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EDITORS' NOTE

Each month, the New Inquiry publishes a magazine of essays and reviews relating to a theme. The magazine provides an opportunity to reflect on a certain category or concept from multiple angles, allowing us to devote more time to a single idea than in an individual essay that would be published on the website. But we've never conceived of the magazine as more central to our project than the website. And as the year comes to an end, we want to recognize some of the outstanding essays that were published online.

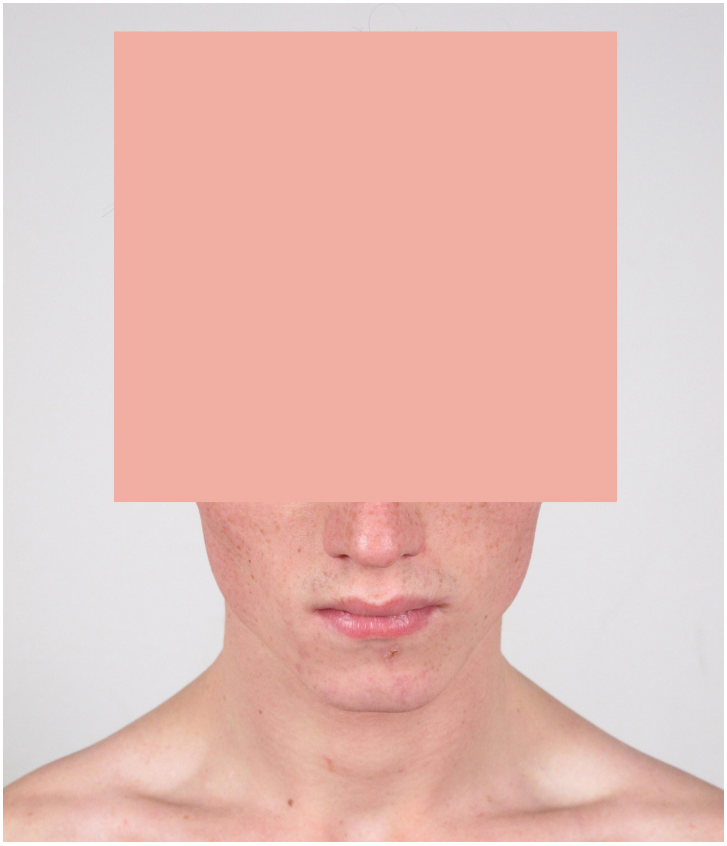
Publishing one essay a day on the New Inquiry website isn't a simple task, but we are proud to deliver timely, thoughtful analysis on topics others won't. Some essays capture their object of inquiry whole; others transcend their object to stand above the news cycle and deliver a larger truth. We wanted to save a few choice essays for an end of the year reflection, as a partial measure on the way to a complete anthology.

The twelve essays collected here display one aspect of the work that we do, the part that attempts to intervene in public discussion of serious issues. This output can unfortunately be fleeting, so we've preserved some of our favorites for posterity's sake. We hope you enjoy the retrospective.

Return to Sender

By MICHAEL ANDREWS

When gay communist Didier Eribon came out of the closet, it wasn't as a gay man or a communist. The French sociologist came out as working class.



David Marinos *Skin*, 2012

THE term "intersectionality" was coined in 1983 by UCLA law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, in a paper she wrote examining women of color in Los Angeles who had suffered domestic violence and rape. The term encapsulated Crenshaw's argument: the experiences of these women could not be understood solely through the lens of sexism, nor solely through the lens of racism. Instead, they had be understood through the intersection of these two forms of oppression. Crenshaw's paper posed an implicit challenge to mainstream feminism, dominated as it was by middle- and upper-class white women who frequently misunderstood or ignored the experiences of women of color. (Thirty years later, little has changed in this regard.) In response to this challenge, mainstream feminism balked, dithered, and generally embarrassed itself: as the concept of intersectionality

was eagerly taken up by feminists of color and radical scholars, many mainstream feminists decried it as divisive or overly academic.

While initially developed in a feminist context, the concept of intersectionality has since been broadened to stand for the idea that there is no central form of oppression. Domination should rather be understood as operating through multiple interlocking systems—racism, sexism, class exploitation, and so forth. This has become a basic principle of many radical currents in recent years, especially Black feminism—and unsurprisingly, it has also provoked a backlash from the old-guard left. Some orthodox Marxists who hold that class supersedes all other forms of oppression have denounced intersectional politics as a distraction from the one real struggle—the class struggle. But placing class above (instead of alongside) other forms of oppression creates serious pitfalls for radical politics—pitfalls that are thoroughly explored in a new memoir by Didier Eribon, a prominent French intellectual celebrated for his work on Michel Foucault. Eribon grew up gay in a working-class family that extolled class struggle, but maligned homosexuality. In *Returning to Reims*, he blends moving personal reflection with arresting social analysis to show how a failure to recognize the interrelation of different forms of oppression not only produces individual trauma, but also cripples radical social movements.

When *Returning to Reims* was initially published in France in 2009, it shocked the French literati. Eribon had previously garnered high praise for his books on the formation of gay male subjectivity, so it wasn't the passages about his boyhood dalliances with his rowing club teammates that scandalized readers. Rather, as George Chauncey explains in his introduction to the Semiotext(e) edition of the book (superbly translated by Michael Lucey): "In its pages the distinguished public intellectual Didier Eribon came out again, not this time as gay, but as a son of the working class." Eribon had never publicly discussed his working-class origins—a personal detail that would've caused him to be shunned by the thoroughly bourgeois French intelligentsia. In Returning to Riems, Eribon seeks to understand why he avoided talking about his class background for so long. In the process, he provides an absorbing account of how this background, despite his considerable efforts to escape it, shaped his adult self.

Riems is a mid-sized city in northeast France where Eribon was born in 1953. After hardly visiting for decades, Eribon returned to Reims a few years ago. What prompted this visit was his father's grave illness—although Eribon didn't go there to see his father, whom Eribon had long despised for his homophobia. He went instead to comfort his grieving mother and to ask her about his childhood. In the course of several conversations, Eribon confronts the boy he once was and the world he fled. The "return" of the book's title is thus also, as Eribon explains, a return to an earlier self: "It was a rediscovery of that 'region of myself,' as Genet would have said, from which I had worked so hard to escape: a social space I had kept at distance, a mental space in opposition to which I had constructed the person I had become, and yet which remained an essential part of my being."

This "social space" that Eribon yearned to flee was marked by the deprivations and frustrations of working class life in postwar France. His father worked long hours in a factory and his mother cleaned houses. The family lived in a series of cramped government-provided apartments where he and his three brothers shared a single bed, and where each floor in the apartment building had only a single communal bathroom. One of the few bright spots in Eribon's bleak upbringing were the neighborhood dances and

festivals organized by the local branch of the French Communist Party. Eribon's parents were staunch supporters of the Party, which provided them and their fellow workers with a sense of collective identity and hope for the future. "The Communist Party," as Eribon explains, "was the organizing principle and the uncontested horizon of our relation to politics."

Eribon began to chafe against this community at a young age. He liked to read books instead of play sports, which put him at odds with his father, his brothers, and virtually every other boy in his working class neighborhood. He was the first person in his family to attend high school (doing so wasn't mandatory in France at the time), and this produced the first of many ruptures with his family: "The educational process succeeded in creating within me, as one of its very conditions of possibility, a break—even a kind of exile—that grew ever more pronounced, and separated me little by little from the world that I came from." This separation grew wider when, at the age of 13 or 14, Eribon fell in love with a male classmate. Homosexuality was scorned in Eribon's hyper-masculine milieu, so he was forced to conceal his desires. Sometimes he even leveled homophobic insults against other boys to ward off any suspicion about himself. This psychic disjunction—a nerdy gay boy hiding behind a fake manly facade—produced within Eribon a split self. He found himself perpetually "shuttling back and forth between two registers, between two universes."

As he strives to comprehend how these traumatic experiences shaped his fragmented identity, Eribon relies heavily on critical theory, especially Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Eribon explains that this use of theory is necessary in order to tame the intense emotions that come with remembering—emotions that can inhibit real self-understanding:

> A project like this—to write a "return"—could only succeed if it was mediated by, or perhaps filtered through, a wide set of cultural references: literary, theoretical, political, and so on. Such references … permit you to neutralize the emotional charge that might otherwise be too strong if you had to confront the "real" without the help of an intervening screen.

It's this use of theory by Eribon—to understand, for example, how the working-class habitus he carried with him into the classroom slowed his academic progress—that most distinguishes Returning to Riems from the navel-gazing memoirs that dominate the bestseller list. Eribon uses theory to connect his personal experiences to larger processes of oppression and historical change. He thus interprets the homophobia he faced in high school as partly an attempt by disempowered working-class boys to assert some shred of power over others. In this way, Eribon doesn't just attain greater self-knowledge in the course of writing his memoir. He also arrives at a deeper understanding of the social dynamics that animated his childhood. Returning to Riems turns memoir into a form of sociology. (Eribon is, in fact, a professor of sociology.)

Eribon finally escaped at age 20, when he moved to Paris to continue his graduate studies. He immediately found himself in an environment that embraced his intellectual ambitions and gay identity. But at the same time, it was an environment where working class tastes and experiences were denigrated. In a fascinating parallel, Eribon reveals that at high-brow social gatherings in Paris, he employed the same techniques he once used to conceal his homosexuality to now conceal his class origins. This entailed "a constant self-surveillance as regards one's gestures, one's intonation, manners of speech, so that nothing untoward slips out, so that one never betrays oneself." Eribon's move to Paris also precipitated a shift in his politics. In his late teens he had been a devout Trotskyist, but

the latent homophobia of his comrades ensured that he never felt completely comfortable in this milieu. "I was split in two," he says. "Half Trotskyist, half gay."

Then, in Paris, Eribon discovered Foucault's writing. Foucault's conception of domination as a sum of multiple vectors of oppression—not just class, but also sexuality, race, and "sanity"—resonated with his own experience. Eribon writes that for himself and other marginalized subjects facing sexual or racial hatred, it was necessary to escape the hegemony of class-centric Marxism in order to open up new ways of thinking about domination:

> During the period of the 1960s and 1970s, when I was student and when Marxism dominated French intellectual life, at least on the left, all other forms of "struggle" seemed "secondary"—or they might even by denounced as "petite bourgeois distractions" from the place where attention should be focused, the only "true" struggle, the only struggle worthy of interest, that of the working class. Movements that came to be labeled as "cultural" were focusing their attention on various dimensions that Marxism had set aside: gendered, sexual, and racial forms of subjectivation, among others. Because Marxism's attention was so exclusively concentrated on class oppression, these other movements were required to find other avenues for problematizing lived experience, and they often ended up to a great extent neglecting class oppression.

Eribon's refusal of class in his personal life thus coincided with a refusal of class in his political activity. For many years to come Eribon would avoid the topic of class in his activism and his writing. As he himself observes, his acclaimed books on homophobia barely mention class.

But with Eribon's "return to Reims," he brings his evasion of class to an end. While talking with his mother, he realizes that class oppression is fundamental to understanding the world he came from and the ways it shaped his subjectivity. He reevaluates his memories in the light of class relations, and the result is not only a series of moving personal epiphanies, but also a compelling account of the fortunes of the French working class in the second half of the 20th century. Eribon comes to see his father's anger and unhappiness as a consequence of the harsh conditions of his life—backbreaking work, perpetual instability, a sense of thwarted fulfillment—conditions that have defined the working-class experience for ages: "My father bore within him the weight of a crushing history that could not help but produce serious psychic damage in those who lived through it." When his father dies before Eribon can attempt a reconciliation, Eribon chastises himself for succumbing to his bitterness for so long: "I regretted the fact that I had allowed the violence of the social world to triumph over me, as it had triumphed over him."

Enlarging his analysis from his family to the French working class as a whole, Eribon goes on to elucidate a shocking political reversal by French workers: in 2002, huge segments of the French working class—including Eribon's mother and brothers—voted for the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the French presidential election, enabling Le Pen to enter a runoff election against Jacques Chirac. (Chirac won by a landslide in the runoff.) Eribon attributes this startling development to the gradual abandonment of the French working class by the establishment left. This process began, Eribon says, in the 1970s and '80s, when ambitious left-leaning politicians—some of them veterans of May '68—quietly relinquished the traditional left-wing commitment to class conflict in order gain access to the halls of power. When François Mitterrand of the Socialist Party was elected president of France in 1981, it initially seemed like a major victory for the left. But once in office, his administration slowly jettisoned the leftist language of "domination" and "exploitation" in favor of the neoconservative language of "individual responsibility" and "the social compact." This produced, according to Eribon, "a strong

sense of disillusionment in working-class circles."

At the same time, the French far right began to promulgate a shrewd discourse that blamed the plight of the beleaguered French working class on the influx of black and Arab immigrants. This discourse may have been factually suspect (and patently racist), but in the absence of any counter-discourse from the left that linked precarious working conditions to global capitalism, large swathes of the French working class were drawn to Le Pen. The far fight came to play the role that the Communist Party once played in the lives of Eribon's parents and many other workers—providing a language that explained and legitimized their predicament. As Eribon writes, "Whole sectors of the most severely disadvantaged would thus… shift over to the only party that seemed to care about them, the only one, in any case, that offered them a discourse that seemed intended to provide meaning to the experiences that made up their daily lives."

As a first step toward reversing this rightward drift in the French working class, Eribon calls for the reintroduction of a vigorous class language in mainstream leftist discourse. However, he is quick to add that this does not mean the French left should revive the old orthodox Marxist language that viewed class as the only oppression worth talking about. It means, rather, that the left must devise a language that recognizes class as one among many forms of oppression:

> Why should we be obliged to choose between different struggles being fought against different kinds of domination? If it is the nature of our being that we are situated at the intersection of several collective determinations, and therefore of several "identities," of several forms of subjection, why should it be necessary to set up one of them rather than another as the central focus of political preoccupation? … If we are shaped as political subjects by discourses and by theories, should it not be incumbent upon us to construct discourses and theories that allow us not to neglect this or that aspect, not to exclude any form of oppression, any register of domination, any form of inferiorization?

This litany of rhetorical questions is a powerful summation of intersectional politics. And it's all the more powerful considering that neither here nor anywhere else in his book does Eribon reference the scholarly discourse on intersectionality. He seems to have arrived at this analysis independently, based partly on his personal experience. The above passage can also serve as a description of what a thriving revolutionary culture might look like—one in which different forms of oppression aren't crudely ranked, but instead recognized as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, intersectionality has lately come under fire from inheritors of the very same vulgar Marxism that Eribon sought to escape as a young gay man. In an article titled "Intersectional? Or Sectarian?," the British journalist James Heartfield, a former member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, denounced intersectionality as a "minefield of political correctness."

