiness which could awaken envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, with people we could have spoken with, with women who might have been able to give themselves to us." (Benjamin 1974, 2)

1 As told in The Book of Numbers in Torah, Korah revolted against Moses, who freed the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt. To punish him and his co-conspirators, God sent fire that consumed all of them.

In talking about revolutionary action, Benjamin (1974) notes the importance of the disruption of imaginary progress: "The consciousness of exploding the continuum of history is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action" (10). Far from stating this as a dogma, he points to the affective phenomenon of "exploding the continuum of history" accompanying revolutions. In the July Revolution, reportedly, independent saboteurs shot at multiple clock-towers in Paris at approximately the same time, bringing the flow of time to the standstill (Benjamin 1974, 11).

I then ask: where is our revolution? Is it for the lack of the revolutionary affect? That seems unlikely, since never before has education been so widely available, causing widespread awareness and cursory knowledge of the struggles of the ones who came before them. Never before have we been so tormented by the injustices occurring around us, being able to witness them on screens, recorded by their direct victims. Explosive actions still happen, tens of thousands of people voice their rage on the streets – and the revolution is further than it has ever been.

I suggest that the structure of the emergency that Benjamin talked about is different from the internal structure of the emergency we currently inhabit. The real emergency is of the historical-affective, phenomenal character, and is conceptualized by Benjamin as the vicious cycle of state violence that guards the status quo and perpetuates the existing oppressive structures. If we are to visualize this original structure in simple terms, it will be a circle, a loop, but the one that masquerades as linear progression. The former constitutes the topography of the historical-affective time, while the latter is one's phenomenal impression of the movement in this time. Phenomenally it is experienced as linear progress, the movement forward, which is precisely what undermines the employment of divine violence by the masses. Is the current historical-affective time also felt as a loop? Is it presented as such? This question is important because if it is not, then Benjamin's phrasing regarding exploding the (illusory) historical continuum loses its meaning: it is a completely different structure that would have to be tackled. The exploding in question requires a certain affect. If the exploding is no longer relevant, then whether we experience the said affect may be of no difference, explaining the absence of the divine exception. Something other than the exploding of the illusory continuum might constitute divine violence, and therefore the prerequisites for it may diverge from the ones outlined.

The Slow Cancellation of the Future

Chasing the understanding of how time is felt by masses, I consider Mark Fisher's argument regarding the loss of the future or, as he eloquently put it with reference to Franco "Bifo" Berardi, 'the slow cancellation of the future'. The 'future' here should not be understood colloquially. Both Bifo and Fisher (2014) talk about not only the "direction of time," but the cultural and "psychological perception" of the movement of time and of the notion of the future (6): "[…] the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion. It doesn't feel like the future." (8) The proclaimed loss, therefore, is conceived affectively and not ontologically. Afflicting us is the inability of imagining the future, turning our gaze forward instead of being swept up in the flow of time like Benjamin's Angel of History. This loss is haunting, and the ghost of the lost future is ever-present in the current moment. If we would have done our mourning, the present would be muddled by the spectrum of the loss. But haunting is precisely a "failed mourning": we reluctantly refuse to let go of the ghost of the future, or rather, the ghost itself is refusing to weaken its grip on us (Fisher 2014, 22). The loss of the future implies the loss of the newness of the present, the 'now' therefore contaminated with the ghost of the past unsuspectedly, naïvely. In his pessimism, Fisher (2014) suggests that the lack of newness might arise because "[…] in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more." (9) The articulation of the present is, therefore, suspended, and the moment is haunted both by the loss of the future, and by the 'lost glory' of the past. The linearity of affective time is thus distorted, folding in on itself and giving way to "strange simultaneity" with the past and the ghost of

the future both existing in the current moment (Fisher 2014, 9). Does that mean that the topographic map of the historical-affective time is nothing but a dot? The simultaneity that Fisher talks about paradoxically implies both the illusion of perpetual movement and the stagnation. Let us presently articulate this situation to understand its implications.

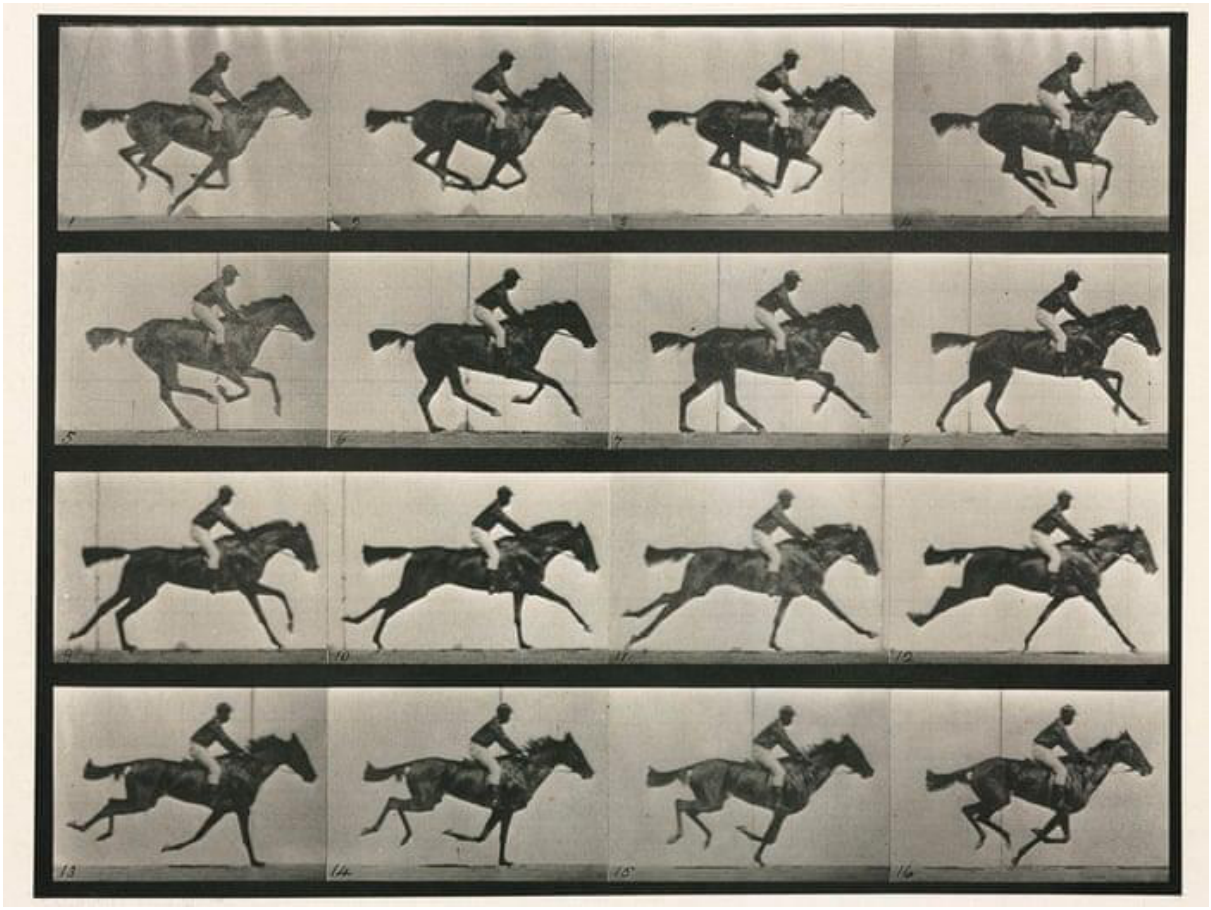
I propose to explicate the notion of the 'future' beyond characterizing it as an affective concept, as Bifo did. In Fisher's writings the word 'future' denotes the potentiality of something not yet in existence, on the precipice of coming to be. In political terms, the loss of this potentiality is equal for Fisher to the grim conclusion that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism," the phrase that is ascribed to Jameson and Žižek, and is the name of the first chapter of *Capitalist Realism* (Fisher 2012, 1-2). The future would not *necessarily* usher in the newness, but it *could* if only we still had it. One thing is certain: whether historical-affective time was linear before the cancellation of the future or not, it cannot remain linear now, since there is nothing on the horizon. The line cannot possibly stretch forward because "forward" as a category no longer exists. If the line does not stretch forward, are we as if suspended in time, stagnating, or is there movement, albeit not a progressive one? In other words, do we feel stuck at the end of the line (the end of history), or do we experience movement, with the historical-affective line taking a turn and assuming a two-dimensional shape?

One's initial intuition after considering Fisher's diagnosis may be that the present is stagnant, and the charade of the perpetual movement is phenomenally unconvincing. Left directionless, we cannot move forward, and not being naïve enough to believe we can turn back time, we are stuck in the in-between, the here-and-now that has lost its character as being the moment of resurrection that Benjamin (1974) talked about: "Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before?" (2). The now as a resurrection brings about the newness that is necessarily connected to the past: the present is not empty but the new apparition of a lineage of moments. Something new can only exist in contrast with something old. The involvement of the past in the realization of the present, therefore, is precisely the element that allows for the springing-up of any novelty. Without resurrection there is no potentiality.

Imagine Muybridge's famous snapshots of horse in motion, or better refer to *Animal Locomotion (Plate 626)* below. Here, every new moment – every new snapshot – is not merely the continuation of time, but the continuation of the dynamic movement through it. The moving through time is phenomenally manifested through the visual of the horse galloping: every snapshot is the resurrection of that movement. Now imagine that every shot starting from the second one is substituted by the first in the series. If one puts film with such a series of snapshots into the zoopraxiscope,[22] they factually will change one another, but no movement would be discernible because of the identity of the snapshots. The time will pass, indicated by the film rolling and one's cognitive understanding that there are multiple snapshots changing one another. Phenomenally, however, the movement through time will effectively disappear. Each snapshot does not enact the resurrection of the horse's movement, but instead contributes to the undead, hauntological quality of the quasi-moving pictures. The movement here is not dead – the film keeps spinning – but also not alive, since no movement of the horse is detectable. The future is lost, and the past is impossible to resurrect – the perfect illustration of our historical-affective predicament. This initial conceptualization of our situation, however, gives way under experiential scrutiny: it does not feel like we are living through stagnation. There is a distinct feeling of the future being unreachable, but the sense of the constant movement is profound. The testament to it is heard everywhere, imbued with every possible sentiment, from praising the fast-paced life to lamenting it and desiring to hermit at a distant farm. The stagnation, further, could affectively be

2 Zoopraxiscope is a mechanical object that was used to display moving images, a predecessor of a film projector. Imagine a washing machine drum, all black, with the snapshots of an object in motion made in rapid succession placed on the inside surface of the drum. There are slits on the outside surface of the drum, so that the spectator can look in and see the snapshot that is the opposite of the slit they are looking through. The drum starts spinning, the snapshots changing each other in rapid succession, the spectator seeing them blend into one representation of the motion.

marked by deep melancholy of the profound loss – the affect coloring Fisher's writings "on depression, hauntology and lost futures" – but we also feel rage, restlessness, unsatisfaction. The affects that imply the future, designating the desire for change, for which the future is necessary.