But Eribon's personal and political trajectory demonstrates the importance of understanding class as shaping and shaped by other forms of domination. After growing up in a political environment where the homophobia he faced was treated as "secondary," as a merely "cultural" form of oppression, Eribon felt the need to abandon the category of class in order to realize himself as an openly gay man. But as he discovered when he returned to Reims, his working-class background was just as fundamental to the formation of his identity as his homosexuality. His challenge was to understand how these seemingly antagonistic traits interacted to produce the person he became, how his halves made a whole. A similar challenge faces today's radical social movements: to recognize the interrelation of seemingly distinct kinds of oppression, and build an opposition whole enough to fight back. TNI

Reason Displaces All Love

By HANNAH PROCTOR

Libidinal economizing in the early Soviet Union.

She had suffered an acute attack of "love"—the name given to a disease of ancient times when sexual energy, which should be rationally distributed over one's entire lifetime, is suddenly concentrated into one inflammation lasting a week, leading to absurd and incredible behavior.

—Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug*

NEP Women, 1920s

IN summer 1956, six tons of books were thrown by court order into the public incinerator on 25th Street in New York City. Those smouldering pages were written by Wilhelm Reich, who died in jail shortly thereafter, infa-

mously denounced as the fraudulent peddler of "orgone," a mystical cosmic life force. As a young communist psychoanalyst in interwar Vienna, Reich had argued that capitalism unhealthily restrains primal sexual instincts, and that a genuine political revolution would shatter the constraints of bourgeois sexual morality, unleashing sexual energies through a kind of wild orgasmic release.

In 1929, Reich visited the Soviet Union, where psychoanalysis would soon be outlawed, and was rather scathing of the psychologists he met there, including one of his hosts, Aron Zalkind, a leading figure in the psychological community in Moscow. Zalkind was the author of the influential treatise "12 Commandments for the Sexual Revolution of the Proletariat," first published in 1925, which argued that the capitalist free market was incompatible with what he somewhat confusingly called "free love," given that he meant something like the opposite of what it meant in the 1960s. Unlike Reich, whose prurient embrace of unrestrained lovemaking was to be enthusiastically championed during the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s, Zalkind advocated sexual abstinence as the appropriate conduct for the revolutionary proletariat.

During the period of the New Economic Policy (1921–1928), which saw the reintroduction of certain forms of private enterprise into the Soviet economy, sexual relations were being renegotiated for both ideological and practical reasons. As the heroine of Feodor Gladkov's 1925 novel *Cement* observes: "Everything is broken up and changed and become confused. Somehow love will have to be arranged differently." But how exactly love was to be arranged was unclear. Although the fledgling Soviet government had legalized divorce and abortion, secularized marriage, and decriminalized homosexuality, and although women's roles in the home and workforce were being concretely transformed, Zalkind's emphasis on sexual inhibition is characteristic of the ambivalence toward sex during the NEP period.

Zalkind's commandments were as follows:

1. Sexuality should not develop too early.

2. Sex should not occur before marriage.

3. Sex on the basis of pure physical attraction should be renounced.

4. Sex should only result from "deep and complex feeling" between comrades.

5. Sex should be infrequent.

6. Sexual partners should not be changed too frequently.

7. Sexual relationships should be monogamous.

8. Every sex act should be committed with the awareness that it might lead to the birth of a child.

9. Sexual partners should be selected on the basis of class. ("Sexual attraction to class antagonism, to a morally disgusting, dishonest object, is as perverse as the sexual desire of a human for a crocodile or an orangutan.")

10. There should be no jealousy.

11. There should be no "sexual perversions."

12. In the interests of the revolution, it is the duty of the proletariat to intervene in the sex lives of others.

Zalkind relies on an economic, quantitative conception of psychic sexual energy or libido borrowed from Freud. In the interest of self-preservation, the fragile organism must protect itself from both external and internal excitations, and the constant tension between pleasure and unpleasure must be regulated through sublimation, repression, and cathexis. Or in Zalkind's inelegant phrasing, "The body is stuffed with a certain amount of energy, a certain amount of internal stress and excitement, which erupts on the outside."

In *The Future of an Illusion*—the last of Freud's works to appear in Russian translation in 1930, with a hostile introduction by Zalkind—Freud is dismissive of those who would claim that "a reordering of human relations" might overcome the necessarily repressive character of society, stating that "every civilization must be built up on coercion and renunciation of instinct," (though he explicitly declares that his conclusions are not intended as a com-

ment on the "great experiment in civilization" occurring in Russia). Unlike Reich, Zalkind does not contradict Freud on this point. He may imagine repression and sublimation as conscious, voluntary, and collective, but he insists that communism cannot be built without forgoing immediate gratification. The oft-repeated Soviet injunction to make sacrifices in the present to reap the eventual benefits of the bright Communist future corresponds to Freud's reality principle, defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as the "temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure."

Freud argued that giving the instincts free rein would be dangerous. Civilization is a by-product of repressed instincts rather than the result of some immanent tendency toward progress or perfectibility. By assuming that renouncing pleasure will ultimately lead to a superior form of society, Zalkind's argument is more explicitly value-laden: Sex too much, too soon, too often or with too many people diverts energy that could otherwise be used for building the new Communist society. For Zalkind, sexual desire does not originate in the seething depths of the primitive unconscious. Sex is morally rather than mortally dangerous; it is wasteful and frivolous rather than primal and destructive.

In Freud's theory, the regulation of psychic energy remains largely metaphorical. But Zalkind insists that Freudian theory has a materialist essence; his more literal conception of energy thus has a closer relation to contemporary discussions of labor efficiency and industrial production. In tune with this infamously Taylor-obsessed period, Zalkind focuses on management, rationality, organization, and discipline.

But if under capitalism, energy expenditure is primarily concerned with maximized productivity and profitability in the workplace, in communism all human activity is up for grabs, including people's most intimate encounters. Any unnecessary exertion might deviate resources that could otherwise be spent building the new classless society. Zalkind's quantification of energy allows for the commensurability of action. As historian Anson Rabinbach puts it in *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, "Energy is the universal equivalent of the natural world, as money is the universal equivalent of the world of exchange."

Building barricades, constructing dams, designing factories, or fucking your comrades—all activity is reduced to the amount of energy they require to perform. Zalkind imagines a scenario in which a worker is insulted by his boss. Such an event, he claims, produces a fixed volume of anger, which will inevitably "break out": The worker might erupt and throw a plate at his wife. But instead, the energy could be positively channelled into organizing a demonstration or distributing agitational pamphlets.

Zalkind's vision recalls Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1921 dystopian novel We, in which controlled copulation can be performed only during the alloted "sex hour," when people are permitted to lower the curtains in their glass homes, and encounters must be tracked with a pink ration book of signed tokens. But these concerns were not confined to the pages of science fiction: Some married couples in the period actually attempted to organize their domestic chores and sex lives on the basis of the Scientific Organization of Labor.

Despite his likening of the libido to a flowing liquid, Freud's conception of the unconscious knows no spatial constraints—quantity has no meaningful existence there. In bourgeois Vienna, there is no suggestion that a patient's libidinal resources might simply run out; their sexual drives are understood in relation to their historical experiences rather than their physical well-being.

But in post-revolutionary Russia there was a genuine fear that people were literally running out of energy. Zalkind's anxieties about squandering libidinal currency rely on a physiological understanding of energy developed amid acute privation. "Exhaustion" was rife among revolutionaries; Lenin's death in 1924 from a brain hemorrhage

was said to have been provoked by his excessive exertions on behalf of the global revolutionary proletariat. Hunger, often accompanied by energy-sapping cold, gnaws insistently in first-hand accounts of the period. *Revolution and Youth*, the book in which Zalkind's proclamations were originally published, includes detailed nutritional charts to ensure revolutionaries retain optimal "brain fuel." Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* constantly returns to the subject of food (or lack of it), its pages strewn with paltry, unappetizing morsels. Stoic revolutionaries survive on black bread, dried fish, coffee made from raw oats, rotten horsemeat, and the odd spoonful of sugar. This nutritional dearth had sexual implications: As a result of malnutrition, impotence was widespread.

The acute privations of war communism may have abated with the NEP reforms, but ideological uneasiness also accompanied the re-emergence of private enterprise. Luxury was condemned, hardship romanticized. Serge's memoirs begin with the following assertion of revolutionary commitment: "Thou shalt think, thou shalt struggle, thou shalt be hungry." Emma Goldman described the confusion wrought by the sudden reappearance of food on the streets of Moscow in the wake of the NEP:

> Large quantities of butter, cheese, and meat were displayed for sale; pastry, rare fruit, and sweets of every variety were to be purchased. . . . Men, women, and children with pinched faces and hungry eyes stood about gazing into the windows and discussing the great miracle: what was but yesterday considered a heinous offense was now flaunted before them in an open and legal manner.

Zalkind's treatise captures something of this confusion. The renunciation of sex was connected to the renunciation of food; both were related to ideological purity and self-sacrifice. He explicitly equates sexual excess with gluttony and is obsessed with the chaos of bourgeois sexuality and its "rampant leakage of energy wealth." Similarly, Alexandra Kollontai's "thin and under-nourished," idealized communist heroine Vasilisa Malygina drinks "nothing but water, eat[s] slops, dress[es] in rags" and infuriates

Ad for a girdle, 1928

her NEP-man lover by falling asleep during sex as she's so tired from organizing a worker's commune. Meanwhile, NEP-men and women were typically represented as disgustingly obese, often gorging themselves on rich food. Bourgeois decadence is physically manifested in luxuriant folds of flesh.

Fat signifies licentiousness, particularly when attached to female bodies: Pendulous breasts and ample thighs become emblems of wantonness. These fleshy ap-

pendages were often perilously combined with commodities associated with (bourgeois) femininity as masquerade. Fripperies such as synthetic stockings, bright lipstick, perfume with French-sounding names, and gaudy jewelry were condemned as a frivolous expense—like sex itself—and for unnecessarily arousing male sexual desires.

Eric Naiman discusses this symbolism of fat at length in *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Idology*, but frames it in terms of anorexia, projecting a contemporary American discourse into the past. The anorexic wants to remain stuck in childhood, whereas Soviet renunciation has a very different purpose. In their immediate pursuit of gratification and rejection of sublimation, the fat, reprobate NEP-people behave like children. In contrast, the committed communist will always forswear pleasure in the present, not because they want to stop their progressing but precisely for the sake of the bright future to come.

IN the 1990s, when scarcity and barter returned to the Soviet Union on a scale not seen since the 1920s, a tire factory in Volgograd allegedly paid its employees in dildos. This stark image of fungible, mechanized pleasure seems to conform to Zalkind's own treatment of sexual behavior. What, if anything, distinguishes his understanding of economy from a capitalist one?

"The Adventures of the Rouble"—written by Soviet national-anthem author Sergei Mikhalkov in 1967—tells the story of a day in the life of a rouble. The rouble is first given to an industrious carpenter who uses him to buy carnations for his wife on International Women's Day, but he ends up being given as change by a cabdriver to an American, in whose wallet he meets some arrogant U.S. dollars. They tell the incredulous rouble of their previous adventures—they had been given to a pilot as payment for successfully bombing foreign cities, then squandered on drinks in a bar, before being found in the hands of a wrongfully accused black man killed in a police dragnet. Our comrade the rouble, who takes such pride in his role helping people to acquire simple quotidian items, is horrified. He thinks he has nothing in common with these brash, green monsters. But even taking into consideration the peculiarities of the Soviet economy, there is nothing in the rouble's *form* that prevents him from being used for activities just as horrifying as those described by the American dollar.

Zalkind, in regarding energy as currency, makes a similar assumption as Mikhalkov's rouble makes. But conceiving of revolutionaries as having an abstracted aggregate of energy risks draining both revolutionary activity and sex (assuming the two are mutually exclusive) of any definable *qualities*. Difference dissolves into general equivalence. Jacques Derrida's remarks in *The Postcard* about Freud's economic conception of the relation between pleasure and unpleasure are apposite here. Freud, he says, implicitly supposes that we know what pleasure is but fails to actually tell us anything about it:

> Nothing is said of the qualitative experience of pleasure itself. What is it? What does it consist of? … The definition of the pleasure principle is mute about pleasure, about its essence and quality. Guided by the economic point of view, this definition concerns only quantitative relations

However, the renunciation demanded by the reality principle does assume that pleasure (however ill-defined) will eventually be reached. Mikhalkov's rouble changed hands during the stagnant Brezhnev era, when the fervent pursuit of utopia had been indefinitely deferred. Zalkind's rejection of immediate satisfaction through sex and the forms of consumption (both calorific and monetary) assumed to accompany it is premised on a faith in a greater and deeper love to come: communism.

The Soviet fixation with machines and industrialization was distinctly utopian. A Taylorist understanding of energy allowed for the productive forces of human labor

to be equated with the productive forces of machines. In communism, it was hoped, the latter could take on the work of the former to reduce human labor time, releasing people from exploitation into a new world in which energy could eventually be distributed freely.

The contradiction between the coruscating future and the shabby present animates NEP-era discourse. A key preoccupation was the transformation of *byt*, or everyday life. Constructivist artists famously turned their attentions away from pieces for sequestered galleries to quotidian objects—clothing, buildings, kitchen utensils, food packaging. The clutter of the domestic sphere was associated with the vestiges of the old world that needed to be blasted away to make room for the new.

The private home, with its tawdry little objects was, of course, associated with women and the drudgery of housework. Here too it was thought that energy ordinarily expended by humans might be taken over by machines. The novel *Vasilisa Malygina* ends with the eponymous heroine discovering that she is pregnant. A gynecologist asks if she will return to her husband to avoid raising the child alone, but Vasilisa replies:

> "I'm not alone, though. Tomorrow I'm leaving for the weaving works. There's a fine group there, mostly women, weavers. We'll all work together there, organize a nursery…" A baby! That would be nice. She would show the other women how to raise a child in the Communist way. There was no need for a kitchen, for family life and all that nonsense.

Sergei Tretiakov's banned 1926 play *I Want a Baby!* stages the contradictions in NEP-era attitudes to sex. Although the play's protagonist Milda is too absorbed in revolutionary activity to be distracted by romance, she is suddenly overcome by the overwhelming desire to have a baby. She does not, however, want to have a husband or a family. Inspired by a eugenicist comrade, she decides to find the finest specimen of proletarian to mate with, explicitly relating the organization of production to the organization of reproduction. Milda, like Vasilisa, plans to raise her child collectively. She looks hopefully to the future, foreseeing the complete transformation of domestic life:

> Give it a few years. They'll finish building the block. The days of primus stoves and poky little rooms will be long gone…The concept of the housewife will be outmoded. People will have relaxed. There'll be a nursery.