The film is therefore rolling, but is Muybridge's horse galloping? In other words, does it feel like we are moving through qualitatively different events? In a radical way, it is not the case, which is noticeable both on the global and personal levels. My first proposition here is that historical-affective time is cyclical, looped. To establish what is meant by the "looped" topography of historical-affective time, examples are necessary but not sufficient without firmer theoretical grounding. Bifo's writing is instrumental in providing it. Like Fisher, he does not harbor any illusions about the future: "This is why I'm writing this phenomenology of the end. There is no end" (Berardi 2014, 9). His writing, however, is not marked by Fisher's despair, Bifo does not pretend that he knows whether it is bad or good, hopeful or grim. After all, he is mainly interested in the causes of the contemporary predicament which he construes as mass unwellness manifesting itself on the level of sensibility.

Bifo's Diagnosis

Bifo starts his *Phenomenology of the End* with an announcement: we are living in the age of global cultural mutation and technological transformation, which is influencing societal relations on the level of people's sensibility. He announces that the mapping of this mutation and the corresponding sensibility shift is the central task of contemporary philosophy (Berardi 2014, 9-10). The mutation is not incidental, but coincides with the shift from the age of Industrial Capitalism to what Bifo (2014) calls semiocapitalism (11). As explicated in *Precarious Rhapsody*, semiocapitalism is "the new regime characterized by the fusion of media and capital." (Berardi 2009, 18) The semiotic fluxes "[…] follow an extra-semiotic principle: the principle of economic competition, the principle of maximum development," hence the Frankenstein of semiocapitalism is born (Berardi 2009, 36-37). Transposing Bifo's terminology onto the present inquiry, the technological

and cultural mutation is his conceptualization of the ongoing emergency, since it causes proliferation of mass mental suffering, on which I will elaborate in due time.

The shift to semiocapitalism causes people to adapt to it by enforcing a change in their sensibility (Berardi 2014, 21). It is precisely the sensibility that is affected because the shift to semiocapitalism brings changes to the process of sense-making (semiotic flows being the flows of information and stimuli), which is the motion of putting informational elements together to form a shape that has discernible meaning. Shortly, in the Industrial Age the conjunctive mode of sense-making, which is characteristically creative, was dominant: "[…] no original design is to be restored: […] the conjoining act is able to create an infinite number of constellations without following the lines of a pre-conceived pattern, or an embedded program." (Berardi 2014, 12) Creative sense-making is fueled by empathy, as is clear from Baron-Cohen's description of its functioning: empathy starts with interpreting the semiotic signs produced by the other, therefore extrapolating their feelings; the second step is responding to these feelings accordingly (Berardi 2014, 15). The technological shift that has been taking place over the last decades, however, has forced us to employ connection in place of conjunction, the process that can take place only in the "logical technology of mind." (Berardi 2014, 14) Taking the place of the infinity of meanings implied in the creative conjunction is the syntax dictated by the needs of the technological development of the age of the ever-accelerating infosphere. Empathy becoming redundant, the elements are connected through a set of rules (syntax) assuring linguistic compatibility (Berardi 2014, 19). This is how digital exchange of information (semio-capital) functions: the machines need to be following the same protocol for the elements – the zeros and ones – to be connected in a way that creates meaning.

The logic of computerized information-sharing has succeeded politics in being the dominant influence on the metamorphoses of the individual and the social body, consequently causing the shift on the level of sensibility. The impotence of political action is the result of the change in temporality brought about by the acceleration and complexification of the infosphere. There is simply not enough time to process stimulants to make decisions rapidly enough. We are thus forced to adopt the mode of sense-making that requires less time: connection is speedier, since it follows a pre-ordained protocol. Mental behavior effectively gets automated (Berardi 2014, 22-24). Although our body-mind is capable of evolving, the rhythm of the evolution is not able to keep up with the accelerating semiotic flows (Berardi 2014, 37). We are under a permanent overload, lacking the time for pointed attention (Berardi 2014, 35-36). One cannot choose to disengage from the infosphere, since inhabiting it has become the requirement of engagement in the (semio-)capitalist system (Berardi 2014, 37). The inability to distance oneself, according to Bifo, causes the proliferation of chronopathologies – symptoms of the mass unwellness caused by having no time for conscious attention. The spike in the use of erectile disfunction pills does not point so much to a higher rate of impotence, but to the shortage of time available for conscious attention: "As time for caresses and words is no more available for precarious lovers, fast sex needs pharmaceutical support: sex without attention, as attention needs time." (Berardi 2014, 37) Keeping the society of mass unwellness together is the emergence of the psychopharmacological state as the only force capable of managing the anxiety and sadness plaguing its citizens. The social habit of regulating unwellness with substances is not new: when the demands for labor productivity rose dramatically in the '70s, cocaine became a drug of choice; to be able to somehow wind down, people started using heroin: no other way to rest than to disconnect from the world completely; after the mass devastation that both of these substances inflicted, pharmaceuticals took their place (Berardi 2014, 38).

The automation of mental behavior can be construed as the contemporary emergency, caused by the material conditions of the shift to semiocapitalism, and therefore the change in the mode of production and distribution of information flows, provoking the mass adoption of connective mode of sense-making. The

mass mental suffering, in turn, is the phenomenal-affective manifestation of the present emergency, its visible extension.

Can the topography of the present emergency ushered in by the rise of semiocapitalism be conceptualized as a loop, therefore bearing the structure of Benjaminian state of emergency? Since what is at stake is our sensibility, one can turn to the everyday experiences to support the thesis on the circular structure of historical-affective time, which fits the requirements of the movement of semio-capital, and is clearly manifested in the character of mass psychological afflictions. The most obvious shared experience is the cyclicity of our everyday lives, dictated by the contemporary work conditions. One naturally and inevitably falls within the cyclical structure of their days and weeks: wake up at 7, have breakfast, commute to work, spend 8 hours in the office, commute back home, scroll to wind down after the day, go to sleep, then repeat it again. Weekly structures are cyclical as well, the weekend drinking marking every turn of the loop. Naturally, this lifestyle is not universal, but undoubtedly widely proliferated. The oppressive nature of the repetitiveness of contemporary white-collar jobs has been extensively reflected in popular culture and media. While our forebearers, forced to adhere to the cycles of nature in the times of agriculture being the latest booming sector, undoubtedly also experienced cyclicity, it was arguably of a different type. Any new season requires a different set of tasks to be performed to maintain crops or animals. Not to mention that while the summer working days were undoubtedly longer than our standard 8 hours, winter would shorten the work twofold, leaving ample time both to rest and spend time on activities unrelated to life-sustaining labour. This forms a stark contrast with the contemporary worker, blue- or white collar, for whom the loopiness is less dynamic: no matter the weather, the season, the daylight, the same set of tasks must be performed daily, for a set number of hours, from an arbitrarily assigned start time to the unchanging end time.

Another, smaller personal loop is the habit of binging: keeping oneself in a loop isolated from the bigger cycles one inhabits. As long as I keep pressing 'play' on the next episode, I do not have to deal with my studies or work; as long as I pour myself another glass, I do not have to think of having to work tomorrow. Binging can be construed as an attempt to fight one affliction with another. We suffer from being stuck in loops characterized by the lack of potentiality and proceed to build the loops of our own making to distract us from the bigger cycles. It does not come as a surprise that the relief is momentary and is succeeded by the feelings of melancholy and guilt. The widely proliferated mental afflictions are intimately connected with one's experience of time. Bifo has attributed the wide spread of the ADD diagnosis to the lack of time for conscious attention (Berardi 2014, 36). The proliferation of depression also seems to have been intensified by the semiocapitalist developments. The permanent bombardment with the semiotic flows requiring impossible speed of mental processing, as well as the material demands of the current stage of neoliberal capitalism, proliferate the feelings of helplessness and insignificance, both of which fit under the umbrella phrase 'lack of potentiality.'[33]

The Spiral

We are left with a predicament: we are not just moving but flying through historical-affective time; at the same time, nothing new is revealed. We are stuck in loops. The cyclical movement undeniably *is* manifest as movement phenomenally, yet there is no potentiality to it: the traveler moves through the totality of impressions and events that – by the virtue of being exhaustive and not limitless – are destined to repeat *ad infinitum,* as long as the loop is intact. The feeling of being stuck in the never- ceasing cycles, lacking all potentiality on the large scale is being managed by the mass medication of chrono-psychopathologies that are caused by the loopiness of the present emergency. However, an important feature of our material

3 Importantly, I do not wish to deny the nascency of genetic causes of depression, but merely state that the social causes of the affliction have become more intense, making depression not just a personal, but societal affliction.

conditions has not been addressed so far: even if we are affectively impacted by the cyclical character of historical-affective time, we also live under the logic of the ever-lasting expansion of capital and progression of technology. Continual sustaining of the capitalist economy requires access to more and more markets and resources. We see it clearly now that the demands of the capital seem to be running into the earthly limit and space exploration is nothing more than the scouting of new markets and commodities to be offered once the resources of our planet become entirely depleted. Semio-capital has similar requirements but concerns our mental rather than natural resources. "The overproduction […] becomes permanent in the sphere of semiocapitalism, as the proliferation of sources of nervous stimulation implies infinite overload of the attention market." (Berardi 2014, 36) I propose that this is precisely why time does not feel stagnant and sluggish: the logic of semiocapitalism requires expansion, therefore there is movement through time. However, this movement brings about not qualitative, but quantitative newness. Every successive turn of the loop is marked by heightened intensity: more products are introduced, more information is being transmitted, more resources are being exploited, more intense cognitive labor for us to adapt to is required.

The structure of contemporary historical-affective time, therefore, can be more precisely characterized not as a loop, but as a spiral. The lack of qualitative newness (experienced phenomenally) is represented in its cyclical flow, and the expansive logic of semiocapitalism is expressed in the never-ceasing widening of the spiral. The latter, undoubtedly, is also manifested affectively and phenomenally through the feeling that things are getting worse: the climate crisis, the personal misery of a precarious worker, the refugee crisis to name a few. The spiraling of the historical-affective time is what constitutes the contemporary state of emergency.