Both Milda and Vasilisa not only abjure but seemingly abhor sex and the bodies that perform it; their masculine appearance (flat chests, masculine clothing, and short hair) is in stark contrast to the voluptuous giggling romantics they are surrounded by, their abdication of sexuality signifying an unwavering commitment to the revolution. Sex here is not presented as merely a distraction from revolutionary work, but is connected to patriarchal oppression. *Cement*'s heroine Dasha, transformed by the revolution into a red-kerchiefed androgyne, refuses her husbands advances, exclaiming, "I'm not even a human being to you, am I, Gleb? Can't you see I'm your comrade?… Half-witted obedience, nice little girl, that's not me."

But though sex itself is portrayed as both frivolous and oppressive (at least for the time being), women are paradoxically presented as being emancipated through bearing children. Pregnancy emerges as the ultimate contribution to the revolution. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman provocatively argues that the image of the child functions to uphold an unquestioned and unquestionable faith in the future upon which all political visions depend. But Edelman assumes that reproduction necessarily reproduces the hegemonic social order, or more precisely, that it reproduces some form of social order. He rejects all projects that might attempt to organize society less oppressively as inherently conservative insofar as they affirm a structure—any structure. Queerness as death drive is pure negation.

Conspicuously absent from *No Future* is any discussion of the relationship between the ideology of repro-

ductive futurism and the oppression of women. And this, surely, is one of the most compelling reasons to resist the injunction to reproduce. Reproduction is understood in the narrowest possible sense—Edelman's concern is with ideal rather than concrete babies, who appear on his pages as if by immaculate conception—without any consideration of how or by whom children are borne and raised. That is, his understanding of reproduction does not include any discussion of *social reproduction* and its place in the maintenance of the existing social order.

But early Soviet representations of motherhood present children as a *breaking* with rather than sustaining the "telos of the social order" that Edelman attacks. Reproduction becomes a form of non-reproduction. And this has implications not only for the future (that is, for the child), it also affords the woman the opportunity to escape patriarchal domination and throw herself into the collective, enabled by the state provision of communal childcare facilities, reconfigured workplaces, and transformed housing.

Yet, as Stalin consolidated his power in the 1930s, traditional family structures were celebrated once more. The image of the ruddy-cheeked, ample-bosomed woman of the fields that accompanied this political shift was always associated with fecundity, nature, and plenty. The child once again became a means of perpetuating the existing, if constantly progressing, social order—new life built on an ever increasing mound of corpses.

The pain and discomfort of pregnancy is conveniently glossed over in NEP-era celebrations of the child, gesturing toward a future where women could be emancipated from biological compulsion, where gender as such would cease to exist. Pregnancy is depicted as something more cerebral than corporeal: It occupies the mind rather than the womb, functioning as a kind of transcendent connection to the future, detached from the messy corporeality of the present. Maternal love is transferred from the individual to the collective, becoming the prototype for all communist love: equally distributed, unconditional, and committed, beyond the constrictions of the couple form or the family.

These visions of androgynous communist heroines and rows of indistinguishable babies in children's homes cast the dissolving of distinction in a positive light. Serge declared that revolutionary struggle was a sacrifice for the sake of the future, seeing his actions as integrated into the movement of history. As such, he renounced his identity, changing his name or posting at the bidding of the Party. He and his comrades were thus, he insists, *interchangeable*. In the context of the revolution, folding the specific into the general is framed as a necessary and, crucially, temporary aspect of the torturous journey to communism. But what happens when (or if) you eventually reach your final destination?

In 1970's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone argued that the Russian revolution failed because it failed to abolish the family. She acknowledges the familiar dystopian visions associated with radical attempts to transform social relations:

> cold collectives, with individualism abolished, sex reduced to a mechanical act, children become robots, Big Brother intruding into every aspect of private life, rows of babies fed by impersonal machines, eugenics manipulated by the state … all emotion considered weakness, love destroyed, and so on.

But, in the right hands, she insists that technology could participate in a revolution that would eliminate class antagonism along with gender difference.

Freed from the constraints of labor—meaning both work and childbirth—"sexuality would be released from its straightjacket to eroticize our whole culture, changing its very definition." Intimacy, comfort, arousal, support, tenderness, affection, stimulation, laughter, intensity, and companionship might be diffused throughout life, not cloistered away in private fleeting moments between individuals. TNI

Sparkle, Shirley, Sparkle!

By LAURA FISHER

An orphaned moppet in pursuit of a daddy, a pet in search of a warm lap, no one is more a child than Shirley Temple as she loses value.

IT takes a great deal of effort to manufacture and maintain any star persona, and that labor is particularly stark in the case of children, who grow tall, lose their baby teeth, and shed the babyish manner that is at the core of their appeal to audiences. Childhood is ephemeral by nature, and the specter of obsolescence haunts every child performer.

Shirley Temple's persona was more or less frozen at six years old. At the moment of her earliest success in 1934, Temple had exactly 56 golden ringlets, round eyes, chubby cheeks, and stocky legs.

The first image in the 1935 film *Curly Top* is that of a child's overturned head of glossy ringlets. Holding her head still for a beat, the child looks up, gazes into the camera, and breaks into a toothy, dimpled smile.

In continuous close-up, she shakes her head of curls for several seconds and giggles, never once looking away from the viewer. Temple is the only lead actor whose name doesn't flash atop her still portrait as the credits roll—it appears marquee-style above the name of the film—but it doesn't matter, of course. By 1935, Temple hardly needed to be introduced by name. Her face and curls identified her

readily enough, just as they more or less embody the plot of *Curly Top* and most of Temple's other movies: a small child performs her cuteness for us in a variety of locations, and we cannot look away.

The legend of Shirley Temple, who died on February 10 at the age of 85, is well known by now. After beginning her career at three years old, Temple became the No. 1 box office draw in the U.S. from 1934 to 1938, and starred in more than 20 highly profitable films by 1940. Her success effectively saved Twentieth Century Fox from bankruptcy, and Franklin D. Roosevelt credited her with perking up Americans at the height of the Great Depression. She remains the youngest performer to have received an Academy Award and one of the greatest examples of effective cross-merchandising in U.S. history. During her reign as box-office darling, Temple's films were geared toward adults as much as they were to kids. Only in the era of Sunday morning reruns have her films become children's movies.

But the cute precocious ideal she represents, her wide-eyed innocence and hearty vitality, has also spawned critique. There is a small academic cottage industry devoted to dissecting the troubling sexual politics of Temple's oeuvre, in which the star appears always as a motherless or orphaned moppet in pursuit of a daddy, a pet in search of a warm lap. Claudia MacTeer, the black protagonist of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, wishes to dismember her Shirley Temple doll to discover the source of its cultural power.

Temple's first role was as the recurring lead in the Baby Burlesks series of 1932–33. In these deeply exploitative one-reel shorts—they make *Toddlers and Tiaras* look like *Reading Rainbow*—she and the rest of the three- and four-year-old performers spoof famous films on a miniature scale, structuring cuteness as the staged collision of opposites: pairing grown up, risqué costumes on top with diapers fastened with huge safety pins on the bottom. Temple shines as Morelegs Sweet Trick, La Belle Diaperina, and Madame Cradlebait.

In Temple's full-length films from 1934 on, all cuteness lies in similar contrast: Temple wears either short dresses that show off her underwear and emphasize her stubby legs or oversize men's clothing and military apparel that highlight her tiny size through sheer incommensurability.

All of Temple's films delight in the visual spectacle of diminutive Shirley craning up her neck to speak to her white male companions, or being scooped up, tossed around, or carried about like a baby. (She danced but never cuddled with Bill Robinson, the black performer who co-starred in four of her films.) Temple's cuteness is structurally dependent on her being dwarfed by adults and kept remote from other white children onscreen, who studio executives believed threatened to "dilute [her] aura of uniqueness and thereby diminish [her] professional potential," as Temple herself put it in her autobiography, *Child Star*. Black children and the tall, dark haired Jane Withers, however, were exempt from this rule. In the racist logic of Temple's films, these children did not threaten her "aura" at all—they only affirmed it, using the same logic that placed her alongside adult men.

While Temple's talent was undeniable, her performances in films and in photographs are surprisingly ritualized, characterized by a limited set of gestures and poses that signify as reliable indicators of cuteness. If you have ever looked at pictures of her, you'll know them already. In print, she raises her eyebrows and purses her lips; raises a know-it-all finger; issues a military hand salute; plays with a toy or small pet; or sits in a dreamy, angelic pose. Onscreen, Temple frequently pushes back her head, implants it in her neck while bracing her shoulders and making several chins, and then shakes her head while making proclamations. She talks though a pout, widens her eyes to signal vitality and "spark," and of course, she sings, tap dances, and cries real tears like a champ.

There's an uncanny quality to Temple's persona that partly stems from the way she repeated these same tropes over many years—Temple's contract with Twentieth Century Fox stipulated that she pose for studio portraits

near-daily, sometimes while also holding a doll that looked just like her.

As a cultural ideal of white childhood perfection, Shirley Temple was heir to a modern understanding of individual children as subject to objectification and comparability, composed of qualities that could be "scientifically" measured, evaluated, and compared. Beginning in 1911, "experts" used growth charts and physiognomic tests to measure infants' physical and mental development in Better Baby competitions. After the U.S. Children's Bureau founded National Baby Week in 1914 in an effort to lower infant mortality rates, infants duked it out in Perfect Baby contests—capstone events that relied upon eugenicist criteria of childhood health and beauty. Such standards would help bolster Temple's status as the smallest and sweetest white girl in the world, and they suffuse the visual culture that surrounds her.

Magazine and newspaper articles focused, often obsessively, on the objective criteria by which Temple had achieved her "perfect" qualities, explaining her diet and exercise regime as instruction for readers hoping to shape their own offspring's development. One 1938 article from *Screen Guide* magazine performed a "scientific" analysis of Temple's physical development, charting her growth and weight statistics against those of the average child. Articles like these insisted that Temple's curls were absolutely real, each ringlet occurring naturally and requiring no upkeep, and reported on her genius IQ of 155. As a corollary, Temple's first studio contract skipped over her extensive early training in dance, making her appear like a natural talent with an inborn facility for tapping.

A major conceit of the child star is that because a child's talent is innate, her work in a film is therefore play. The successful child actor is by definition a natural, her performance as spontaneous and unwilled as it is convincing. (Recall how filmmakers describe the sheer luck of stumbling upon gifted child performers like Quvenzhané Wallis, or Dakota Fanning in her early years.) The media blitz surrounding Shirley Temple erased all visible signs of labor — both the work Temple performed six days a week since she was three years old, and the considerable work that went into training her and maintaining her image.

Historian Charles Eckert has argued that Depression-era discourse demanded that Temple's labor be overwritten as a narrative of love and play, making her status as a worker "self-obliterating." And so the mythology goes: Shirley did not memorize lines and dance steps and spend hours posing for still photographs each day—she simply *played*. Witness *Time* magazine: "Her work entails no effort. She plays at acting as other small girls play at dolls. Her training began so long ago that she now absorbs instruction almost subconsciously." Witness Temple's mother, Gertrude: "I was afraid she would begin to act for me. I want her to be natural, innocent, sweet. If she ceases to be that, I shall have lost her—and motion pictures will have lost her too." Lionel Barrymore expressed awe at his young co-star "artless art."

And yet this effort to reinscribe Temple's work as play co-existed with a media narrative about the economic relief she instigated in the midst of the Great Depression. One article in *Modern Screen*, "Shirley Temple: Saver of Lives," describes how Temple's success put thousands of people

on the payroll. She made millions for the film industry and uncountable merchandisers, even if her father lost through poor investing all but $44,000 of the money she made for herself.

Why do we need Shirley Temple to be a miracle? It hardly needs repeating that her image was micromanaged by her parents and Twentieth Century Fox, her birth certificate forged to make her one year younger and thus always apparently in advance of her peers (a fact she learned on her 12th—no, 13th birthday), and her hair rinsed with vinegar and set in pin curls nightly. Indeed, Temple was obligated to do everything possible to keep herself young and innocent. Her 1934 studio contract included clauses meant to pre-empt spoiling, specifying that her co-workers were not allowed to praise her, that she should isolate herself on set from adults who might not be able to resist flattering her, and that she was forbidden to watch films other than her own lest her famous capacity for absorption and imitation should distort her own natural style. If Temple became spoiled, executives reasoned, you would be able to see it in her face.

Even as Temple stuck to her formula and grew as an accomplished actor and dancer, you can see the strain in her eyes begin to outshine their sparkle around 1938. By 10 (9 to the public), Temple had lost all her baby teeth, subtly matured her hairstyle into two pigtails, and grown several inches, and her impression of an adult's vision of a six-year-old white girl had become unconvincing. The tension is obvious in Temple's 1938 movie *Little Miss Broadway*, in which she plays Betsy, an orphan whose singing and dancing saves the hotel she lives in and secures her some parents. Facing the crisis of Temple's obvious maturation, *Little Miss Broadway* resorts to desperate camera angles, often angling down at her from extreme heights to exaggerate her childishness as she peers powerlessly upward. Temple's choreographic strategies remain the same, yet her childish tricks—dancing on tables and countertops, being scooped up and thrown about, generalized cuddling—do not carry the same charge. Betsy simply has no cute power; her powers are more womanly. When she smiles at an older boy and begs him for a nickel so she can take the subway, he grumbles, "Oh, you dames are all alike."

Temple retired from the screen two years later. Her parents bought out the remainder of her studio contract and sent her to school for the first time. She would go on to make a handful of movies in her teens, but the love affair was plainly over.

As early as 1937, author Graham Greene perceived the end of Temple's childhood as a crisis of temporality. Greene's infamous review of *Wee Willie Winkie* in *Night and Day* magazine flagrantly eroticizes her—for which he was sued for libel—even as it critiques the way her audience fetishized the young star. And yet it also expresses a curious sense of nostalgia for Temple's disappearing girlhood. "The owners of a child star are like leaseholders—their property diminishes in value every year. Time's chariot is at their back," he writes. Greene adds to this (libelously) that infancy was *always* Temple's disguise; with a "well-developed rump," "agile studio eyes" and a "well-shaped and desirable little body" she had always held a specifically *adult* appeal for audiences. The "mask" of Temple's childhood, while clever, could not last.

Nostalgia has always been at the heart of Temple's appeal, as much at the height of her career as it is now upon her death. Nostalgia, after all, is a kind of resistance to progress; it's a mode of connecting with a time and place that has never truly existed but which endures as fantasy and which grounds national and cultural projects of all kinds. It's true that Shirley Temple was a pretty marvelous performer. But nostalgia can be a sinister optic in adult viewers gazing upon the young. All too easily, it cloaks the sexual objectification of children and obscures the role of cuteness as a commodity that is destined to decline in value. Temple was at odds with real time from the start.