The Benjaminian predicament of being stuck in a loop thus becomes more complex: how does one disrupt a spiral? The real exception – the employment of divine violence – had the virtue of penetrating the historical-affective circle within which the power of the oppressors was perpetuated. If one imagines penetrating a layer of a spiral, one will quickly realize that they will not disrupt the figure completely, escaping it. One would simply end up on another turn of it, once again swept up by the flow of time. Semiocapitalism's ability to absorb every crisis is unmatched: each catastrophe or instance of divine violence is not just absorbed but used as a fuel to perpetuate the spiral. The catastrophic 9/11 attacks led to the intensification of the US surveillance state, as well as the worsening of imperialist violence in Iraq. The Enron scandal did not end the practice of fraudulent accounting but laid the foundation of the contemporary wave of financial corporate fraud, the white-collar criminals treating it as a lesson. No matter how many walls of the spiral are broken down, the next one already awaits, engulfing us.

My task was to find out why the presence of revolutionary affect did not make the current emergency extreme enough to provoke divine violence. This evidently was the wrong question altogether. The problem does not lie with the lack of extremity of the emergency, but with pure violence no longer constituting the real exception inasmuch as it is not equipped to overcome the emergency at hand. A revolution like the ones that shook the world in the twentieth century is not enough, it would be absorbed and appropriated even if it initially succeeded. The left disillusionment and pessimism thus becomes more understandable. However, it also becomes possible to address. If the old tools do not work, there is no use in mourning their sudden uselessness. What matters is to build new ones that are designed for the new problems to be addressed. I may, in fact, be remiss in using the old, functional language: tools and problems to be solved; getting out of the spiral, destroying the flow of time. As Heidegger (1977) pointed out, instrumental thinking may limit our ability to access the truth by virtue of only regarding things as means to ends, as tools and solutions (287).

While it is outside the scope of this paper to outline what could possibly constitute the real exception in the context of contemporary emergency, I dare to provide a couple of comments that sketch out the

character of such an exception. If destroying a spiral does not seem like a possible task, then we should turn our attention to living in it; as Donna Haraway eloquently and timelessly put it, to stay with the trouble. To "stay with" is not a tool, but a method of inhabiting the spiraling historical-affective time. The loss of the future here is irrelevant both for Haraway and for Benjamin, the latter stating – as we have seen before – that no present moment is jealous of the future. Nietzsche seems to have been right in more than one way: God is indeed dead, with divine violence becoming impotent in the face of the expansive logic of (semio) capital. If God is dead, however, we do not rely on him to do our dirty work. To learn how to live a dignified life in the spiral is a task that requires both patience and resilience, cooperation and mindfulness. Destroying is undoubtedly easier than living-with, even if it demands more tangible sacrifices. The real exception is no longer an explosion, but a continuous effort in mending and caring. In this sense, the philosophy of care, as well as contemporary ecophilosophy may be the domains capable of inspiring and birthing the new exception. What is important to keep in mind – and why I humbly but confidently consider the current inquiry fruitful – is that the emergency lies in the structure of historical-affective time. Any real exception, therefore, will influence precisely it, and will affect our experience of moving through it. The emancipatory politics of our age must concern themselves with the spiraling of historical-affective time.

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Accountability: *from Structure to Individual (and back)*

Rutger Maaskant

Racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination are pervasive, even in spaces where people are committed to combating them. It is difficult to reconcile two apparently contradictory facts: one, that racism, sexism, and various other forms of structural domination are widespread; two, that many people do not reflectively endorse overtly racist and sexist views. Very few people think of themselves as having discriminatory opinions. Almost no one identifies with a label like 'racist', 'sexist, 'homophobe', etc. Then why is discrimination so widespread? One influential way of dealing with this contradiction is to posit the existence of broadly shared implicit biases. Implicit biases are biases that have 'gone underground' in our psychologies, being therefore both widespread and difficult to root out (Beeghley & Holroyd, 2020). To effectively combat social injustice, we should thus focus on combatting the ways in which individuals are implicitly prejudiced. This point of this essay is to complicate that idea.

In this paper, I respond to a dialogue between Robin Zheng and Sally Haslanger. Although this dialogue is only a small part of a very large debate about the interaction between structure and agency, I believe that the contributions made by these authors construct an especially interesting and fruitful way of approaching this dichotomy. In section II, I explain the arguments made by Sally Haslanger (2015) against psychologistic 'standard stories' of bias, which form the background for the debate. Haslanger argues that the explanatory role often accorded to implicit bias in these stories is too individualistic. Social injustice arises in systemic ways that do not necessarily require individuals to have acted unjustly. Section III details the response by Zheng (2018), who responds that although injustice might be structural, the responsibility for remedying injustice always falls on the shoulders of individuals. She argues for this by employing a distinction between attributability and accountability. In section IV and V, I argue that this distinction is fruitful, but more so if not exclusively applied to individuals. To do this, I use Haslanger's (2022) conception of social systems that consist of interacting material, semiotic and individual components. I conclude that the responsibility of fighting injustice can fall on systems that are larger than the individuals that constitute them.

I. The Background: Haslanger's Contribution

Haslanger (2015) has made an important contribution to understanding structural injustice by contextualizing the importance of implicit biases. She argues that although it would be wrong to state that implicit biases do not exist or are wholly unimportant, they are not the only story to be told. Theories of implicit bias have two potential functions. First, an explanatory one: they help explain how patterns of discrimination and domination are stable over time, apart from explicit intentions to dominate. Second, theories that posit implicit bias might fulfill a normative role: they can help allocate responsibility and blame. Therefore, they can provide guidance for liberatory action by pointing out who needs to change and how. Haslanger argues that an explanation of injustice in terms of implicit bias cannot stand on its own. Haslanger frames her critique of implicit bias as a critique of 'standard stories'. Standard stories are stories that employ a limited number of characters who act for independent, self-motivated reasons. From these small-scale scenarios, an explanation of the phenomena in general is extrapolated. In the context of unequal outcomes for example, this might look as follows: why did character X get hired, and not character Y? Because the person making the decision was (implicitly) prejudiced against character Y, due to their ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and so on (Haslanger 2015, 3). In other words, in standard stories, discrimination is

explained by employing stories about individuals. As a result, discrimination is largely understood as a psychological phenomenon.

Standard stories are particularly amenable to individualistic explanations of unequal outcomes. This misses the fact that people act within specific contexts. Haslanger gives examples of people acting in ways that are largely reasonable and unprejudiced, but nevertheless generate unfair outcomes. In these cases, there is persistent social inequality that is generated by structures, instead of (unconscious) individual attitudes. For example:

> *Bus schedule:* Jason has a job at a factory in the suburbs. His shift begins at 6am. He is poor and relies on the bus to get to work. He takes the first bus from his neighborhood in the morning and after a 45-minute commute arrives at his job on time. Due to cut-backs, however, the city has decided to reduce the bus service and there is no bus leaving the city in the morning that will get him to work on time. He asks for a shift change, but it is not eligible. He loses his job. [Variant: lack of bus at any time that will accommodate a wheelchair.] (Haslanger 2015, 8-9)

In this example, inequality arises between bus and car users and between workers in different neighborhoods. Jason's wealthier, car-owning neighbor is not impacted by the changes: different social groups are thus affected to unequal degrees. Variants for other disadvantaged groups are easy to come up with, such as the alternative scenario in which Jason cannot use public transit because no busses accommodate a wheelchair. The inequality in *Bus schedule* is not to be explained by any implicit biases, but by a lack of resources. The correct answer as to why Jason lost his job is that he did not have adequate access to transportation. Nevertheless, this inequity is not caused by an implicit bias on the part of any of the decision makers: they are simply acting within the structural constraints that have been set for them. The city officials deciding the bus schedules have a limited budget, the shift manager faces constraints by upper management, and so on. Thus, inequities can arise even without any biases.

How should we respond to structural injustice? Haslanger notes two points in particular. First, insofar as bias is learned, our focus should be on the mechanisms by which people come to learn biases. Focusing on individuals, rather than structures, might be unsustainable. Second, social change is the result of collective action. Thus she argues that 'Moral responsibility concerns not only what I can and should do, but also what we can and should do together' (Haslanger 2015, 12). In other words, there is reason to shift the normative responsibility away from individuals, and onto collectives. Real social change comes from unions, political parties, and social movements, not from people that individually seek moral improvement: structural problems should be dealt with structurally. A focus on implicit bias, on the other hand, will center our attention on individuals only.

II. Retaining a Normative Focus on the Individual

Robin Zheng (2018) contests Haslanger's thesis that responsibility should be on the shoulders of groups. Zheng notes that discussions about implicit bias are structured around an axis of structure versus individual. This means that it would be inadequate to simply target one or the other, to always favor structure or individuals. The point is to understand how they interact. Zheng agrees with Haslanger that there are important structural mechanisms that are not always reducible to the (implicit) intentions of any specific individual. Thus, both seem to agree on the explanatory work that implicit bias can and cannot do.

Nevertheless, Zheng defends a 'normative focus' on the individual, meaning that it is ultimately the responsibility of individuals to address and undo social injustice. Zheng underlines that social change comes

from collective action, but that *precisely for this reason* we should retain a normative focus on individuals. Only by maintaining a normative focus on individuals can we appropriately come to address injustice. How should we understand this? Zheng differentiates between two different types of normative focus: attributability and accountability. Theories of attributability aim to assess whether an action is a genuine exercise of agency. If an action really is a result of genuine moral agency, then it can be attributed to that person. The appropriate response to moral wrongdoing, if attributed to individuals, is blame, reproach, or punishment. On the other hand, accountability is concerned with the distribution of burdens and duties for undoing injustice. If someone is accountable for some structural injustice, that person has a duty to take part in abolishing that structure. Crucially, the two types of responsibility can come apart. Someone can thus be *accountable* for an injustice without that injustice being *attributable* to them. Take the example of the bus schedule. There is no one acting unjustly, so no one is particularly blameworthy. Thus, there is no moral wrongdoing to be attributed to any individual. Nevertheless, the situation with the bus schedule is perpetuating social inequality that should be addressed, and someone has to take on this task. The work of undoing the injustice falls on the shoulders of whoever is accountable, in whatever way this is to be decided. In the case of the bus schedule, a factory manager might be accountable for accommodating shift changes, or a city official for adjusting bus schedules. The upshot is that some parties can be accountable without any wrongdoing being attributable to them. Someone can have the responsibility to act without having done egregious harm.

The distinction can also be applied to cases of implicit bias. Zheng (2018, 10-12) stresses that everyone suffers from implicit biases to some degree. Everyone, no matter how well we exercise our agency, participates in the generation of unjust outcomes. Even if we are just doing our jobs, we participate in institutions that are still rife with injustice (we might imagine ourselves as municipal officials in the *bus schedule* example). Correspondingly, everyone is participating in this system that perpetuates injustices, and is thereby in some sense accountable. We all share the burden of responsibility for undoing structural injustice, even if we have not actively chosen to enact unjust behavior. Even though we all share this responsibility, not everyone is accountable in the same degree. Those with more social power will often play a larger role in perpetuating injustice, and hence are more accountable for undoing them. That moral burdens are distributed unequally does not invalidate that everyone shares *some* responsibility for undoing injustice.

What does this mean for structural injustice? Haslanger critiqued the role of standard stories, arguing that they give an incomplete picture of the causes of implicit bias. Zheng believes that the proper targets of this argument are those theories that understand implicit bias in terms of attributability, namely most of the existing literature on implicit bias (Zheng 2018, 6). Understanding implicit bias as conferring accountability, on the other hand, retains a normative focus on the individual while maintaining structural change as the ultimate goal of social justice practices. Again, the upshot is that even though we all participate in the background institutions that generate injustice, so that no one might be making the conscious choice to enact moral wrongdoing in the forms of racism, sexism, and so on, we are all individually responsible for undoing this harm.

The dichotomy between attributability and accountability allows Zheng to remain consistent in her normative focus on the individual, while still thinking of injustice as being embodied in structures. Why is it important to maintain this focus on individuals? Zheng suggests that notions of individual responsibility (accountability) are simply indispensable for social action. Although structures might be super-individual, we always act from the first-person perspective. This means that although the ultimate objective might be a structural change, our normative theories should aim foremost at motivating individuals. In Zheng's own words: "The possibility of social change, then, lies in the agency of individuals within a structure whose behavior maintains it—whose behavior, therefore, might alter it" (Zheng 2018, 9). A strategy for dealing with structural injustice should take account of this. Even though injustice is often structural, it is ultimately

individuals who are the initial agents of social change. Thus, a focus on the moral duties of individuals is how we go from the third-person perspective of theory to the first-person perspective of everyday involvement with oppressive structures. What does this mean for our understanding of implicit bias? The standard stories critiqued in section II placed the responsibility for injustice on individuals. By splitting up responsibility into attributability and accountability, Zheng argues that although structures often cause injustice, it is up to individuals to undo this.

III. Material and Meaningful Aspects of Social Structure

In a recent paper, Haslanger (2022) argues against the position of methodological individualism. Although that paper is not a direct reply to Zheng, parts of Haslanger's arguments are nevertheless relevant because some of the concepts and examples in that paper are useful in defending a normative focus beyond individuals. Specifically, the arguments can be read as a reply to Zheng's position that the only way we can interact with social structures is as individuals. Consequently, the first-person perspective is neither the starting position nor the most important vantage point for understanding political action. In this section, I will use Haslanger's critique of methodological individualism to challenge Zhengs claim that the only way we can interface with social structures is through the individual.

Haslanger argues practices are an important constituent part of social structures. Practices in turn are partly constituted by social meanings (Haslanger 2022, 524), which are not individual attitudes but collective understandings. These intersect and interact with material circumstances. An example of this interaction is the formation of a 'spontaneous' path through a forest: the type of path that forms when many people walk the same trail, thereby trampling grass and plants until it becomes somewhat permanent. The formation of the path is an example of the way that (material or semiotic) systems and individual experiences interact. On the one hand, the path is dependent on collective meaning: multiple individuals must have a coinciding understanding of where to walk, or what the meaning is of the gestures and signs that demarcate the path (signs, footprints, someone telling you where to walk). On the other hand, the course of the path is clearly influenced by material circumstances, winding around obstacles, going over hills, or avoiding muddy ground. This process of path-formation does not have to be conscious, explicitly communicated, or reflectively understood. Haslanger suggests that the appropriate way to understand such phenomena is as "social by virtue of their functioning in a social system that 'regulates' our efforts to coordinate" (Haslanger 2022, 526). The example of the path shows that social reality is the result of different interdependent systems, which are sometimes independent of how people think about or experience them. From this, Haslanger concludes: "In a social system, we should be interested not only in humans and their attitudes, but also the ways in which humans have modified parts of the physical world to maintain the system, the ways in which human attitudes fail to adequately represent how the system works, the ways in which we can improve the functioning of the system" (2022, 27). Social outcomes are not generated by individual intention, but neither are they most effectively addressed by them. This means that an individualist understanding of how we interact with social systems falls short. If, as Haslanger says, we should think of social outcomes as being the result of interlocking systems, we might be able to extend this to the topic of justice.

This is where Haslanger's account of social structures forms a problem for the argument given by Zheng. Before we can answer the question of accountability, we must answer the prior question of 'What is wrong?' Which of the interlocking parts that constitute social systems are responsible for undoing the injustice? For Zheng, the answer must always point at individuals. However, following the analysis of the preceding paragraphs, the answer might equally well be material or symbolic; a thing or a sign. This brings us back to Haslanger's original argument. We can often try to correct individual patterns of behavior, but it might be much more effective to ask: 'Which material or symbolic processes are responsible for the

reproduction of these patterns?' Haslanger takes an example from Anderson (2010) of a young black gas station worker who prefaces his offer for help by saying: "Don't worry, I'm not here to rob you." We could focus on correcting the biases of individuals who made the gas station worker conclude that such a warning was necessary. But we could also ask: 'where are these stereotypes produced?' and 'How are they disseminated?'. In other words: how do people come to hold these prejudices in the first place? These questions could still point us in the direction of concrete individuals. Alternatively, they might point at what Haslanger has called symbolic/ material loops, which go beyond the actions of single or composite individuals. In the next section, I argue that the latter is fully coherent. In other words, I argue that accountability can fall on broader structures, such as language systems, material artifacts, or collectives, rather than just individuals.

IV. Conclusion

This paper started with Haslanger's critique of individual explanations of structural injustice. Zheng adds to this that responsibility for injustice has two dimensions: attributability and accountability. I argue that this distinction between attributability and accountability is indeed important for understanding implicit bias. I accept that attributability might be best understood as something that only applies to individuals; a sign or thing cannot be morally guilty in this sense and deserves no praise or blame. However, I contend that accountability can be conferred on non-individual entities. This means that both super-individual entities, like groups, as well as nonhuman ones can bear accountability. In this section, I show some examples of what non-human accountability might look like.

First, accountability can fall on collectives. To once again use an example of Haslanger: accountability could very well fall upon the city managing a public transit system, or a school system fighting segregation. Alternatively, imagine a large credit company, that, due to years-long implicit bias on the part of its employees, has not accorded mortgages at equal rates to aspiring black and white homeowners. Even if many of the original biased employees have now left, it still seems that it should be on the credit company to make amends for the structural harm perpetrated. This is an example of a larger-than-individual structure facing accountability; one that is to some degree already recognized in a juridical context insofar as companies can be legal entities separate from their owners and employees.

Or take another example. Say a corrupt oligarch at the beginning of the twentieth century amasses a great fortune through exploiting workers. Unfortunately the oligarch is rather selfish, so as he nears his death, he devises a mechanisms to ensure that his fortune will never come into possession of anyone else. At his death, the fortune is locked away in a bank account that, by some legal construction, becomes inaccessible to anyone. A century later, descendants of the exploited workers, who still face adversity due to their poverty, ask for reparations. It would be reasonable to suggest that the money for these reparations should come from the bank account. If so, it is the bank account on which the accountability falls. But a bank account is neither a human being nor a group of human beings. What money exactly is, is a contested issue, but it seems clear that a bank account is not composed of individuals. To be clear: the bank account is not 'guilty'. This would imply attributability, and plausibly requires agency, but a bank account is not an agent and cannot be attributable. What is at stake here is accountability: the ability to bear the burden of correcting wrongdoing. This is something a non-agent can bear. In this case, the burden is partially taken up by the descendants (in staking their claim), and partially by anyone facilitating reparations (for example, bank workers). A major part of the burden would, however, would fall on the bank account itself. Not because the bank account can act, but rather because that is where the money for reparations comes from. The account would therefore be 'bearing the burden'. As the bank account is non-human and non-agential, this example shows that wrongdoing can be attributed (in the technical sense used by Zheng) to even the non-human parts of systems, such as social constructs.

The question of accountability asks us who is responsible for undoing injustice. When implicit biases lead to unequal outcomes, it can be tempting to focus on individuals. Although this might certainly be fruitful in some circumstances, it is not the only possibility. I have argued that structural injustice needs to be dealt with structurally. This means that accountability might fall on systems, rather than just individuals. I have argued that social systems, like footpaths, are interlocking systems of meaning, material components, and human action. Something like a footpath should not just be understood from the perspective of the individual, but from the way people, signs and things interact. Thus, if we want to change a footpath, we should look to change the social and material system that makes the footpath function as it does. The same, of course, is true for injustice.

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ESJP
#24 | 2024

Humorloos en Hyperreëel Europa: *de vraag of dat erg is*

Coen ten Ham

In het begin van het boek *Grand Hotel Europa* van Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, komt de op Pfeijffer zelf gebaseerde hoofdpersoon aan in het hotel waarnaar het boek is vernoemd. Tussen de staat van het hotel en de staat waarin Europa zich bevindt, ziet Pfeijffer parallellen. Hij reflecteert op de speeltuin die Europa is geworden ten opzichte van de rest van de wereld: Europa gaat ten onder aan het massatoerisme, terwijl het dit toerisme tegelijkertijd ook nodig heeft om voort te bestaan. Zo komt Europa terecht in een spiraal van steeds nepper wordende steden en een paradoxale zoektocht naar authenticiteit. Het echte Europa bestaat dus niet, "het romantische, historische, Europese hotel [is aangepast] aan de verwachtingen (…) van een romantisch, historisch Europees hotel" (Pfeijffer 2018, 413). Het in verval geraakte hotel wordt weer populair, net zoals het schitterende Europa zichzelf wordt door zichzelf te imiteren.