She knew it too. "When I was fourteen, I was the oldest I ever was. I've been getting younger ever since." TNI

The Whitney Biennial for Angry Women

By EUNSONG KIM *and* MAYA ISABELLA MACKRANDILAL

We're tired of talking about them. We all know who they are. Let's talk about us.

I.

First, some definitions:

(White)spatiality: There is a specter here that haunts this space. It has multiple faces. We'll call one white supremacy: the belief in the universal, a pure idea arrived at by a series of white men who have combed through culture and curated its worth. Another face we'll call visual oppression. We'll call it passing. We'll call it presence without provocation. We'll call it just enough black faces to assuage liberal guilt without the discomfort of challenging anything. We'll call it the fantasy of postracial America. We'll call it visible invisibility.

Maya Mackrandilal *Sheath IV*, 2014

The Body of the Other: It goes where it pleases under the vague, ever-present threat of violence. It infiltrates. It wears the right clothes. It uses the right words. It has abandoned its mothers. But it claws at the ribs, crawls up the throat, and tumbles past the lips in polite company. Don't forget what Gloria Anzaldua told us: "Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out."

The Ritual of Looking: It is pleasant enough, the rapt masses examining objects, reading texts, staring at screens. It is pleasant enough, their whispered exchanges, the sidelong glances at fellow patrons. Like pilgrims, we circumambulate the rooms in near silent meditation, offering our attention to the gods that feel right to us. We want to say that there is a value in this thing we've been doing for thousands of years, this thing that's been with us before capitalism, before agriculture, before patriarchy. This thing was there at the beginning: to make, to regard what is made.

White Aesthetics: And isn't this specter the god of our neoliberal artistic landscape? A place where critical language—which is meant to articulate everything that is not said, to reveal the threads of systemic inequality—is co-opted by an inane buzzword pastiche? Where the artist-CEO employs the labor of others—material labor of unpaid assistants, affective labor of subject-bodies, contractual labor of the working class, temporary labor of performers, take your pick—to realize his unique vision? There is only space for "questions" here. Ambiguity is both a currency and a shield. The titillation of a brush with the radical—a safari of political rebellion—without the nuisance of actually addressing systems of power or challenging the status quo. All the trappings, none of the substance.

II.

Since 1932, the Whitney Biennial has promised its audiences a crib sheet for the market trends of contemporary art in the United States. Every two years, the Biennial anoints its debutants for the next round of museum trough feeding. Careers are ignited, financial introductions between artists and the wealthy are made, and Americans are re-educated as to what Art is supposed to mean in this country.

This is the Whitney Biennial for Angry Women.

Exiting the elevators on the fourth floor, we are confronted with curator Michelle Grabner's statement, printed on the wall, and a portrait of Barack Obama by Dawoud Bey. Translation: "Look at art in the era of our first black president!" Alternate translation: "Thumbs up to the Democratic Party!" Another alternate translation: This is a signifier that links Grabner's floor to liberal democracy—"Hey, I'm one of you, an American who believes in progress!" The biennial has three curators and each has a floor. Why shouldn't they all have their own presidential portrait? George W. Bush for Anthony Elms. Eisenhower or Johnson for Stuart Comer. It's safe to say that the Obama portrait is open code for the newest American myth: the multicultural, progressive future.

Obama as multicultural symbol establishes the "correct" gaze of the 4th floor and the 2014 Whitney. If museum goers were high-schoolers being forced to take standardized tests on imperial timelines, this symbol would represent the party line of contemporary American art. The insertion of people of color into white space doesn't

make it less colonial or more radical—that's the rhetoric of imperialistic multiculturalism, a bullshit passé theory. What's more, the 2014 Whitney Biennial didn't even bother to insert more people of color. The gesture was merely rhetorical.

Rogue counting is finding numbers that institutions don't want to produce, and we believe it's essential to apply it to white curatorial practices. But the problem is structural, rooted in a long violent genealogy of gatekeeping. In the tradition of the Zapatistas, we talk back to the institution by translating its language. The following quotes are drawn from the curators' introduction to the Biennial catalogue:

"We hope that our iteration of the Biennial will suggest the profoundly diverse and hybrid cultural identity of America today."

Translation: "The 2014 Whitney Biennial is the whitest Biennial since 1993. Taking a cue from the corporate whitewashing of network television, high art embraces white supremacy under the rhetoric of multicultural necessity and diversity."

"It became clear that we were inspired by a number of the same artists…"

Translation: "There are only so many white artists. You bump into the same ones again and again at parties."

"If there is any central point of cohesion, it may be the slipperiness of authorship that threads through each of our programs."

Translation: "We read Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' in college and still cling to it as a justification for all of our specious curatorial practices. We don't think about how it describes a cultural landscape rooted in white supremacy, where the positionality of the author is irrelevant. Questions of profit (i.e., who's getting paid and who's gaining power) will be conveniently ignored."

"The exhibition and this catalogue offer a rare chance to look broadly at different types of work and various modes of working that can be called contemporary American art."

Translation: "Our definition of *different* and *broad* is rooted in a definition of the art world that excludes the vast majority of the cultural production of people of color and others at the margins."

"Some borders—formal, conceptual, geographic, temporal—get tested, but we can still see through the assembled projects and people how the breadth of art is expanding because it is the artist and makers themselves who are pushing boundaries by collaborating, using the materials of others, digging through archives, returning to supposedly forlorn materials, or refusing to neatly adhere to a medium or discipline."

Translation: "Why can't there be women abstract painters?" Why is this conversation happening? It's so boring we're falling asleep. Abstract expressionism is the expression of white male capitalist identity—why keep it alive? Let's just decapitate the white male artists and dealers who believe this and be done with it.

The curatorial statement at the entrance to the fourth floor reads:

> Donelle Woolford [Joe Scanlan] radically calls into question the very identity of the artist …

Translation: "Joe Scanlan is a white male professor from Yale who created a black female persona to promote his work, because he thinks that black bodies give their owners an unfair advantage on the art market. We are more comfortable with white fantasies of the other than examining lived experience. We don't give a fuck about the history of blackface, carnival representations of the other, or violent displays of captured indigenous peoples as museum objects. We believe in our hearts that we are beyond this.

Translation: "What if we stopped searching for the implications of the white imagination and instead celebrated its racist and colonialist fantasies?"

The white man understands everything better than you, okay? He will use fictional black female identities and then their bodies as props to help you understand cuz he's afraid that if it comes from him, you might not pay attention. (I'm sorry, but this has never happened. Still, it's good to know that this is his greatest fear.) #DominantCulturePersecutionComplex

He understands the world better. That's why he's the director, the manager, the CEO, okay? That's why he is in charge of hiring, and we get to be hired, okay?! It's just the way that things work. He comes up with the ideas. You get paid to play your part. Do you get paid royalties? Do you become credited in the company? Are you the artist? No. But that's not the point. The point is that he showed us something old that looked like something new, and we must be grateful. Okay?

The manager, the director, and the CEO are neocolonialsts. He will help us understand that this is art. Diversification (i.e., the multicultural transnationalism of corporate enterprise) is beautiful to the white man director in charge of the spending accounts.

There is nothing wrong with him. There is only something wrong with you, the employee who refuses to submit to his gaze.

He will refuse his whiteness because he believes it's possible to refuse our embodiments. He will cite a nonsensical theory about essentialism or Foucault. He will refuse his whiteness as if whiteness can be refused even as it's constantly being affirmed.

"Donelle Woolford" is a fictional black female persona that Joe Scanlan invented and who now represents his body of work. In Scanlan's narrative biography, Woolford was his assistant who made work from the scraps in his studio. Scanlan hires various black actresses to perform as Woolford in productions that he directs, as well as for artist talks at educational institutions across the country.

Scanlan has two paintings in the Whitney Biennial—*Joke Painting (detumescence)*, 2013, and *Detumescence*, 2013—presented under Donelle Woolford's name (she is listed in the catalogue as if she were a real person, with no mention of Scanlan). These dick joke paintings, the latest in "her" practice, are based on works by Richard Prince." Scanlan has used his fictional black female character to appropriate from another white man. Bravo! White men continue to make art about their penises. Scanlan uses Donelle to camouflage his desire.

In Scanlan's narrative, Donelle Woolford has the privileges of a white cis man without being one. She went on lavish vacations with her family. She went to a fancy school. For her BFA she went to an even fancier Ivy where she met all the right people. She's had a slew of wonderful shows with powerful people. In Scanlan's narrative she didn't sit through critiques where her art was labeled as "not universal" because it contained her body. She didn't deal with the sidelong glances from her peers, convinced the only reason she was even there was because she was a "minority." She didn't live the life of a thousand little cuts, the infiltrator's life. She doesn't know what it's like because she is a figment of a white man's imagination.

Scanlan didn't look to lived experience or the political imaginations of Afrofuturism as a possible basis for his social fiction. Scanlan took the familiar life of a privileged white man and dumped its traits on an othered body. If only Scanlan could share the surface markings of your oppression—your skin color, your gender—but keep his foundational privilege, he could be a famous artist.

Because othered bodies are subcontractable and only

that. They are sources of revenue—a perfect metaphor for the art world.

He will say that some black women didn't mind, that they were paid, that it was okay. And he will say it over and over again, and you, dear consumer of the hodgepodge that is recycled and rebranded as culture—can you reject his repetition?

Actionable Responses:

1. Joe Scanlan wanted Donelle Woolford to perform at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which only shows works by artists of African descent or works inspired by black culture. The museum rejected his proposal. Whoever made that decision deserves an AWARD. Please contact us if you are interested in receiving an original sculpture and tributary poem.

2. We've coined the hashtag #scanlaning and launched an accompanying Tumblr (http://scanlaning.tumblr.com). We invite women of color and their allies to produce original "Joe Scanlans" (a.k.a. whiteboy art) to post online. We invite everyone to call out art-world racism with #scanlaning, to call out the privileged white aesthetic with #scanlaning, to call out white male fantasy with #scanlaning.

IV.

Dear White Curators,

1. Diversity is not the inclusion of those not from New York. Diversity isn't more white women. Diversity isn't safe art. Diversity isn't black bodies put on display by white artists.

2. You don't get to appropriate diversity as a buzzword for your PR work. Besides, we know how to count:

—There is one black female artist (we refuse to count your fictional black female artist)

—You put the two Puerto Ricans in the basement …

—HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN is a collective of 38 mostly black & queer artists but barely gets treated as one artist. How amazing would it be if their 38 people counted as 38 people at the Whitney, which would accord them 40% of the museum's space? They have been allotted an "evolving" temporary screening slot. They are the largest collective in the Biennial yet their real estate is virtually nonexistent.

—Gary Indiana, another white male artist trafficking in racist fantasies, receives more space, time and visibility than the 38 members of HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN

#tertiaryplacements #tertiarynarratives #tertiarybodies

3. Your theory is tired, your reasoning bland and your politics telling. To use Sara Ahmed's term, your Biennial is a case study in "reproductive whiteness" – citation practices that privilege whiteness, white thinkers and white history to perpetuate whiteness. We know how to read between the lines.

4. Your choice to reproduce a whitewashed art world has material effects on the lived experiences of people of color and denies the shifts taking place in our visual world.

5. If you are interested in learning more about white supremacy operates in the art world see Pedro Velez's ongoing public conversation: #drunkdictators #momumentsafari #AllYouArtEditorsareWhite #MonochromaticCritics #ProtestSigns #JamesCunonialism

Love and Kisses,

@clepsydras and @femme_couteau

P.S.

—After Jerry Garry Saltz's praise for George W. Bush's paintings, his approval is not a substantive career achievement. #irrelevant

—Scanlan has the same critical framework as Perez Hilton #manchild

—#solidarityisforwhitewomen

—#AngryPoC

Pedro Vélez *Drunk Dictators*, 2014

V.

We're tired of talking about them. We all know who they are. Let's talk about us. Let's talk about the people on the margins of things. Let's talk about the ones who slip through.

Let's talk about Etel Adnan.

In his catalogue essay, Stuart Comer points to Adnan's work and the "nomadic, cosmopolitan patterns of her life" as the framework for his section of the exhibition. In her work he sees a kind of prescience. He sees "proto-screens" and "hybridity." He attempts to mine the past in order to form a portrait of the present. Much has been made about the age of the artists in the 2014 Biennial relative to previous editions, and all three curators should be commended for reframing what it means to talk about the Now. But we are most seduced by Comer's selection of Adnan. It is an assertion that we write new histories each time we make our work, that our histories are mutable, interconnected webs, not a linear progression of obvious genius. It is a nod to the periphery, to the unseen actors who shape our world.

In her leporello *A Funeral March for the First Cosmonaut*, Adnan takes us on an epic journey that sweeps through the individual, the political, and the cosmic with each brushstroke. Her prescience goes beyond form and medium as she constructs a narrative so rich with associations that it exists in the past, present, and future.

and we are the introverts of the space age
scratching clouds with closed fists
burying eyes in The leather of trees
eating and remaining hungry
kissing and remaining lonely
speaking and remaining doomed
breaking wells in the direction of death

This is the legacy of our civilization: No matter how far we move forward, we carry so many of the same fears. But Adnan offers us hope in the death of a cosmonaut, hope in our own mortality. The body suffers and then it dies, and those who are left behind will hold up the memory in space "which lingers between atom and dream."

There is nothing new, just the old made new. This is our human legacy

Let's talk about Dave McKenzie:

The Beautiful One Has Come does not mark itself as special—it is more dismissible than it is inviting. Dave McKenzie's video is five minutes long and filters between two spaces: one a museum, one an abandoned building. One contains the bust of Nefertiti at the Neues Museum in Berlin, the other—the white noise of graffiti and broken windows. Both spaces are filled with objects we are not allowed to touch, signifiers we have lost access to. They are the objects of our imaginations—artifacts of ancient mythology and urban industrialization. McKenzie's video shows the markings of these spaces, their capacity, their distance.

Each space is represented with a single take—with almost a direction transition between the gallery space and the abandonment. There are two moments where Nefertiti is clearly displayed. The rest are hurried shots of museum-goers looking at her. They watch her. They listen to stories about her. She remains in glass, looking elsewhere.

We are given more attention to the abandoned building than the museum. Here the camera floats. It is not hand held. It glides between the graffiti, the broken windows, the greenery outside. The spectator is moved slowly and there are no sounds of human interaction. We hear the outside but it is quieter than the museum.

The Beautiful One Has Come reveals the markings of space—how some are preserved and others are utterly destroyed. In the museum, the video performs a critical geography, becoming a quiet and constant protest of provenance, cultural privileging and beauty.

What is visible? What is invisible? What is at hand? What is hard to find?

We need to think about these questions and distinctions.

We need to think about taisha paggett.