Europa is, uitgedrukt in een term van filosoof Fredric Jameson, pastiche geworden; een parodie zonder "gevoel voor humor" (Jameson 1985, 16). Zodoende is het precies het verhaal geworden dat het over zichzelf vertelde. Pfeijffer gaat in het boek op reis naar de Cinque Terre, waar hij een weeklacht aanhoort van een andere toerist over het paradoxale massatoerisme (Pfeijffer 2018, 382-88). Het verlies aan authenticiteit dat Pfeijffer hier signaleert, ontstaat door het materialiseren van het beeld dat toeristen hebben van het authentieke Europa. Deze geschapen realiteit, die echter is dan de werkelijkheid, betreft wat Jean Baudrillard aanduidt met de term hyperrealiteit (Baudrillard 1987, 479). Maar dit verlies aan realiteit kan aan de hand van het gedachtegoed van Jacques Rancière ook minder negatief worden geïnterpreteerd. Lang beschouwde Europa, zoals Pfeijffer stelt, de wereld als haar speeltuin, maar zij is nu juist door haar geromantiseerde verleden de speeltuin van de wereld geworden. Zo ontstaat er een verschuiving in de politieke en culturele dynamiek, wat Rancière een nieuwe "verdeling van het sensibele" noemt, door het politieke ingrijpen in het Europese superioriteitsgevoel (Rancière 2009, 710).[1]

In dit essay zal aan de hand van Jameson, Baudrillard en Rancière worden besproken dat Europa humorloos en hyperreëel is geworden, om uiteindelijk Pfeijffers vraag te kunnen beantwoorden "of dat erg is" (Pfeijffer 2018, 133).

Pfeijfferiaans postmodernisme

In de roman probeert Pfeijffer duidelijk te maken dat het prachtige, ouderwetse, historische Europa het massatoerisme niet overleeft, terwijl Europa het tegelijkertijd nodig heeft om voort te bestaan. Om het authentieke Europa te zijn waarnaar de toerist verlangt, imiteert Europa zichzelf. Deze dubbelzinnigheid komt ook naar voren in het werk van Jameson. Volgens hem is een voornaam aspect van het postmodernisme pastiche, een imitatie waarbij het gemeenschappelijk begrippen- of denkkader verdwenen is (Jameson 1985, 15). Dat kader, dat bijvoorbeeld de mogelijkheid biedt een bepaalde filosoof gemakkelijk te herkennen aan de stijl van de tekst, biedt ook de mogelijkheid tot parodie – een imitatie mét humor (15). Maar zodra de samenleving fragmenteert in verschillende stijlen, bevindt uiteindelijk ieder individu zich op een voor de ander niet te begrijpen "linguïstisch eiland" (16). Daarmee is het onmogelijk geworden om de ander met humor te imiteren. Het 'normale', waaraan de parodie haar humor ontleent, is namelijk

[1] Wat het politieke ingrijpen betreft wordt het karakter van Pfeijffer geconfronteerd met de volgens hem onvermijdelijke economische neergang van Europa (Pfeijffer 2018, 450-55).

onherkenbaar in een pastiche. Omdat het gemeenschappelijk kader is weggevallen, verdwijnt dus ook de humor uit de imitatie (16). En zodoende is het niet eens zozeer een imitatie meer te noemen; het is onvergelijkbaar juist omdat er geen gemeenschappelijkheid is.

Volgens Pfeijffer is Europa, en zo ook het daarvoor symbool staande hotel, verworden tot pastiche. Zo vervangt de nieuwe Chinese eigenaar van het hotel een Chinese kamer door een "kitscherige imitatie van een typisch Engelse pub" (Pfeijffer 2018, 325).[42] Dat wil zeggen, een ruimte die voorheen werd gevuld met door Europeanen toegeëigende Chinese cultuurelementen, maakt plaats voor door de Chinese eigenaar toegeëigende Europese en specifiek Engelse cultuurelementen. Dit alles heeft geen satire tot doel en is ook niet bedoeld als de- of postkoloniale kritiek. In plaats daarvan is het bedoeld als een marketingstrategie – die nog werkt ook (413). Deze fatale imitatie van de Europese cultuur, die symbool staat voor de manier waarop toeristen met Europa omgaan, is pastiche precies omdat de intentie ervan neutraal was en geen bijbedoelingen had, behalve dat het fungeerde als een slimme marketingstrategie. In die zin is Europa in al haar ouderdom volledig postmodern.

Een dode stad vermoord

Niet alleen heeft Europa zichzelf tot een betekenisloze imitatie gemaakt, Europa *zelf* bestaat volgens Pfeijffer niet meer. In een passage over de Cinque Terre beschrijft Pfeijffer waarom toeristen steeds meer naar dezelfde plekken reizen, waardoor er vijandigheid ontstaat tussen de bewoners en zij concurrenten van elkaar worden, het evenwicht tussen natuur en stad met grof geweld doorbroken wordt, en geen visser meer uitvaart om diens traditionele beroep uit te oefenen (380-88). "Het toerisme heeft een dode stad vermoord," schrijft Pfeijffer, en precies dit komt overeen met Baudrillards analyse van de hyperrealiteit (388). Het beeld dat de toerist heeft van de stad die hij bezoekt, schept een realiteit die reëler is dan de werkelijkheid.

Wat hyperrealiteit is, komt voor Baudrillard duidelijk naar voren in film. In zijn voorbeeld van de productie van de film *Apocalypse Now*, waarbij de Vietnamoorlog *echt* nagemaakt wordt terwijl deze amper afgelopen was, verschrompelt de daadwerkelijke Vietnamoorlog tot iets dat nooit is gebeurd (Baudrillard 1987, 479-80).[53] Zo ook bestaat Europa niet in Pfeijffers roman. Vanuit een geglobaliseerd hotel schrijft hij dat Europa niet alleen haar ziel heeft verloren, maar ook dat hiervoor in de plaats een naar het beeld van de toerist geschapen Europa is gekomen. Zo zijn toeristen volgens Pfeijffer naast consumenten van hyperrealiteit ook producenten. In de roman wordt de productie van hyperrealiteit geïllustreerd door een reisbureau dat 'authentieke ervaringen' aanbiedt aan toeristen, waarbij de vakantie van elke toerist wordt aangepast aan ieders eigen verbeelding. Zo vertelt de directeur van het bureau dat zijn reis zou worden aangepast aan zijn specifieke wensen, als hij naar Vietnam zou gaan: "als jij meer richting een Tetoffensief zat te denken, dan zeggen wij: "Hoe cool is dat?", en dan stoppen we die jungle vol met boobytraps en huren we wat plaatselijke acteurs in die lekker met de losse flodders gaan knallen" (Pfeijffer 2018, 461).[64] Toeristen hebben volgens Pfeijffer de productie van de hyperrealiteit tot het uiterste gedreven. Niet alleen de acteur of legerleiding zit aan de 'joystick' of "houdt van de geur van Napalm in de ochtend" (Coppola 1979), ook de consument stapt van het beeld af en wordt, in de zoektocht naar authentieke ervaringen, producent van hyperrealiteit.[75]

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2 Overigens is het belangrijk te melden dat Pfeijffer zich in het boek meermaals op stereotyperende manieren uitlaat over toeristen. Dit is belangrijk omdat van zulk taalgebruik afstand moet worden genomen, maar ook omdat het afdoet aan zijn eigen postmoderne betoog.

3 Tegen het einde van de Vietnamoorlog begon de (pre-)productie van *Apocalypse Now*. Het filmen begon in 1976, iets meer dan een jaar na het einde van de oorlog.

4 Het 'extreme' van die vakanties ligt dus vooral in hoe goed iets nagedaan wordt; de vakantiegangers betalen voor de 'authentieke ervaring' (Pfeijffer 2018, 462).

5 Pfeijffer gebruikt het woord authentiek, terwijl Baudrillard eerder 'the real' in tegenstelling tot 'hyperreal' gebruikt.

Op vergelijkbare wijze schrijft Baudrillard dat heel de Verenigde Staten cinematografisch is: "de woestijn is bewandelbaar als een Western," net zoals men, na het zien van een schilderij van een Nederlands dorpje, het museum verlaat en precies dat dorpje ziet (Baudrillard 1987, 483; eigen vertaling).[86] Maar het dorpje staat in Pfeijffers roman vol mensen die allemaal op zoek zijn naar het authentieke beeld, en die elkaar allemaal de schuld geven van het verlies van dat beeld; een verlies dat bij gratie van hun vraag voor hen is gefabriceerd. Dit is een pervers verlies van realiteit: de kostbare vakanties van toeristen zijn zo gemaakt dat zij er zijn om niet te zien, om dan al zuchtend te klagen om die zichtloosheid. Europa volgt daarmee de Verenigde Staten en wordt hyperreëel; waar de VS hyperreëel werd door haar cinematografische Western-wandelingen, wordt Europa hyperreëel door haar toeristische en paradoxale authenticiteitsdrang. Als Pfeijffer in de roman in Skopje aankomt om een ook buiten het boek uitgekomen Macedonische vertaling van *La Superba* te vieren, schrijft hij dan ook: "terwijl het Willink-achtige surrealisme van dit verlaten decor mij overweldigde, drong het tegelijkertijd tot mij door dat alles wat ik zag nep was. Die standbeelden waren gisteren gemaakt (…)" (Pfeijffer 2018, 245).

Contrakolonialisme in het esthetische regime

De perspectieven van Jameson en Baudrillard ten aanzien van het ongebreidelde massatoerisme zijn, net zoals Pfeijffers eigen insteek, negatief. Bij Jameson kan door een gebrek aan gemeenschappelijke taal de imitatie geen betekenis meer hebben, terwijl bij Baudrillard het verlies aan realiteit door massatoerisme tot het ontstaan van hyperrealiteit leidt. Toch kunnen de gevolgen van het massatoerisme, aan de hand van Rancières verdeling van het sensibele, ook op een positievere manier worden opgevat.

Rancières verdeling van het sensibele is tweevoudig, naar de dubbele betekenis van het Franse *partage*, wat zowel delen als verdelen betekent. Volgens Rancière wordt de ervaring verdeeld in bepaalde groepen, waardoor wordt bepaald wie mogen participeren in het politieke debat, naar wie er wordt geluisterd, waarover gesproken wordt en wat zichtbaar is. Delen heeft in deze context betrekking op het opdelen van het sensibele; het bepaalt wat gemeenschappelijk is, en het biedt de gelegenheid tot de introductie van nieuwe subjecten en objecten in het politieke debat (Rancière 2009, 706).

Deze verdeling van het sensibele verandert met elk nieuw regime van de kunst, waarvan Rancière er drie signaleert: in het ethische regime hangt het oordeel over een kunstwerk af van de politieke, en vooral morele, waarde die het met zich meebrengt (Deranty 2010, 122). Dit is het regime van Plato, waarbij een kunstwerk de ideale vorm per definitie niet goed kan representeren, omdat kunst een imperfecte afspiegeling is van de ideale vormen van de ideeënwereld (Plato 1998, 257). Kunst krijgt van Plato geen eigen plek in het publieke domein, omdat de moraliteit gebaseerd is op het bereiken van deze idealen. Met het daaropvolgende representatieve regime is dit morele oordeel niet meer nodig, omdat kunst zich emancipeert tot een autonoom domein met eigen regels. Deze regels ontstonden met het in het representatieve regime mogelijk geworden idee van het genre (Deranty 2010, 124). Het breken met deze regels, waar vaak sociale klassen, afkomst en welvaart aan ten grondslag liggen, wijdt het laatste regime in, namelijk het esthetische. In dit regime van de moderne tijd gaat het om het creëren van ervaringen die buiten het gewone liggen en daarom een nieuwe verdeling van het sensibele vereisen – dat wil zeggen, die het gewone transformeren (Rancière 2009, 710).[97]

Deze nieuwe ervaringen, die leiden tot een herverdeling van het sensibele, zijn ingrepen in de alledaagse politieke orde, omdat deze zintuiglijk maken wat niet zintuiglijk was. Eigenlijk zijn alleen deze herverdelende ervaringen politiek te noemen, of daarom 'metapolitiek' (710). Het betreft hier een emancipatoir aspect van

6 Baudrillard, "The evil demon of images," 483 (eigen vertaling).

7 Met 'moderne tijd' wordt bedoeld: de periode van tijd vanaf het einde van de achttiende eeuw, 'modernity'.

de herverdeling die Rancière beschrijft: met het al dan niet neutraal afbeelden van bijvoorbeeld de arbeider, wordt deze opeens opgenomen in het sensibele – een ontwikkeling die in de andere regimes onmogelijk is.[108] De afbeelding representeert niet meer alleen, maar democratiseert ook: van iedereen kan kunst worden gemaakt; iedereen kan kunstenaar worden. Op deze manier is kunst politiek. Sterker nog, kunst in het esthetische regime is inherent politiek.

Van het toerisme wordt in *Grand Hotel Europa* over het algemeen een grote satire gemaakt, maar toch ziet Pfeijffer het ook als een gevolg van de wereldwijde stijging van welvaart en dus als een politiek fenomeen. Een toerist uit zijn roman zegt op gegeven moment dan ook: "Europa is zo ouderwets en achtergebleven dat ik mij hier kan voorstellen hoe onze voorouders leefden" (Pfeijffer 2018, 199). Door Europa op deze manier te karakteriseren, wordt typisch Europees denken volledig omgedraaid: in plaats van uit een geciviliseerd superioriteitsgevoel de wereld als speeltuin te beschouwen, wordt Europa nu juist door haar krampachtig vasthouden aan haar geromantiseerde verleden tot speeltuin gemaakt.[119] Europa is een museum geworden, één groot neutraal te beschouwen kunstwerk zonder betekenis, dat juist door die betekenisloze neutraliteit een politiek evenement veroorzaakt dat het volledige machtsevenwicht verschuift naar precies die plekken waarover Europa haar superioriteitsgevoel nooit onder stoelen of banken heeft gestoken.

Door het kunstwerk Europa te bezoeken, bevrijdt men zich op deze manier van het juk van de Europese verdeling van het sensibele, of, beter gezegd, produceert men een nieuwe verdeling ervan. Dat gebeurt dus door het centrum van de ervaring te verschuiven buiten Europa, waardoor de plek van de Europeanen aan belang verliest. Daardoor wordt geherdefinieerd wat gemeenschappelijk is, en wordt opnieuw bepaald wie wordt gehoord en welke subjecten deel uitmaken van die – nu globale – gemeenschap.

"'De vraag,' zei ik, 'is of dat erg is.'"

Waar de analyse van het esthetische regime en de herverdeling van het sensibele met betrekking tot Europees toerisme resulteert in een postkoloniale kritiek, zou Jameson juist beweren dat Europa pastiche is geworden – parodie zonder humor. Met Jameson is alle kritiek onmogelijk geworden omdat er geen gemeenschappelijke taal meer bestaat, terwijl Rancière aan de hand van de herverdeling van het sensibele in het gebrek aan gemeenschappelijke taal juist een politiek ingrijpen in de bestaande sociale orde signaleert. Ook Baudrillards hyperrealiteit is een kritiek binnen het esthetische regime, omdat met het vervagen van de grenzen tussen beeld en realiteit een compleet nieuwe ervaring geschapen wordt. Desalniettemin is het massatoerisme exemplarisch voor de analyse van Baudrillard, omdat toerisme een paradoxale zoektocht is naar een authenticiteit (of realiteit) die echt geworden is door het beeld dat toeristen van die realiteit hebben. Een Platonist, op zoek naar de ethisch verantwoorde ware vorm, zou bevestigend antwoorden op de vraag of dit verlies aan realiteit erg is. Echter, het verlies aan realiteit wijdt ook een verschuiving in, een herverdeling van het sensibele omdat Europa tot speeltuin wordt gemaakt. Dat is alleen erg als de Europeaan het als diens 'beroep' of taak beschouwt om 'de waarde van het verleden te erkennen in plaats van je blind te staren op de valse belofte van een toekomst' (Pfeijffer 2018, 532). Ironisch dat juist Pfeijffer zich jaren na het schrijven van *Grand Hotel Europa* beklaagt dat hij de roman voor 'niets' heeft geschreven, omdat het einde van het massatoerisme nog niet is bewerkstelligd (Pfeijffer 2021).

8 Overigens betekent het ontstaan van het ene regime niet dat de ander geheel verdwijnt: zij kunnen naast elkaar bestaan.

9 Zoals in de inleiding is vermeld, is de term 'speeltuin' afkomstig van Pfeijffer, die Europa als zodanig ziet. Dat dat een omdraaiing is van de vroegere situatie, impliceert Pfeijffer bijvoorbeeld in het citaat hiervoor. Het is belangrijk duidelijk te maken dat daarmee niet wordt bedoeld het Europese imperialisme te bagatelliseren, maar juist het schijnbare gemak waarmee het zich beschouwt als beschaafd, superieur en derhalve gerechtigd tot dat kolonialisme te benadrukken. Vandaar ook dat deze herverdeling van het sensibele een belangrijke metapolitieke gebeurtenis is.

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The Friendliest Prison: *Social Media*

Umut Derman Tacyldiz

Editorial remark

This essay has been written in the context of the MA Philosophy Now course 'From Theory to Practice'. In this course, comprising the MA academic track, students work on philosophical methodology and present a paper as preparation for their thesis in a student-led symposium. As part of this course, students are invited to collaborate with the ESJP to publish this paper as part of a Special Edition. In collaboration with Ada Bronowski, coordinator of the track, we chose to publish this piece by Derman as a special addition to the current issue of the ESJP. What is included here, thus, is an extract of the larger work Derman is developing as part of his MA thesis. It is intended for a wider audience and serves as a nice impression of his idea.

We thank Derman for his enthusiasm, and Ada for her continued support.

Deciding the topic I wanted to research in my thesis and finding a research question was a process of about two months that took longer than I expected. Let me describe what I want to tell you in my thesis: There is a large meeting room made of glass on the fifth floor of the Bayle Building called *Glasbak*, where our faculty is located. This room is located in the middle of the floor and can be seen from almost all rooms on the floor. Since there is no mirror effect on the windows or any kind of blur effect, people sitting inside can also see what is happening outside. When I first saw this glass meeting room, I thought it was a Panopticon because those outside could watch and observe those inside, and those inside were aware that they were being watched. This situation automatically puts pressure or oppression on the people inside in the Foucauldian sense. But you can guess that the reason for designing such a glass and watchable room was not to put pressure on people or to restrain them. On the contrary, the glass walls of this room represented the principle of transparency that we often hear in today's politics. I will return to this transparency later on. Now, I want to tell you a story.

During the Christmas break, I came across information that changed my perspective by chance, thanks to a professor at my former faculty. After a few hours of reading, inspired by my professor, I came across a concept called Omnipticon. If I have to explain in order: there are three main types of social surveillance, based on whether the space that is being watched is somewhere local, global or cyberspace. The first type of surveillance is considered a Panopticon, which emerged with modernism, where a small group of people watches over a larger group of people. The second one is the Synopticon, where the many watch over the few. Emerged mainly with the growth of the mass media, the Synopticon is the product of a more globalized world compared to the Panopticon concept. The third type of surveillance is the Omnipticon, where both Panopticon and Synopticon are applied simultaneously. In addition, the concept of conniption appears to be the closest to today's social media. Also, there is a new actor in the Omnipticon, watching over individuals: the eye of the market. The fact that individuals technically cannot run away from being monitored allows market actors to fix their eyes on them along with governments and ordinary people. Following this, such close monitoring of individuals is carried out by perceiving them as attitudes, behaviours, habits, and patterns that are measured by using existing algorithms instead of perceiving them as human beings. Individuals are no longer monitored as living, breathing human beings but as objects transformed/ reduced into a ball of numbers and statistics, in other words, informatic bodies.

After learning what an Omnipticon is, I came to the conclusion that the glass room in our faculty was actually an Omnipticon, not a Panopticon. I can say that the primary path I want to follow in my thesis in the context of survival and oppression is just like my daily personal experience.

Now, it is time to get back to the transparency concept that I mentioned at the beginning. The concept of transparency in politics undoubtedly takes its name from physics and empirical experiments. Transparency in political affairs and government regulations is certainly something everyone supports. However, we also need to accept that there are different views on transparency in human relations and private life. Whilst some people openly express their opinions on social media many times a day, some do not even download the Facebook application to their phones to avoid being followed. Based on this, we can say that while transparency is desired in corporate/governmental structures, it is controversial in personal/individual matters.