Would the average viewer of the Whitney Biennial know that paggett was in the show? Probably not. Her name haunts the page of the museum guide, she is in "Other Locations." "Other Locations" is tertiary placement such as: temporary screening schedules, "hallway galleries" and limited-run performances. But this is the Whitney Biennial for Angry Women. And we know she's there, because we're intimately familiar with Other Locations. We know she's there because we set a fine-toothed comb to the catalogue to find her. We didn't get to see her work in person. We didn't get to stand with her, moving slowly, feeling our breath. But we can come to rest in her words on the page. To put it in her words, we can think about "a transhistorical, metaphysical her," because when she talks through her words she speaks our lives back to us. We know this terrain, this terrain of the now. She is the beating heart of what we wish the Whitney was.

In the Biennial's catalogue, paggett writes:

"also remember: the experience is not for me but for an us-ness that dies and comes alive depending on what we're open to receiving, what interpretive frames we're speaking to/from, and how deeply and consciously we're breathing (the underseeing) as all of this is going down."

This is the Whitney Biennial for Angry Women. In Other Locations: experiences for an us-ness that is both dead and alive. A demand for the impossible: decolonization, decentering, radical thinking, radical action, radical making. TNI

My Gay Shame, or, How Patriarchy Stole Sex

By HANNAH BLACK

I think this is not an unusual story, but only a story about being born a girl.

AS tweens in the 1990s, before online porn and sex advice were as ubiquitous as they are now, we learned sex from magazines. We bought them with pocket money, or borrowed them from our mothers and older sisters. I still vividly remember fragments from this patchwork self-achieved sex-ed: a letter to an advice column, for example, asking, "How many fingers does a boy use when he fingers you?" Well, girl, it depends.

Knowing what was expected of us, we learned sex as technique, as mechanics. I had a working knowledge derived entirely from trashy magazines and hearsay of how to perform that ancient oblation, the blowjob, by the age of 12. When I finally met a hard dick in person, I was astonished to discover that it was possible to work out what you wanted to do with it from your desire rather than from technical expertise. This brief happy discovery was short-lived; through my teens, as the gender machine redoubled its crushing work, my pleasure receded and was overshadowed by sexual duty.

Off the glossy page, there was a whole world of sex out there that adults coyly warned us about. You weren't supposed to accept gifts from strangers, wander too far off the path in the nature reserve, or go into the toilets in the park. The people who populated this forbidden realm were exclusively men; some of them wanted to have sex with children, we were told, and some of them wanted to have sex with each other. But I was thrilled by these glimpses of sex, which felt to me like promises. The legendary men who lurked in

shadowy places were on my side, because they did what they liked, and I thought that when I grew up I too would be able to do what I liked.

There was a beautiful park with an old, wild forest that our parents would sometimes take us to. Everyone knew, and so children knew too, men met there to have sex. This knowledge thickened the sunlight that hung in the trees' foliage and deepened the shadows at the mouths of the caves. Once I succumbed to this faint vertigo and got lost there. Strangers helped me find my way back to my family. Who were they, my mother wanted to know, urgently, and was suddenly and completely reassured when I explained that I had been helped by two men who were holding hands. I remember her and her friend doing the thing that adults do over kids' heads when they think they don't know something, the shared secret laughter. But I felt superior to them because I was the one who the forest had briefly swallowed and taken for its own. Because most of the adults in my life wanted to hide sex from me, or half-hide it, or mistook children for ignorant people who didn't know what sex was, I felt an immediate and natural allegiance with those adults who fucked in public.

Through the AIDS crisis, many cruising spots in the UK were destroyed by local councils. Sex-as-play was being banished from the world just as it was being banished from my life. Maybe my understanding of this war on public sex as a terrible historical defeat for proletarian sociality is autobiography masquerading as analysis, and maybe that doesn't matter. I emerged into puberty from a childhood in which sexual play and experimentation, outside the utopia of my siblinghood with my brother, was mostly conducted with other little girls. But most of us understood early, and without being explicitly told, that sex with boys was a duty that we would do well to find pleasing.

Confronted with those terrible, quasi-scientific girls' magazines which told young women how to give men sexual pleasure, I turned to novels by gay men to find out why I should bother: for an education in how to love men's bodies. Between the local library and my bookstore job, I worked my way through several books a week, unimaginative but thorough: Edmund White, Alan Hollinghurst, James Baldwin, Gore Vidal, Derek Jarman's memoirs, every play by Tennessee Williams; I also read writers who weren't gay men but wrote about them, like Pat Barker and Michael Chabon. I bought a second-hand copy of E.M. Forster's *Maurice* and it turned out to have a love letter handwritten on the inside cover. These were books about people who knew how to be consumed by desire, and how to take desire lightly. I thought they revealed the mysteries of the secret adult world of sex.

I read gay men as a lesson in masculine pleasure, and as a revolt against the unpleasure of femininity. I read them to learn how to be a man. An eccentric neighbour gave me a copy of Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers* when I was about 15—an incredible gift. There I read the immortal line, "A man who fucks a man is a double man!" Typing the sentence out now, it still strikes me with the force of truth. It pleases me because it means, perversely, that a woman who has sex with a man is a man too, and a woman who has sex with women is a double woman. You are what you fuck, and what fucks you is you already, by tacit admission. (Though a friend recently pointed out to me that doubling might not mean intensification but splitting, complicating, fragmenting.)

Often no amount of desire seemed enough to convince straight boys that girls actually wanted to sleep with them; most of them persisted in acting like they had to trick or otherwise force them into it. Or they would say during sex, wonderingly, "It's like you really like it!" For years I heard this as self-loathing, and assured boys that they were beautiful and sexy—only later realizing that it was a slur not against the male body, but against female desire. My own desire corroded under the pressure; a passionately sex-curious, wildly affectionate child, by my late teens I barely remembered what sexual pleasure felt like, and had to re-learn it from first principles, a precarious and damaged gift that I've found and lost over and over again. And I think this is not an unusual story,

but only a story about being born a girl.

Boys, however, could be girls without losing themselves. As a romantic teen I loved the tacky but heartrending scene in the movie *Stonewall* where a drag queen takes off her make-up and, temporarily transformed into a soberly dressed boy, promises her lover, "I'm your knight in shining armor, baby, your boy and your lady. I'm your momma lion, I'm your man." In queerness, you could be all things to all people, or to just one if you liked. But whenever I slept with a man I was only a woman, and men found so many ways to remind me of it. I was in dance school the first year I was in London, surrounded by beautiful, witty and physically ingenious gay boys; they did everything better than I did. Looking back at the gay men I knew in my extreme youth, I realize that I tried to learn both masculinity and femininity from them. I have always had many women in my life, as friends and lovers, but for whatever reason I couldn't find my image of myself among them.

I suspected, and books and porn confirmed, that sex between men did not have to leap the impasse of one person's disbelief in the other's sexual pleasure. Yes, I knew one or two girls who slept around with the enthusiasm and freedom of boys, but almost nowhere between men and women did I see the collegiate, unpretentious sexual warmth that seemed to abound among men. In the gay world that I intimated in fragments, taking a dick was a form of mastery. I treasured the line in an early episode of the wonderfully graphic UK drama *Queer As Folk*: "He said he wanted to stay inside me forever, and I wanted him to. I can still feel him, like he's still there." In the straight world, there were few representations of how a receiving body strains and reshapes itself: Being fucked was fashioned as biological destiny, as if all bodies with pussies are born knowing how best to receive. After a particularly terrible early sexual experience, my body rebelled against this. I didn't return to that form of sex until my first months at college, when I fell into a love affair with a friend, a man who was mostly only attracted to men. We made up the kind of sex we were able to have as we went along, clumsily and without special grace, but in the process I was somehow convinced all over again that sex was a place where pleasure might be found.

The rest of my time at college was shaped by my best friend there, a stoner who liked to tell stories about his trips to men-only saunas where people knew bodies first and names only later or never. He also taught me a lot about the practice of longing for straight men. Friendships between women and gay men are often depicted as research labs on how to be femme, but I think what a woman might look for among gay men is masculinity, not femininity. I didn't (only) want fun sex gossip or advice about clothes, both of which were in plentiful supply among my woman-identified friends; I wanted to feel like a boy. If I had to be a girl, I wanted be the kind that men meant when they called each other girl. I was so dis-identified from (white) womanhood that straight men's desire for me, when it happened, felt like an unexpected transgression that I often didn't know how to respond to. Or I wanted it to be that way, because I had learned a deep suspicion of what men's desire did to people who allowed themselves to be women. I wanted sex without love, I wanted sex to be love, I wanted to be anonymous, I wanted my own desire and not to be only desire's object.

I know this is a wildly optimistic reading of what gay sex culture promises women, in a world where women are conceptually if not legally still property as well as people. Arguably gay men are the most committed of all to the brutal practice of manhood because their desire as well as their sociality is fraternal. Like every reality compared to its daydream image, in real life gay men can disappoint by being no more or less than men after all, just as the white women with whom I assume comradeship sometimes side with whiteness. We are all fragmented in relation to structures of domination, and trying to survive them. But I wanted an excuse to love men, or a safe way to love them, and this is where I found it. Everywhere in the straight world, masculinity reigned as patriarchy. But in my image of gay men, distorted by longing, I found masculinity in a form I could bear. TNI

Weird Corporate Twitter

By KATE LOSSE

Just as corporations have become persons in law, they have also become persons on social media.

IN 2014, high-profile corporate voices on Twitter can be as casual, playful, and sometimes intimate as an individual user's—and often more so. "~draw me like one of your French toasts~" the chain restaurant Denny's coos from its Twitter account, raking in thousands of faves and retweets. The tweet is funny, a kind of Twitter humor tour de force that remixes a relevant social-media meme with a comforting Denny's menu item.

At the same time, upon reading perfectly casual and on-meme corporate tweets like these in my Twitter timeline, I've begun to feel discomfited. To be perfectly honest, I feel unsettled, even usurped or displaced, by corporations' perfectly on-point social-media voices.

To understand my unease, it's necessary to trace back the trajectory of popular social-media voices to the time before corporations sounded like teens. Sounding like a teen when you're not one isn't new. When Twitter was first gathering steam around 2008 and 2009, I followed @hipsterrunoff, the Twitter account of a blogger named Carles who posted arch, deadpan musings—so flat in

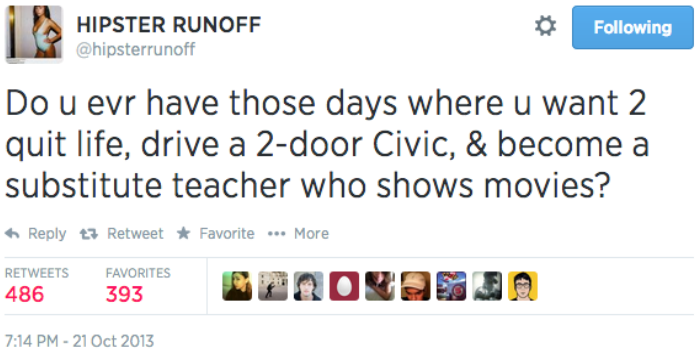
tone they felt infallibly ironic—on alternative American culture on his blog. The voice of Carles's Twitter account was something like that of a perpetually wry and mercurial teenager talking affectionately to his friends. "H8 U" he would say one minute, "<3 U" the next, as if exchanging texts. "Miss u."

Carles's "real" identity was anonymous, and as such his voice could represent everyone's inner teen friend or teen self, roaming around mall establishments like Chili's and Hot Topic and dreaming of escaping to a relevant music #festival, an aimlessness amid our capitalist landscape with which Carles's thousands of followers could identify. "Do u evr feel so empty that the only thing that can make u feel complete is the #Coachella lineup?" "Do u evr have those days where u want 2 quit life, drive a 2-door Civic, & become a substitute teacher who shows movies?"

Through Twitter you could feel like Carles was yours, hidden in your web browser or phone, making commentary about the anytown/job/suburb that you could believe—via the elastic proximity of social media—that you shared with him. Perpetually alienated and abbreviating and remixing words, he seemed firmly and comfortingly situated in subculture and not of the focus-group-tested, corporate mainstream that spoke to us on television and print.

A few years ago these distinctions were clear—only an imaginary teen on social media could tease us via text with his rapidly mutating tastes and emotions, while corporations still tried in stiff earnest to get us to buy whatever they were selling. Voice was the thing that told you who was who: casual insouciance signaled authenticity; perky seriousness was for brands worried about their bottom line.

But slowly, and by 2014, very quickly, the insouciant, lower-case voice became the mainstream, corporate voice. Now, a Denny's tweet can sound more casual and on meme than any individual's Twitter account. And it isn't just Denny's: Brands from Chipotle to Hamburger Helper have gained massive followings this way. If in the past five years



we all had to grow up somewhat—Carles doesn't even tweet anymore—how is it that corporations grew down, becoming the new meme-aware "teens" of social media?

It is a fact of marketing that brands can't ask for business too directly. People tend to recoil from requests that feel too direct, and this is why social-media accounts explicitly selling anything seem like spam, triggering disinterest. Brands have to make us want them by giving us something: in branding terms, providing #value. This is how humor, or the gift of laughs, becomes the universal gift that any Twitter account can provide to its followers, as #weirdtwitter proved in its universe of thousands of anonymous accounts tweeting nonsensical humor at each other.

Seeing this humor as a universal formula for followers, corporate brands have steadily moved to the #weird #humor side of Twitter, in unison.

But if the conceit of #weirdtwitter is that any average person in America can remake themselves as a pseudonymous #weirdtwitter comedian, corporations joining the fray have an outsize advantage, because they are neither anonymous nor average nor even a person. When corporations tweet something "weird" and "funny" to us, we pay more attention: The thought of a traditional corporate entity, which has historically had no direct "voice," suddenly distilling itself into an eccentric, devil-may-care character is instantly affecting, precisely because of how uncanny, even creepy, it is.

We all know that a corporation's Twitter account is managed by a social-media worker (despite Denny's claims on Twitter to be an "egg" rather than a social-media guru). Social media managers for corporate brands tend to be young people steeped in digital culture, who may be junior in status but are tasked with building a newly "hip" brand essence for the social media reading public. So does the frisson of reading these weird corporate tweets happen because we are rating the social-media manager's performance on Twitter, like an Olympic judge holding up a score at the end of each tweet (and supply-

ing important metrics to the brand at the same time)? Or does the Denny's brand's mewling Twitter intimacy make us feel paternal, bound to support and foster our corporate brand children as they speak to us through the web, learning our native medium?

That explanation doesn't seem complete to me, though. I also feel a sinister intimation of power in these new corporate social-media voices. Denny's the corporation has transformed itself through its tone into a hip, ageless kid basking in the approval of its many followers. And this may be the creepy core what makes me uncomfortable in the Denny's voice: When brands speak anonymously and yet so intimately through the voices of unnamed social-media managers, we like them more than we can like any individual tweeter. On social media, the cute-voiced corporation is cuter than any person.