And now, just as Foucault said that the panopticon changed the classical understanding of prison and the concept of punishment, I would like to talk about a similar reflection on social media: Traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Let me explain: in today's digital era, the internet has transformed communication, but it has also led to the emergence of cyberbullying—a widespread and damaging issue. Traditional bullying occurs in physical settings such as schools or workplaces, where interactions are face-to-face. This type of bullying is confined to specific locations and times, offering victims relief when they are away from these environments. However, cyberbullying entails using digital technologies to harass, intimidate, humiliate, or target individuals. Cyberbullying can appear as harassment, threats, public humiliation, exclusion, impersonation, and doxing. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is persistent, anonymous, and can have enduring effects due to the permanent nature of online content - I guess we can see the similarities here with the Panopticon. The mentioned anonymity often emboldens bullies to escalate their actions, feeling less vulnerable to immediate repercussions. The consequences of cyberbullying are significant. The oppression of cyberbullying, which can proceed independently of space and often time, continues uninterruptedly on the individual. Victims frequently suffer severe emotional and psychological harm. Socially, victims may become withdrawn, feeling isolated and excluded. In this context, I believe that the changes in the concept of bullying are similar to the changes in the concept of punishment. In sum, my thesis will investigate the oppression that transparency and constant observation imposed on individuals based on Foucault's Panopticon.

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Affects, Aesthetics, and Activism: *An Interview with Dr. Christoph Brunner*

By Atal Katawazi and Georgina Aránzazu Dijkstra

Preface to the Interview

by Atal Katawazi

On December 12th 2024, our Editor-in-chief Georgina and I visited Dr. Brunner. We discussed art and theory, media, decolonial studies and the disruptive potential of academia. Dr. Brunner discussed the importance of the Deleuzian 'idiot question', the question of 'what else there is, after everything has been said and done'. We discussed how theory inside of academia can be very comfortable, with a serious risk that it is reduced to merely playing language games. While these academic games are fun and necessary, our global problems are too pressing to get stuck on them.

Six months after Dr. Brunner declared his wish for students to develop an activist sense, there was an encampment for the Palestinian cause on Campus Woudestein. The encampment had as its main demands that the university cut all ties with the settler-colonial state 'Israel' on grounds of genocide and put out a statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The encampment was evicted from campus by over 50 riot police officers, as the CvB wanted to make place for a 'wellbeing festival'. None of the encampment's demands were heard. Still, the university remains in a 'security state' with extra security personnel, checks and camera's adorning our campus.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the whole ordeal, was the silence of our own faculty. We find ourselves within a faculty and whose staff teach, write, and research questions of moral, social, and political philosophy - specifically Critical Theory, decolonial theory, feminist theory. Many students, including me, find it hard to give this credibility, if they cannot even speak out against a genocidal apartheid state. Or at the very least, be in solidarity with our activist students and staff when they get violently evicted.

One thing was clear to me: our interview was not finished. On the 28th of June, a month after the eviction, I visited Dr. Brunner in his office again. In this conversation I felt stuck in a double bind, the office setting felt as if I was face to face with the Institution. Yet, in front of me I found a person that was kind and caring, and equally frustrated with institutions, while obviously being a part of it.

The conversation lasted about an hour, it was a difficult and personal dialogue, there was a sense of shared frustration. Throughout our talk I realized that our faculty staff, academic and non-academic alike, are constantly themselves stuck in double binds. On the one hand they are part of the university, a public institution, which makes their work inherently political. On the other hand, they also feel like individuals who are just doing a job, already struggling with temporary contracts, constant performance measures and plenty of workload. If you appeal to staff, as persons, they will immediately respond that they care deeply about the Palestinian plight and the ongoing genocide, but that their hands are tied by the university. If you appeal to staff, institutionally, they will immediately retort that they will not make a unified statement as faculty, because they are all individuals who do not share common values and thus could never speak out together. The personal values, then, holier than the institution.

I realized that I was too demanding of 'our' professors. That they, too, are being held hostage by the political and economic structures they also actively take part in - not unlike the students. The big difference between them is of course that the professors hold more power, and have a mortgage. 'Our' professors are nothing but minions of the university, which is one of the claws of the state. They could try to incorporate critical theory in their curriculum, use an intersectional feminist pedagogy, and invite speakers from marginalized communities and give them a podium. But despite this, I fear this would not lead to much, our system is already deeply flawed. What I was asking of 'our' professors, to stand up and speak out against oppression, would mean we would have to dismantle the whole of white patriarchal capitalism, to start somewhere.

At the end of the conversation, we both felt cynical. After the recording stopped, we left the office and Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks came to my mind. He wrote on the 'Jewish Question':

> "Colonial racism is no different from other racisms. Anti-Semitism cuts me to the quick; I get upset; a frightful rage makes me anemic; they are denying me the right to be a man. I cannot disassociate myself from the fate reserved for my brother. Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every instance of my reticence, every instance of my cowardice, manifests the man."

I finally realized that in our conversation we got stuck in a cynical academic game. Every act commits us as human beings, how can we disassociate from the fates reserved for our Palestinian siblings? How can we disassociate from the fates reserved for our, Jewish, Sudanese, Congolese, Kurdish and South-African siblings? How do we explain to our children that we lived in times of Apartheid and genocide and remained silent, how do we even explain this to ourselves?

Walking out of his office, I shared this sentiment with Christoph. He turned to me and said: "You should have added this in the interview". We smiled. The right thing to do should not have to be easy for us to do it. If we have to dismantle white, patriarchal capitalism for justice, then let us.

Dr. Christoph Brunner was appointed assistant professor of Media and Technology at the Erasmus School of Philosophy in 2023. His research intersects media studies, aesthetics, critical theory, and cultural studies. He obtained his bachelor's in Cultural and Religious studies from the University of Bremen. He then moved on to Goldsmiths College, at the University of London, for a master's in Cultural and Media Studies. Afterwards he completed a PhD in humanities with a focus on continental philosophy at the Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. After his PhD completion Dr. Brunner held various research positions in Europe and America. Our Editor-in-chief Georgina Aránzazu Dijkstra and interview editor Atal Katawazi visited Dr. Brunner in his office and conducted an interview on December 12th. We discussed his transdisciplinary background, philosophical and artistic practice, and the disruptive, activistic potential of theory and practice.

A&G. *You come from a diverse background with a variety of disciplines like cultural, religious and media studies. And now you are an assistant professor at ESPHIL. Could you elaborate on your journey to philosophy?*

CB. I can start by saying -not ironically but thankfully - that it is also a surprise to me to have landed in a philosophy department, due to my German background. There philosophy operates a bit more traditionally than it does in the Netherlands. I came to this position as its specification of philosophy of media and technology aligns with my prior studies. For my undergraduate I followed a double major in cultural and religious studies at the University of Bremen. Cultural studies, in German *Kulturwissenschaften*, was more akin to cultural and social anthropology. For religious studies, I also followed a lot of courses on Hinduism and Hindu religions. So, there is an empirical side to my early studies. Back then, there were general readings on theories of culture, like Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. But there was also a lot of pop culture analysis happening, specifically in sound studies. This got me interested in cultural studies in general, because (specifically in Britain) it is a field where there was always a strong understanding that theory is neither neutral nor abstract, but socially engaged and political. That was always interesting to me. To turn towards aspects of our everyday lives made a lot of sense; that we must give more attention to what happens in the media, in the public, outside of the realms of classic politics, theory, academia, or the sciences.

Afterwards I ended up going to the UK to Goldsmiths, expecting to do cultural studies. Instead, my first course was mostly continental philosophy. We read Nietzsche, bits and pieces of Marx, and 'How to Make Yourself a Body Without Organs' from *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari. That text really warped me because there are passages about sadism and stitching up your ass and things like that. I asked myself: 'What's going on here?', 'Where am I?' - and then I got hooked and dug deeper. That is when I fell in love with post-structural thinking. I started to read a bunch of philosophy and followed a very fundamental course that was reading Marx's *Capital Volume I* from cover to back. That left quite a mark on me, but I also realized during that period that I wanted to work more on media, pop culture, and sound.

I was very interested in sound. It was the time of dubstep in London and cultural studies allows you to fuse personal and scholarly interests. Back then I sought out people working in media studies, like Luciana Parisi and Matt Fuller. Parisi's *Abstract Sex* and Fuller's *Media Ecologies* were important books for me, as was Rosi Braidotti's *Metamorphoses*. I was interested in questions of gender, queerness, and sound. I was specifically intrigued by how the relation between humans and technology is mediated in sound cultures, particularly in electronic music, and that is what I wrote my master thesis on. It became a philosophical work, thinking about sound as an affective relay between humans, bodies, technologies, and sonic experience as well as the whole culture formation that comes with it.

After my master's I was advised to apply to the Interdisciplinary PhD in Humanities at Concordia University, Montreal. This happened at the 'New Interfaces for Musical Expression' conference in New York, a nerdy field where musicians, engineers, and scientists invent experimental instruments, and exchange on interfaces, affordances, and live performance. In this rather alien field I met a group of scholars and artists from Montreal who encouraged me to apply for the Interdisciplinary PhD in Humanities, I found out this PhD would allow you to study alongside artists. It is a humanities PhD program, but people with an artistic background could do a third of the thesis as a studio component. Here, it became clear to me that I wanted to work deeper into the philosophical line where I started; specifically, French continental philosophy. In my case, it was the ultimate chance to learn French and read texts in their original language, and to do the more genealogical work of going back to Bergson, Simondon, Deleuze - the French line. My project moved away from questions of sound cultures towards research on the politics of affect and aesthetics. I wrote my thesis on relationality and collectivity in art and media, which I am currently reworking into a book publication. This is how I ended up doing trans-disciplinary and philosophical work. It was in line with affect theory, but also metaphysical questions, of the virtual and the actual, questions of emergence, temporality, which all relate to perception and media. That is where I am at.

My current research on media aesthetics, specifically in social movements, concerns more than media as a means to ends of communication and the circulation of opinions, images or discursive shifts. Rather, I study how we are constantly in a state of being affected on a pre-reflexive level, by perceiving and sensing and then making sense without necessarily being always conscious about how we make sense. Just take a look at how the alt-right in the US works almost virtuously with memes. These memes seem "funny", but they're actually racist or misogynist. People don't even necessarily succumb to that kind of content level, but just the joke of it, and they circulate it. They are part of something without being conscious. Which doesn't mean these people are innocent or passive or that content doesn't matter, but I am however, interested in this level where things arouse action without being necessarily classified in clearly defined political terms or in discourse.

A&G. It is interesting to see how you, in your journey, engaged with different practices that have different approaches to knowledge; a philosophical, continental practice and artistic practice. How do you conceive of the relationship between the two?

CB. This already started at Goldsmiths, being one of the most important art schools in the UK, artists would often come into courses and give talks. But my perspective really changed when I started studying alongside artists in Montreal. One of my supervisors, Erin Manning, initiated the *SenseLab*. The *SenseLab*, back then called 'Laboratory for Thought and Motion', was born out of a student initiative as a space outside of university where you could engage in, what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call, "study". It is a more collaborative practice of knowledge production that engages in undogmatic ways with philosophical works built in a non-hierarchical and collaborative structure. More classically one could call these things reading groups, but it's more than a reading group. It was not only scholarly driven but also had artists come in with different kinds of questions. I always enjoyed how an artist's perspective on things can trouble the theoretical routines. These routines often assume a certain kind of authority, and troubling these makes you realize the things you think don't need to be explained anymore!