For us, there is a sociopathic freedom in knowing there is no individual behind the Twitter account. The corporation will not reach out for support in hard times the way an individual person on Twitter may. Laughing with it doesn't trigger an existential fear that we might be relied on for support, sending vibes or crowdfunds during @dennysdiner's darkest emotional hour.

But while our own motivations for liking corporate brands more than individual people on Twitter may signal a certain desire to shirk responsibility, the exploitative relation goes both ways. The corporation, while needing nothing emotional from us, still wants something: our attention, our loyalty, our love for its #brand, which it can by definition never return, either for us individually or for us as a class of persons. Corporations are not persons; they live above persons, with rights and profits superseding us. The most we can get from the brand is the minor personal branding thrill of retweeting a corporation's particularly well-mixed on-meme tweet to show that we "get" both the meme and the corporation's remix of it.

Is the sinisterness of the Denny's Twitter presence, then, that even as we are laughing at a restaurant chain tweeting at us like a coy, meme-hashing kid, we are also aware that we are being manipulated by the witty teen's fundamental opposite? That no individual person could garner the laughs, followers, and, most important, shareholder value for being coolly funny that a corporation can? Because regular users can amass faves and followers, but not typically the shareholder value in their personal brand that a corporation can.

That is, in speaking to us like an equal, Denny's shows us how we can never be equals with a corporate brand, on Twitter as in life. In fact, just as corporations have become "persons" in law, they have also become "persons" on social media, bearing all the fruits of personhood while retaining all the massive advantages of being an entity that defies individual personhood. At the end of the day, @Dennysdiner is just a legal structuring entity housed somewhere in Delaware, formed to serve mediocre diner food in cities across America. And yet in spite of—or maybe even because of—this uncanny act of assuming personhood, we like it. Corporations can't be lonely, but with their newfound "cute" voices they are becoming more popular than people.

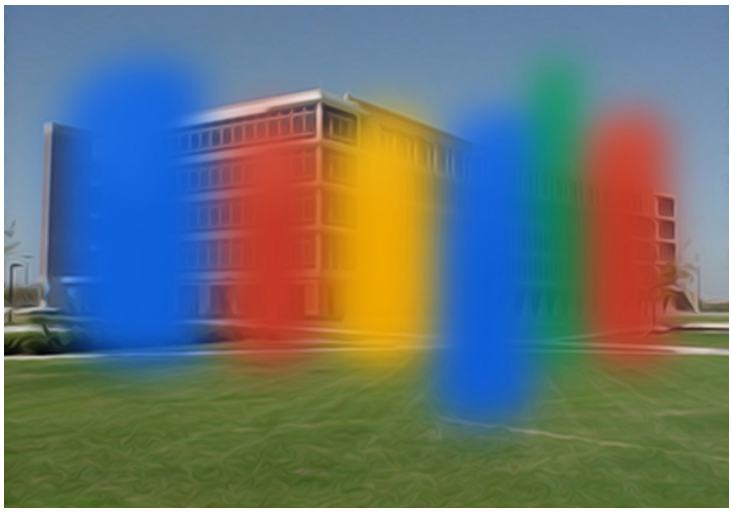
To become popular and "cool," brands have had to learn the very techniques we learned as resistant teens to deal with power: our sarcastic humor and our endlessly remixable memes. Corporate #weirdtwitter redeploys the memes we once used to signal our resistant identities to one other to make themselves seem like our sassy peers. In other words, Denny's the corporation wants a seat at the table at the Denny's where we used to go to meet and commune with other teens in all our midnight, underground, post-all-ages-show angst.

It isn't enough for Denny's to own the diners, it wants in on our alienation from power, capital, and adulthood too. While we giggle at corporate #weirdtwitter tweets, the corporate invulnerability that makes them easy to follow is also what makes their assumption of a human, familiar voice feel, despite our laughter and faves, cold and a bit pathological. Denny's too wants to belong. TNI

Plantation Neoliberalism

By CHRIS TAYLOR

Is an intense fixation on present conditions of labor simply the best means of making slavery disappear?



FRÉDÉRIC Lordon's book *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza & Marx on Desire* is haunted by a dream it can't quite recall. Not Lordon's, but Baruch Spinoza's—though even calling the dream Spinoza's, as if he had owned or authored it, is to miss the lesson that the dream relates. The dream challenges conventional notions of having and being had, appropriation and expropriation. It's a dream, in other words, about slavery, about those whom we still too easily call "slaves," and it's one where the fact of enslavement sends

Spinoza running into a kind of psychic fugitivity. He narrates it in a letter:

One morning, as the sky was already growing light, I woke from a very deep dream to find that the images which had come to me in my dream remained before my eyes as vividly as if the things had been true—especially the image of a certain black, scabby Brazilian whom I had never seen before. For the most part this image disappeared when, to divert myself with something else, I fixed my eyes on a book or some other object. But as soon as I turned my eyes back away from such an object without fixing my eyes attentively on anything, the same image of the same Black man appeared to me with the same vividness, alternately, until it gradually disappeared from my visual field.

Slavery's ordinariness shows up here as what early modern Europeans think about when they're not thinking of anything in particular. Spinoza manages his uncanny encounter with Europe's politico-economic unconscious through a careful, calibrated winnowing of attention to the stuff of his existential present: a book, perhaps a nightstand, perhaps even his own body. By sticking to the particularity of his European ordinary, Spinoza hopes to flee from this cognitive Netherlands.

But it doesn't quite work. The moment Spinoza's attention is unfixed from the world immediately before him, the Brazilian reappears. Scabby with leprosy, his presence disrupts the ontological order into which he intrudes. The catch is that he cannot not intrude, for slavery sticks to the European world like its shadow. And so Spinoza's confident assertion that the Brazilian "gradually disappeared from my visual field" is just a bit rich. Writing in the clear light of an early morning, one in which subjects and objects have re-achieved their clarity and distinctness, he can insist that the man has disappeared—it was just an "image," one leaving his European ordinary untouched. But the return in his letter to this scene of psychic undoing suggests that the encounter impressed Spinoza more than he is willing to admit. One lapse of attention to his everyday world and the scabby Brazilian might reappear, disjointing Spinoza's present from itself.

For a book as concerned as Lordon's is with Spinoza and with human servitude, it's funny that the philosopher's famous sighting of an enslaved person should go uncited. Funny, but not without a kind of logic. Lordon's rigorous attempt to mobilize Spinoza in order to work through the present neoliberal composition of work assumes first and foremost that the present to which it refers is unique. What the original French title refers to as neoliberal "servitude" is posed as qualitatively distinct from the forms of work and domination that precede it. And yet the history of slavery that Lordon wants to bracket off as he fixes his attention on our present symptomatically erupts into his text with a surprising regularity, casting the ontological order he describes under the shadowy presence of slavery's past.

This symptomatic eruption begins on the very title page of the translation, in which the gentler *Capitalisme, désir et servitude* becomes the blunt (and more marketable, perhaps) *Willing Slaves of Capital*. This translation does no small measure of conceptual harm to Lordon's argument; he rigorously distinguishes between desire and will, denouncing the liberal metaphysics of the former. But this moment of (mis)translation is a kind of interpretation of the original's unconscious. Where *Capitalisme, désir et servitude* imagines that it is beginning after slavery, the translation's insistence on the signifier "slave" thrusts the Brazilian back before our eyes. And as Lordon's text wants to but can't let itself show, the term's stickiness is less an accident than an index, a material sign marking the persistent structural effects of plantation slavery on the composition of work in our present, a persistence that shatters any assurance that we dwell in a novel present—or that we dwell in the present at all.

Nothing seems further than plantation slavery from

the question Lordon poses: Why do people today work, and willingly, and even joyfully, for other people? Why do we willingly serve capital? Indeed, the very figure of the "willing slave" seems to erect a partition between different historical regimes of servitude. But Lordon's aims are less historical than conceptual. In thinking through the possibility of a desirable servitude, Lordon's aim is to shift the philosophical apparatus that organizes liberal, and then Marxist, understandings of servitude and enslavement, mastery and domination. For Lordon, liberal and left approaches to servitude have been "built around the idea of free will as sovereign self-control." The primacy of the will in such accounts poses human servitude as either a relation of involuntary domination or one of voluntary consent. But such recourse to the will leaves untroubled what requires explaining: You might willingly work for Facebook, and even give it your all—but why would you want to?

The concept of "voluntary servitude" (a phrase he draws from La Boétie) doesn't cut it for Lordon: It wants to preserve the sovereignty of the willful, intending subject even while it accounts for most subjects' actual non-sovereignty. The figure of the willing slave is an impasse in the philosophical constitution of liberal modernity, but it also, for Lordon, offers a chance to switch philosophical gears. If Hobbes and Locke could only think of the figure of the slave to think its impossibility,

Lordon suggests that Spinoza's anthropology of the passions offers a way of thinking the willing slave as a non-contradictory figure for a reality we all recognize. "There is," Lordon declares, "no such thing as voluntary servitude. There is only passionate servitude. That, however, is universal."

In moving from a metaphysics of the will to an anthropology of the passions, Lordon reframes what makes work work in our neoliberal, post-Fordist present. For Lordon, employers today rely less on the threat of starvation (a form of discipline he attributes to the epoch of industrial capitalism, that of Marx's Britain) or on the shaping of desire through consumer goods (a form of subject formation he attributes to the epoch of Fordism) than they do on reconstructing work itself as a "source of immediate joy." Lordon describes this process as "co-linearization." Co-linearization aims to reduce the uncertainties that dog scenes of employment: The meeting of employer and employee is a meeting of two desires, each going their own way. The desire of the employee continually threatens to drift from the desire of the boss; the neoliberal workplace accordingly attempts to reduce this drift to zero, to get the employees' desires to align to that of the firm's.

In this alignment, capitalism moves beyond the "intrinsically sad" affects of industrial capitalism and the "extrinsically joyful" affects of Fordist consumerism; "the sting of the idea that 'real life is elsewhere'" has been removed from the well-aligned worker. Joyful life is life spent working at the call center, at the Google campus, and so on. Capital today profits on humans' capacities for affective survival, on our abilities to convert the bleakness of any situation into conditions for a different kind of flourishing. The desire to work becomes the last achievable desire available for those who have to work all the time anyhow; we desire it so we can keep desiring.

As Nietzsche might put it, we love neoliberal life not because we are used to living, but because we are used to loving, and sometimes the boss is the only game in town. If you've got to dance with the one who brung ya, you might as well dance hard and enjoy yourself; you might wind up falling in love. And so we do. We identify with our employer's brand, we take so much pride in our professions that we adopt them as our names, we modestly repair our alienated relation to our neoliberal world. Firms seize on this reparative labor as a chance to refashion laborers, following a "delirious vision of the

total possession of individuals," one "so complete, that it is no longer satisfied by external enslavement—obtaining the desirable behavior—but demands the complete surrender of 'interiority.'"

Affective relations are now primary to the maintenance of employment relations; passions shape the materiality of the world we inhabit today. This is the present that Lordon thinks we can finally describe as the elaboration of Marx through Spinoza, as if human history's movement through early industrialism, through Fordism, and into post-Fordism has finally aligned with the human ontology Spinoza projected. Other Spinozian Marxists, such as Antonio Negri, tend to narrate this eschatological movement as the real subsumption of the social into capital, a real subsumption that is always really happening, now, really.

But what if our present has no singularity, no novelty, nothing new or neo- about it? Even as Lordon attempts to fixate on the specificity of our Spinozian epoch, distinguishing contemporary modes of servitude from those which preceded them, the Brazilian can occasionally be seen cutting into the privileged present. Lordon himself remarks upon the tenuousness of the distinctions he draws: "The distinction between the successful endeavour of reconfiguring the desire of employees and the pure and simple enslavement of reconditioning is at times extremely tenuous." Neoliberal modes of producing desire can't be so rigorously distinguished from prior modes of repressing workers' desires for something else.

What Lordon here poses as an empirically-induced hesitation over analytic categories—a moment at which he cannot attend to the object presently before him—might be better read as a the problem of establishing a distinction between then and now, between past and present. Such moments pose a radical question: Are contemporary organizations of labor really so novel, or have we simply learned, with Spinoza, that an intense fixation on the present is the best means of making the slave disappear? What if Lordon took his metaphorics of servitude and slavery more seriously, more radically, and attempted to read the composition of neoliberal work from the perspective of Spinoza's Brazilian?

He would at least have good reason to do so. The robust account that Lordon offers of post-Fordist, neoliberal capitalism maps neatly onto sociological descriptions of plantation capitalism. For Lordon, the post-Fordist moment is constituted in part by the declining purchase of the value-form: "the lack of an objective, substantial reference in which to ground the measure of surplus power obliges us to detach the idea of exploitation from the calculation of value…" We thus need a "political theory of capture more than an economic theory of value"—a theory, that is, of how value is bossed out of subjects without using the normative or technocratic idioms of economic calculability.

For West Indian economic historians grouped around the Plantation School (such as Lloyd Best, Kari Polanyi Levitt, George Beckford, and Douglas Hall), this is precisely how the plantation functioned, and, indeed, still functions. The plantation's relationship to export markets meant that labor time and economic value were only loosely tied together. The measured and measurable value form of liberal capitalism did not, and could not, regulate the time or intensity of work—no matter how much improving planters tried (as so many neo-Weberian accounts have lately stressed) to rationalize production. The capitalist plantation was animated by the incalculability of the value it produced. Monetizable value was only a transcription of prior political "capture," as Lordon might put it.

This meant that the capitalist plantation was organized by the brutal simplicity of command—a command that materialized as much in physical violation as in quotidian scenes of subjections in which enslaved selves were fashioned. The injunction to love, to laugh,

to dance, to sing. To live and make a life worth living through the unlivable. Enslaved people were not only bound for life but to it.

To think the structural sameness between now and then isn't to claim that the experiences are identical. Nor is it simply to claim, in the true but inadequate formulation, that slavery sits at the origins of the capitalist world-system. It is, rather, to think of plantation slavery as opening a deep-structural continuum in which time doesn't pass or move forward but accumulates, as Ian Baucom might put it. If plantation slavery resides at the origins of capitalism, this is because the plantation-form insistently presides over those moments in which capitalism re-originates itself, moments in which new epochs of exploitation and accumulation emerge—early industrialism, Fordism, post-Fordism. Every form of capitalist labor process bears a homology to the plantation, because the plantation is all there is.

Or, put less dramatically, the slave plantation names an accumulated repertoire of forms for creating and controlling work, and the components of this repertoire are continually re-composed and re-combined in the discontinuous, unruly unfolding of human history. It's no accident that CLR James and his various groups would theorize Fordist work regimes alongside their historical explorations of plantation slavery; that the European autonomists in whose tradition Lordon writes would draw deeply upon James' groups' work and the metaphorics of slavery to track the emergence of post-Fordism; or that Plantation School economists and historians would offer some of the first scholarship on the institutional forms of neoliberal globalization through their studies of multinational corporations. Wittingly or not, these thinkers didn't so much or only think about slavery as they thought through it. Indeed, to track the history of capitalist work is to track the diffusion, ramification, and intensification of the plantation. It's to track, in other words, the insistent presence of Spinoza's scabby Brazilian.

But to think all history as history of plantation struggles isn't to lament the plantation's inescapability. Just the opposite—and this is where Lordon both supplements and requires supplementation by the history of slavery that his book can't not, even if it doesn't want to, bear traces of. If neoliberal employment works by aligning the desires of the worker with the boss, Lordon argues that the practice of liberation will entail becoming orthogonal or perpendicular to the boss's line of desire. "Orthogonality," he writes, "is a perfect disalignment, which may be a prelude to another realignment, this time negative, namely, open and antagonistic, on the same axis but in the opposite direction." It is, in other words, a flight from reconstituted plantations to somewhere else, a refusal of work and work's culture whose negative movement opens space for something new.

Lordon wants this movement to be the effect of an accumulation of "indignation" that finally reaches the "last straw." But, as he also remarks, affective life consists of the insistent process of refusing to recognize life's bareness. Subjects all possess a "capacity for autosuggestion and re-enchantment" that allows them to "avoid acknowledging being bludgeoned into submission." In other words, practices of affective survival inhibit the eruption of a revolutionary state of emergency. Given the antinomy here—affect conditions subjects to stay in place; affect conditions subjects to move—how can we explain this indignant but free "step into a life determined in another way"?

Like any antinomy, this one can't be resolved conceptually; its resolution can only be a matter of practice. So Lordon opens his chapter on domination and liberation by gesturing to the empirical fact that liberation happens, sometimes: "Yet, despite all that"—all that co-linearization, all that submission, all that bossing—"every now and then they can harbour other

thoughts." These other thoughts, these free thoughts of freedom, are unthinkable. They are impossible to conceive the conception of—and yet they happen, now and then. Lordon here situates the reader before the fundamental mystery of the history of Atlantic slavery, which is also the history of Atlantic freedom: How do people who don't have a direct experience of freedom, who might not even know how to desire it, come nonetheless to desire freedom? The way that Lordon marks the contingent causality of freedom's coming—"now and then"—itself gestures back to this history, this history that doesn't pass but accumulates and intensifies. He points us back, from our "now" that cannot be named without this "then," not to an inescapable history of work's plantation, but to an exemplary history of fugitivity and flight. A repertoire of freedom anti-capitalists need to think with, because without it, freedom might be unthinkable.

Marx thought so, too. The contemporary celebration of Marxism's antiwork tradition has tended to disavow the fact, in the name of the same presentism fueling Lordon's analysis, that this tradition developed through an engagement with Atlantic practices of freedom. But in one of the few moments where Marx offers a description of antiwork politics, he significantly turns to post-emancipation Jamaica. Pardon this long citation from the Grundrisse, but it is too important to chop up:

> The Times of November 1857 contains an utterly delightful cry of outrage on the part of a West-Indian plantation owner. This advocate analyses with great moral indignation—as a plea for the re-introduction of Negro slavery—how the Quashees (the free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and, alongside this 'use value', regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good; how they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations, but rather observe the planters' impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure, and even exploit their acquired Christianity as an embellishment for this mood of malicious glee and indolence. They have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage labourers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital, because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of direct forced labour, slavery, or indirect forced labour, wage labour. Wealth confronts direct forced labour not as capital, but rather as relation of domination; thus, the relation of domination is the only thing which is reproduced on this basis, for which wealth itself has value only as gratification, not as wealth itself, and which can therefore never create general industriousness.

One could draw a line from this passage to the work of Marx's son-in-law, the mixed-race creole Paul Lafargue, who would convert these ex-slaves' flight from the plantation into a right to be lazy. But we might also draw a line from this passage to our present. What these Jamaicans refuse is "general industriousness," a culture of work that planters and colonial administrators hoped to foster to counteract the decline of plantations in the local condition of emancipation and the global condition of liberalized, post-mercantilist trade. What they are refusing, in other words, is the kind of cultural and affective co-linearization through which capitalists hoped to manage a crisis in production and accumulation. And they move into this orthogonal fugitivity, as Lordon suggests they must, with a smile, with a laugh, with a "malicious grin."

To keep this archive of emancipation open in the present, to feel the now as an intensification of then, is to allow these Jamaicans' grinning laughter to resonate, to participate in their feeling of joy at finding another kind of life, so that we too might follow them into freedom's fugitive future. It would mean, also, keeping the Brazilian within our visual and theoretical field. After all, hanging out in the head of a dreamy philosopher was the last place this man was supposed to be. He was supposed to be cutting cane, plucking coffee—not turning Baruch's brain into a quilombo. To read our present as an intensification of all of this past is to take note of the well-worn tracks to freedom that have already been laid down. TNI

#Ferguson

By ASHLEY YATES

Dispatches from Ferguson by those who were there.

THE night after Sunday's vigil, my fiancée and I returned home and watched a documentary on the Egyptian Revolution in Tahir Square.

I never would have imagined two days later, some of those very people would be tweeting me information on what to do after being tear gassed.

"Sister," they said, "rinse with milk."

Palestinians tweeted me to move against the wind. "We are Ferguson," they wrote.

They saw themselves in our oppression. They bonded to us by adversity. Our struggle is their struggle and the justice we all seek is the same. The bombs that light up Gaza at night and the bullets that killed Michael Brown are cousins in lethality. We share no formal allegiance. We have become a family related by blood.

Meanwhile, those that stand beside us, hands over hearts, repeating liberty and justice for all never told us the exception to that rule. But they show it to us daily. They fall silent when we suffer. They look away when we die. They exist beside us daily, living, breathing, being; yet we never occupy the same space.

That space was never meant for us anyway. It was a trap set to make us easy targets. Michael Brown was your last catch. His death was the fuse that ignited the powder keg of oppression you thought you had us trapped in.

The world heard the boom. Our freedom came loudly.

It will echo on. We will not be silenced. TNI

Photo by Scott Olson

Radical Strain

By HANNAH PROCTOR

For the contemporary female pop star singing is still not seen as deliberate work, but rather effusive labor.

RIFLE through enough music blogs and you'll start to see hundreds of them: young duos in overexposed press photos, probably from Brooklyn, with a girl at the mic and a guy at the knobs. At shows she hangs toward the lip of the stage, pushing lungfuls through her pipes, swaddled in reverb, fog, and purple light. The blogs might describe her as wistful or ethereal or pretty. She might be called a chanteuse, even a seductress. Meanwhile, he's at the back, hood up, head down, eyes on the machinery, working furiously.

It's an arrangement that makes sense to consumers of music and critics alike. We listen to women the same way we look at them. Like beauty, a woman's voice emanates from her body without visible effort. Listeners don't hear the voice as an instrument, but as a primal extension of the singer herself, a throughline from her anatomy to yours. The voice is a component of a woman's affect—never learned, never forced, but something she's born possessing. Watch the audition episodes of shows like American Idol and the Voice. Like beauty, vocal talent

rests on a binary: You have it or you don't.

Like it does with women's bodies, popular culture permits a narrow range of acceptable beauty in women's voices. There's a reason Dan Reynolds of Imagine Dragons has room to sing flat on a live television performance but Beyoncé is expected to catapult through multiple key changes with perfect tone and pitch. There's a reason Lana Del Rey bore the undiluted resentment of her audience when she failed to sing charismatically on Saturday Night Live. There is a reason Britney Spears' isolated, untreated vocals score listens in the millions every time they're leaked and the guttural quality of Shakira's voice is as hotly debated in YouTube comments as her sexual attractiveness. As an object of beauty for public consumption, a woman's pleasantness must permeate the senses.

The pressure doesn't just constrict the blockbusters. Even under the "indie" umbrella, where artists support ad campaigns for Levi's instead of Pepsi, audiences and critics expect women to adhere to a certain standard of vocal beauty. "Only the fact that the singer's rather limited voice wears thin at times keeps I Never Learn from being an unqualified masterpiece," Jim DeRogatis wrote recently about Swedish songwriter Lykke Li's third album. I can't recall a man making a similar comment about Colin Meloy of the Decemberists, or Dylan Baldi of Cloud Nothings, or Jeff Mangum, or Jack White. Their limits contribute to their charm. They have never experienced their voices as obstacles to creating masterpieces.

Girls' limited access to equipment and encouragement is often cited as the reason for the disproportionately low number of women in music, but the male-dominated sphere of music journalism also imposes discrete critical standards upon women. Even contemporary web-based outlets like Pitchfork (disclosure: I've recently started publishing reviews there), which with its contentious album scores fulfills the dual role of magazine and encyclopedia in music culture, hold women to rigorous standards of music-making. At the time of writing, nearly 84 percent of Pitchfork's Best New Album designations have been awarded to male musicians or groups fronted by men. Of 524 total Best New Album reviews, 487 (93 percent) have been written by men. Similar numbers were recently self-reported in the publication's readership. When in 2012 Pitchfork solicited readers to submit their favorite albums to its People's List, only 12 percent of participants self-identified as women.

Like the affective labor women provide for no extra compensation in service or caregiving roles, like mandatory smiling from behind an espresso bar or politely socializing with aggressive men as a waitress, singing is not seen as deliberate work, but effusive labor. A female singer doesn't build music; she exudes it. Male songwriters and producers shape the female voice into a consumable product, laboring to refine the raw materials that women supply.

Weeks before the release of her second album Kala, M.I.A. confronted Pitchfork in an interview about male journalists' tendency to assign male producers credit for her beats, her lyrics, and even her politics. "There is an issue especially with what male journalists write about me and say 'this MUST have come from a guy,'" she told Paul Thompson in 2007. "Yesterday I read like five magazines in the airplane—it was a nine hour flight—and three out of five magazines said 'Diplo: the mastermind behind M.I.A.'s politics!'" While Diplo had two tracks on the album, M.I.A. clarified that, along with co-producer Switch, she had self-produced the whole LP.

In July 2012, Pitchfork awarded Frank Ocean a Best New Music review for his album Channel Orange. One month later, Jessie Ware received the same honor for her debut Devotion. Ryan Dombal, who penned both reviews, describes Ware's voice as a "natural gift" that the album married with "throbbing instrumentation that breathes life into every single turn of phrase or sensitive vocal embellishment." He then spends a paragraph detailing the work of three male producers that assisted Ware with the album:

> The record was largely produced by three men—Dave Okumu of UK art rockers the Invisible, Bristol electronic upstart Julio Bashmore, and singer-songwriter Kid Harpoon, who co-wrote songs on Florence and the Machine's Ceremonials—each leaving his distinct mark without distracting from the whole. Okumu's tracks, especially opener "Devotion", are dark and dense, hinting at passion's underbelly with each deep bass hit; Bashmore's are more airy and upbeat, primed for classy dancefloors worldwide; Kid Harpoon offers the most festival-ready songs—big hooks, bigger drums—like "Wildest Moments". Tying the disparate sounds together are Okumu, who co-produced and played many instruments on nearly every track, and of course Ware herself, who co-wrote all but one song. Her voice is a marvel throughout, often gaining power by holding back or briefly teasing its scope while staying faithful to melody over melisma.

Ware appears as an afterthought here, not an active subject within her own album but a "marvel" inside the machinery. Meanwhile, in his review of Channel Orange, Dombal grants Ocean agency over his artistic work even though, like Ware, Ocean shares songwriting credits with other producers on every track. The review also describes Ocean as "gifted," but with regard to his "voice, wit, charm, smarts, and ineffable humanity." He is a whole person, an actor, not merely a voice. Dombal refrains from granting subjectivity to Ocean's collaborators. He doesn't even list them. It's worth noting that Pitchfork gave Channel Orange a score of 9.5, a full point higher than Devotion.

When a woman apparently hangs in the air as she sings, never engineering but simply existing, critics evaluate her music on the basis of their ability to access her emotionally. The voice, at least, is honest. The draw of an album made by a woman is not to consume what she's created, but to traverse a pipeline directly to her being. She didn't make the product; she is the product. Critics often praise the confessional, cathartic aspects of women's music, favoring a frictionless ride to her core. Last month, when FKA twigs' debut LP1 made its rounds through the critical circuit, several male reviewers commented on her seductive lyrics as though they were being sung directly to them. "How does it feel to have you thinking about me? Um, can I get back to you on that?" wrote Alexis Petridis for the Guardian. "'How would you like it if my lips touched yours?/ And they stayed close, baby, till the stars fade out?' I think we know the answer," James Reed concluded in his review for the Boston Globe, referencing the same track, the sensually overt "Hours".

Despite the narrow confines of "good" singing available to women, certain artists have confounded the expectation that a woman must bare herself, emotionally or sexually or both, to her listeners. In the long tradition of atonal, weird, female vocals contemporary female pop artists sow confusion in the language men use to review them. On the 2006 album from the Swedish electronic duo The Knife, Silent Shout, Karin Dreijer Andersson lacerates her vocals with a mesh of digital effects. Even the record's title indicates a paradox located in the voice. She shifts her pitch, dipping into a range that would normally be perceived as male, then spiking into unearthly squeals. She layers herself, multiplies herself, obscures herself, grapples with herself. In Pitchfork's review, Mark Pytlik writes, "With 'Heartbeats'… she proved that her shrill voice (think Björk by way of Ari Up by way of Siouxsie Sioux by way of Mu's Mutsumi Kanamori) was capable of magic in its natural form, but little of Silent Shout grants us that pleasure." On the second track of The Knife's next album Shaking the Habitual, Andersson would go on to sing, "Of all the guys in the seniority, who will write my story?" before throttling her voice through an industrial filter.

By supplanting the pleasure of consuming the female voice with discomfort, Andersson complicates the role of the female singer. Despite her refusal to comply with gendered expectations of performance, male critics still assumed that she didn't engineer any of the electronics on Silent Shout. Robert Christgau describes Andersson's brother Olof as "cunning" in his synthesizer skills, while painting her vocal contribution as "wacky." In Pitchfork's review of Silent Shout's deluxe edition, Jess Harvell writes, "Olof Dreijer worked his sister Karin Dreijer Andersson's vocals through

sickly FX, making her nursery rhyme delivery sound like it was coming from the bottom of a slimy well." When presented with male/female duos, most critics assume that the woman is there to sing while the man handles production. Andersson's solo work as Fever Ray later proved, at the very least, that she was capable of shifting her own damn pitches.