The *SenseLab* made me realize that art and philosophy share a strong common ground that is creative practice. Philosophy is the practice of inventing and reworking concepts, and art is inventing percepts, affects and experiences. I have collaborated with artists in workshops, events, exhibitions, and performances ever since. To have this dialogue with artists is very much part of my DNA. A lot of my friends are artists. I worked at the Zurich University of the Arts for six years where I was doing theory inside of an art school, which made me think about theory quite differently. I think it was healthy to keep a certain kind of distance, or to not get lulled into a habit or convention that doesn't make you question what you're doing. I think if you lose that quality, it becomes dangerous. You might be a super expert, but you might also be incommunicable. And I think that gives away, to a certain degree, some of the potential of what we can do with theory and philosophy.

A&G. You talk about the interplay between theory and art and the disruptive potential of art to theory. Do you think art or theory still has this potential for disruption outside of academia?

CB. The older I get, the less I believe in it... No, I don't want to be cynical. I think it can. If you look at the history of thought more broadly, it is thinkers and concepts that were changing the world, not only politicians or scientists. Concepts give names to things that didn't have a name before, and thinkers were sometimes a real threat to political regimes. I mean, especially in the Enlightenment era, we can see this threat to the church, a threat to a certain kind of political authority, because of asking uncomfortable questions. You don't want to be complacent with simple solutions. I think this is still extremely relevant, and I think our job is to ask "uncomfortable" questions. Deleuze called it 'the idiot question', which is not

idiotic at all, but asks *what else there is*. When everything has been said and done, when everyone agrees or comes to a disagreement or has concluded, then the idiot asks 'what else is there?', I like that, because that is where things are happening. We shouldn't get too comfortable in our conventions and habits. Theory that takes place only inside of academia is very comfortable. It becomes a lot like petty games of different schools or whatever. Our global problems are too pressing to fall prey to these petty games. They are important and fun, but then you must see where to make the switch and realize the value of other approaches and of collaborating.

Regarding art, I would say I am more interested in aesthetics in the classic meaning of *aesthesis*, which means sensory perception. This does not necessarily mean institutionalized art, because I think institutionalized art has a specific locus in society and culture, and within a certain kind of capitalist regime where it has a clear function. I think that an aesthetic approach, call it an artistic approach or mode of existence, means posing these uncomfortable questions through the sensuous, perception, and experience. Seeing, experiencing, and sensing things in a way that you cannot place yet, that you cannot allocate to something that you already know, and by that, opening a new perspective on the world. You end up opening a new way of thinking, thinking and feeling are intrinsically related in that respect. I think that's very similar to asking the idiot question. At the same time, I don't want to outright reject art institutions. I think they can provide the time and space for experimenting on inventing new ways of sensing and by doing so of sense-making.

A&G. What do you think is the most radical concept in the field of media studies now?

C. It really depends on where you want to look at, but logistics and platformization are two paradigms that are intensely debated these days. The most interesting debates, I think, come from global systems theories, but also from a Marxist, Operaist and increasingly post- and decolonial perspective. They raise questions of how different processes of production and extraction are integral to each other and how different forms of circulation interlace commodities, operations, and subjects.

Materially, we increasingly rely on rare earths that run our technologies and that are constantly extracted from mostly Indigenous lands around the globe. But we also see how our capacity to sense and feel is constantly extracted and piped into a universal valorization machine. How you sense, feel, and how you respond emotionally to what is happening on your social media threads, is immediately siphoned into these logistics whose most palpable surface are social media platforms. So I would say platform capitalism and the logistical paradigm shift are two intensely debated themes. They can then be related to fields like black, decolonial and post-colonial studies, not only in relation to extractivism but also to the ways that the transatlantic slave trade, plantation, economies, mining relate to each other in a sense that becomes almost totalizing. A total subsumption under these regimes. For me, it is particularly interesting to see where the resistances to these supposed totalizing perspectives are.

One of the ways of engaging these resistances is to look at how other ways of making sense, or sense-making occur, at the underside of these platforms or logistics. This power also means you can organize and communicate in a different way. Together with some colleagues, I am working on the capturing, but also emancipatory, practices that occur along logistics and platforms in a book-project called "Infrastructures of Sense-Making.". I guess this is part of my own reluctance, when it comes to techno-pessimism or apocalyptic visions of doomsday narratives of the Anthropocene.

A&G. What texts do you think exemplify this resistance, or offer a good diagnosis of this issue?

C. Depends on what you want to look at. Within surveillance studies (with works like Shoshana Zuboff' *Age of Surveillance Capitalism*), which is a subfield of media studies, I found the book *Dark Matter* by Simone Browne quite relevant, which is on the surveillance of blackness. In that book she creates a compelling analysis of how the conception of blackness and the black body becomes a specific interest, first being erased from history and then hyper-targeted. Think about the incarceration in the United States, and how the amount of black and brown people in the prisons is disproportionately higher than any other segment of the population. She relates all this back to logistical paradigms of the early transatlantic slave trade that predates what we call the panopticon. Browne traces how the surveillance techniques and technologies of the structure of the slave ship predated the panopticon, which in turn inspired Jeremy Bentham who travelled the Mediterranean Sea on ships that carried slaves under deck. Browne's analysis of the surveillance of blackness also includes many artistic forms of resistance that make the reader feel and understand the logistical intimacies of racism and technology the book exposes.

Another body of work that I find very interesting comes from Indigenous Studies in relation to the field of decolonial theory, especially in North America. Figures like Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who has written the wonderful book *As We Have Always Done*, or Glenn Coulthard's, *Red Skin, White Masks* in relation to Fanon's, *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Adrian Rifkin's, *Beyond Settler Time*. All are interesting pieces of rethinking the violent effects of an undividable interlocking of coloniality and modernity. Like Simone Browne, these refer to a canon of Western theories of, for instance, surveillance of the body of a certain conception of power, and a certain temporality and historicity that comes with it. These narratives break up some of the Western paradigms and assumptions of how to think what a concept is, what a body is, how space and time relate to each other. And I think an Indigenous perspective on temporality, land or territory can reshape the ground of how to think the media, its practices, as well as activism and aesthetics. I think that work has not been done yet, and that's also my research interest for the future to further analyze these understandings of time, territory and relationality.

I have done some research on increasingly networked feminist social movements in Latin America. One of the common concerns of these movements is the institutionalized violence against women and feminicides. One prominent movement is *'Ni Una Menos'*, and it relates to problematizing domestic violence and re-appropriating the domestic sphere as a feminist territory, as well as changing anti-abortion laws. The green wristband is part of the signatures or symbols of this movement. As part of these movements, feminists not only achieved the legal structures of some of these countries but also spurred social movements and alliances across the globe, resulting in the *8th of March* feminist movement. A lot of media activism has emerged alongside these processes that also comes out of artistic experimentation. For instance, a Chilean collective called *LasTesis* invented a performance called *Un Violador en Tu Camino*, so 'a rapist in your path'. The performance is a publicly staged choreography, often involving thousands of -mostly female- participants, with lyrics addressing the complicity between the state, its institutions, and patriarchal social structures and gestures pointing at police offices or governmental buildings. Apart from being a highly effective political intervention, *LasTesis* mentions their wish to render feminist theories more accessible as the key motivation for creating the performance. They base their work on writings by Silvia Federici and Maria Lugones. In their performance they create a relay between embodied sensation, a shared experience of violence, but also an empowerment through participation. The performance has been done with a specific kind of aesthetics, the use of blindfold or the bodily posture of squatting. Both of these elements point at intimidating interrogation practices by the Chilean police during the military dictatorship. In addition to the historical reference, the performance creates a physical embodied relay of resistance, which becomes mediated and shared across territories. I think these are re-workings of the platform-capitalized media infrastructure towards different, collective ends, by creating new ways of sensing and feeling across spaces

and territories. This is the work that needs to be more theorized in solidarity with such movements, to show the potential. I think there is enough despair and whining about the way social media clicks so well with the more conservative right-wing politics. Working at the interstice between theory, aesthetic experience, and politics leads me to ask how sensation and feeling but also concepts can challenge and change existing infrastructures of power in their capture of our senses and to sense-making.

A&G. Before we move to our little blitz round, we wanted to ask if there were any other concepts that have been on your mind and you would like students to know about you.

C. A concept that has been with me for a while that I try to develop further is what I call activist sense. What is it that activates the sensuous and sense-making processes? How do sensing and sense-making relate to each other, and what, then, is needed to engage in these processes? This is a collective and networked process, which rethinks linear order of temporality and the role of action outside of an individualizing framework. It's not just human or non-human. It is embedded in a whole activating field of parallel occurrences. For me, one of the really important questions is how, for instance, a social media platform can trigger a process which leads to hate, or one that is empowering. How that happens across thinking and feeling simultanously. Let's take the example of the smartphone, several designers of the big social media platforms admitted in interviews that they create strategies of how to micro trigger certain parts of the brain, yielding effects that lead to certain forms of addiction. This is neuromodulation. It requires a whole array of micro activities and micro activations. The question is what else could be done on this already rich awareness we have of the potential for activation and activity, not in terms of manipulation and not tailored towards capitalist extraction of our sensory-motor capacities. For me these questions point at a critical re-thinking of the temporalities inscribed into digital cultures, and the way they instigate individualization or more collective and shared durations of experience.

The other thing I think is that we have to work hard to include perspectives that come from outside the Western canon. Non-Western philosophies were often a fascination for Western philosophers like Heidegger or Nietzsche and many others. But there are traditions that have been very rich by themselves which are also available in translations. I believe intercultural philosophy as a term has a history at ESPhil, but this conceives of cultures as geographic areas, which is certainly not the way I want to use the term 'culture'. I think we can go beyond the intercultural, to insert other lines of thinking much like Yuk Hui and some other new colleagues do. I think we should build on that and make space of different forms of knowledge and thought.

BLITZ

Deleuze	**Haraway**
Kant	**Bergson**
Singularity	**Multiplicity**
German 19th century	**French 20th century**
Difference	Repetition
Berlin	New York*
Technology	**Social change**
The Visible	**The Invisible**
Dasein	**Design**

* He doesn't like either very much.