And then there's Grimes, whose insistence upon producing her own music has earned her countless unsolicited offers from men to assume the role of her engineer. As a solo woman artist, Grimes (the operational alias of Montreal's Claire Boucher) blasts apart the false binary of woman as voice-effuser and man as aural architect. The bubbling pop utopia on her breakthrough album Visions braids her vocals deep into the music. She keeps her lyrics indistinct, her voice shrouded and strained. Instead of performing as a "good" singer, rounding notes with perfect pitch and timbre, Boucher stretches her voice to the edges of its range. She hits breathy lows and broken highs, never in error, but in service of her complex songs. Live, she pins her microphone under her ear while she uses both hands to trigger beats and navigate leads. Even now, she is the only musician onstage for her live shows. Her music is a tapestry of misbehavior.

Grimes sees backlash from men who review albums for legacy music publications. One of Visions' middling reviews, written by Jody Rosen for Rolling Stone, complained that "Boucher's voice is all airy top end: She sounds like the cross between a J-pop pipsqueak and Alvin and the Chipmunks. It's an irksome, sometimes shrill sound; often, her lyrics are unintelligible. The result is an emptiness at the center of the record: Grimes isn't spooky enough to be 'ghostly,' and not substantial enough to hold your attention." Rosen scans her enigma as vacancy. If he can't enter the record through the traditional channel of hearing a woman's bare voice articulate words, he decides, he can't be expected to access the music on an emotional level at all.

By damming the most familiar access point for listeners, Boucher cultivates challenging, feminist pop music. At Pitchfork, Lindsay Zoladz—the writer responsible for most of the BNM reviews awarded to women in the past two years—wrote of Visions, "The most common complaint I've heard of Grimes comes from people wishing her songs were more structured or hooky, or that her voice was more 'present.' But—never mind the fact that even the haziest moments on the record are anchored by melody—this diffuseness is one of Visions' most refreshing charms." Instead of hearing Boucher's voice as a barrier, Zoladz integrates it into the music as a whole. Often, women critics hear what the male critics cannot see.

Boucher complicates public femininity by reaching for alien extremes in both voice and appearance. Pop music criticism has long been occupied by men who identify with male musicians while simply consuming women artist. But there is growing space for women to be ugly, rough, and weird within what we consider to be pop. Patriarchal templates of female singing need not limit artists who encourage listeners to trace new paths into their music along their flaws, glitches, and idiosyncrasies. Women in pop manifest a radical grotesqueness. I think of the male editor at a publication I once wrote for who complained in the same breath that Grimes' voice was annoying and that he "didn't get her hotness."

When female musicians disrupt a male critic's ability to determine his own entry points into her work they force a choice between recognition on their own terms and rejection. Barring a narrative that strips the singer of her intent, female pop singers that strain their voices against conventional gender performance pierce attempts to make them vessels of male engineering and ultimately suspend the male gaze, at least for the duration of their song. TNI

View From Nowhere

By NATHAN JURGENSON

On the cultural ideology of Big Data.

What science becomes in any historical era depends on what we make of it.

—Sandra Harding,
Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? (1991)

MODERNITY has long been obsessed with, perhaps even defined by, its epistemic insecurity, its grasping toward big truths that ultimately disappoint as our world grows only less knowable. New knowledge and new ways of understanding simultaneously produce new forms of nonknowledge, new uncertainties and mysteries. The scientific method, based in deduction and falsifiability, is better at proliferating questions than it is at answering them. For instance, Einstein's theories about the curvature of space and motion at the quantum level provide new knowledge and generates new unknowns that

After Franz Kline

previously could not be pondered.

Since every theory destabilizes as much as it solidifies in our view of the world, the collective frenzy to generate knowledge creates at the same time a mounting sense of futility, a tension looking for catharsis—a moment in which we could feel, if only for an instant, that we *know* something for sure. In contemporary culture, Big Data promises this relief.

As the name suggests, Big Data is about size. Many proponents of Big Data claim that massive databases can reveal a whole new set of truths because of the unprecedented quantity of information they contain. But the *big* in Big Data is also used to denote a qualitative difference—that aggregating a certain amount of information makes data pass over into Big Data, a "revolution in knowledge," to use a phrase thrown around by startups and mass-market social-science books. Operating beyond normal science's simple accumulation of more information, Big Data is touted as a different sort of knowledge altogether, an Enlightenment for social life reckoned at the scale of masses.

As with the similarly inferential sciences like evolutionary psychology and pop-neuroscience, Big Data can be used to give any chosen hypothesis a veneer of science and the unearned authority of numbers. The data is big enough to entertain any story. Big Data has thus spawned an entire industry ("predictive analytics") as well as reams of academic, corporate, and governmental research; it has also sparked the rise of "data journalism" like that of FiveThirtyEight, Vox, and the other multiplying explainer sites. It has shifted the center of gravity in these fields not merely because of its grand epistemological claims but also because it's well-financed. Twitter, for example recently announced that it is putting $10 million into a "social machines" Big Data laboratory.

The rationalist fantasy that enough data can be collected with the "right" methodology to provide an objective and disinterested picture of reality is an old and familiar one: positivism. This is the understanding that the social world can be known and explained from a value-neutral, transcendent view from nowhere in particular. The term comes from *Positive Philosophy* (1830-1842), by August Comte, who also coined the term *sociology* in this image. As Western sociology began to congeal as a discipline (departments, paid jobs, journals, conferences), Emile Durkheim, another of the field's founders, believed it could function as a "social physics" capable of outlining "social facts" akin to the measurable facts that could be recorded about the physical properties of objects. It's an arrogant view, in retrospect—one that aims for a grand, general theory that can explain social life, a view that became increasingly rooted as sociology became focused on empirical data collection.

A century later, that unwieldy aspiration has been largely abandoned by sociologists in favor of reorienting the discipline toward recognizing complexities rather than pursuing universal explanations for human sociality. But the advent of Big Data has resurrected the fantasy of a social physics, promising a new data-driven technique for ratifying social facts with sheer algorithmic processing power.

Positivism's intensity has waxed and waned over time, but it never entirely dies out, because its rewards are too seductive. The fantasy of a simple truth that can transcend the divisions that otherwise fragment a society riven by power and competing agendas is too powerful, and too profitable. To be able to assert convincingly that you have modeled the social world accurately is to know how to sell anything from a political position, a product, to one's own authority. Big Data sells itself as a knowledge that equals power. But in fact, it relies on pre-existing power to equate data with knowledge.

NOT all data science is Big Data. As with any research field, the practitioners of data science vary widely in ethics, intent, humility, and awareness of the limits of their methodologies. To critique the cultural deployment

of Big Data as it filters into the mainstream is not to argue that all data research is worthless. (The new Data & Society Research Institute, for instance, takes a measured approach to research with large data sets.) But the positivist tendencies of data science—its myths of objectivity and political disinterestedness—loom larger than any study or any set of researchers, and they threaten to transform data science into an ideological tool for legitimizing the tech industry's approach to product design and data collection.

Big Data research cannot be understood outside the powerful nexus of data science and social-media companies. It's where the commanding view-from-nowhere ideology of Big Data is most transparent; it's where the algorithms, databases, and venture capital all meet. It was no accident that Facebook's research branch was behind the now infamous emotional manipulation study, which was widely condemned for its lax ethical standards and intellectual hubris. (One of the authors of the study said Big Data's potential was akin to the invention of the microscope.)

Equally steeped in the Big Data way of knowing is *Dataclysm*, a new book-length expansion of OkCupid president Christian Rudder's earlier blog-posted observations about the anomalies of his dating service's data set. "We are on the cusp of momentous change in the study of human communication," Rudder proclaims, echoing the Facebook researchers' hubris. *Dataclysm*'s subtitle sets the same tone: "Who we are (when we think no one is watching)." The smirking implication is that when enough data is gathered behind our backs, we can finally have access to the dirty hidden truth beyond the subjectivity of not only researchers but their subjects as well. Big Data will expose human sociality and desire in ways those experiencing it can't.

Because digital data collection on platforms like OkCupid seems to happen almost automatically—the interfaces passively record all sorts of information about users' behavior—it appears unbiased by messy *a priori* theories. The numbers, as Rudder states multiple times in the book, are right there for you to conclude what you wish. Indeed, because so many numbers are there, they speak for themselves. With all of OkCupid's data points on love and sex and beauty, Rudder claims he can "lay bare vanities and vulnerabilities that were perhaps until now just shades of truth."

For Rudder and the other neo-positivists conducting research from tech-company campuses, Big Data always stands in the shadow of the *bigger* data to come. The assumption is that there is more data today and there will necessarily be even more tomorrow, an expansion that will bring us ever closer to the inevitable "pure" data totality: the entirety of our everyday actions captured in data form, lending themselves to the project of a total causal explanation for everything. Over and over again, Rudder points out the size, power, and limitless potential of his data only to impress upon readers how it could be even bigger. This long-held positivist fantasy—the complete account of the universe that is always just around the corner—thereby establishes a moral mandate for ever more intrusive data collection.

But what's most fundamental to Rudder's belief in his data's truth-telling capability—and his justification for ignoring established research-ethics norms—is his view that data sets built through passive data collection eliminate researcher bias. In Rudder's view, shared by other neo-positivists that have defended human digital experimentation without consent, the problem with polling and other established methods for large-scale data gathering is that these have well-known sources of measurement error. As any adequately trained social scientist would confirm, how you word a question and who poses it can corrupt what a questionnaire captures. Rudder believes Big Data can get much closer to the truth by removing the researcher from the data-collection process altogether. For instance, with data scraped from Google searches, there is no researcher prodding subjects to reveal what they wanted to know. "There is no ask. You just tell," Rudder writes.

This is why Rudder believes he doesn't need to ask for permission before experimenting on his site's users—to, say, artificially manipulate users' "match" percentage or systematically remove some users' photos from interactions. To obtain the most uncontaminated data, users cannot be asked for consent. They cannot know they are in a lab.

While the field of survey research has oriented itself almost completely to understanding and articulating the limits of its methods, Rudder copes with Big Data's potentially even more egregious opportunities for systematic measurement error by ignoring them. "Sometimes," he argues, "it takes a blind algorithm to really see the data." Significantly downplayed in this view is how the way OkCupid captures its data points is governed by the political choices and specific cultural understandings of the site's programmers. Big Data positivism myopically regards the data passively collected by computers to be objective. But computers don't remember anything on their own.

This naive perspective on how computers work echoes the early days of photography, when that new technology was sometimes represented as a vision that could go beyond vision, revealing truths previously impossible to capture. The most famous example is Eadweard Muybridge's series of photographs that showed how a horse really galloped. But at the same time, as Shawn Michelle Smith explains in *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, early photography often encoded specific and possibly unacknowledged understandings of race, gender, and sexuality as "real." This vision beyond vision was in fact saturated with the cultural filter that photography was said to overcome.

Social-media platforms are similarly saturated. The politics that goes into designing these sites, what data they collect, how it is captured, how the variables are arranged and stored, how the data is queried and why are all full of messy politics, interests, and insecurities. Social-science researchers are trained to recognize this from the very beginning of their academic training and learn techniques to try to mitigate or at least articulate the resulting bias. Meanwhile, Rudder gives every first-year methods instructor heart palpitations by claiming that "there are times when a data set is so robust that if you set up your analysis right, you don't need to ask it questions—it just tells you everything anyways."

Evelyn Fox Keller, in *Reflections on Gender in Science*, describes how positivism is first enacted by distancing the researcher from the data. Big Data, as Rudder eagerly asserts, embraces this separation. This leads to perhaps the most dangerous consequence of Big Data ideology: that researchers whose work touches on the impact of race, gender, and sexuality in culture refuse to recognize how they invest their own unstated and perhaps unconscious theories, their specific social standpoint, into their entire research process. This replicates their existing bias and simultaneously hides that bias to the degree their findings are regarded as objectively truthful.

By moving the truth-telling ability from the researcher to data that supposedly speaks for itself, Big Data implicitly encourages researchers to ignore conceptual frameworks like intersectionality or debates about how social categories can be queered rather than reinforced. And there is no reason to suppose that those with access to Big Data—often tech companies and researchers affiliated with them—are immune to bias. They, like anyone, have specific orientations toward the social world, what sort of data could describe it, and how that data should be used. As danah boyd and Kate Crawford point out in "Critical Questions for Big Data,"

> regardless of the size of a data, it is subject to limitation and bias. Without those biases and limitations being understood and outlined, misinterpretation is the result.

This kind of short-sightedness allows Rudder to write things like "The ideal source for analyzing gender difference is instead one where a user's gender is nominally irrelevant, where it doesn't matter if the person is a man or a woman.

I chose Twitter to be that neutral ground" without pausing to consider how gender deeply informs the use of Twitter. Throughout *Dataclysm*, despite his posture of being separate from the data he works with, Rudder's politics are continually intervening, not merely in his explanations, which often refer to brain science and evolutionary psychology, but also in how he chooses to measure variables and put them into his analyses.

In a society deeply stratified on the lines of race, class, sex, and many other vectors of domination, how can knowledge ever be said to be disinterested and objective? While former *Wired* editor-in-chief Chris Anderson was describing the supposed "end of theory" thanks to Big Data in a widely heralded article, Kate Crawford, Kate Miltner, and Mary Gray were correcting that view, pointing out simply that "Big Data is theory." It's merely one that operates by failing to understand itself as one.

POSITIVISM has been with us a long time, as have the critiques of it. Some research methodologists have addressed and incorporated these critiques: Sandra Harding's *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* argues for a new, "strong" objectivity that sees including a researcher's social standpoint as a feature instead of a flaw, permitting a diversity of perspectives instead one false view from nowhere. Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, argues that "partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard."

Big Data takes a different approach. Rather than accept partiality, its apologists try a new trick to salvage the myth of universal objectivity. To evade questions of standpoint, they lionize the data at the expense of the researcher. Big Data's proponents downplay both the role of the measurer in measurement and the researcher's expertise—Rudder makes constant note of his mediocre statistical skills—to subtly shift the source of authority. The ability to tell the truth becomes no longer a matter of analytical approach and instead one of sheer access to data.

The positivist fiction has always relied on unequal access: science could sell itself as morally and politically disinterested for so long because the requisite skills were so unevenly distributed. As scientific practice is increasingly conducted from different cultural standpoints, the inherited political biases of previous science become more obvious. As access to education and advanced research methodologies became more widespread, they could no longer support the positivist myth.

The cultural ideology of Big Data attempts to reverse this by shifting authority away from (slightly more) democratized research expertise toward unequal access to proprietary, gated data. (Molly Osberg points out in her review of *Dataclysm* for the Verge how Rudder explains in the notes how he gathered most of his information through personal interactions with other tech company executives.) When data is said to be so good that it tells its own truths and researchers downplay their own methodological skills, that should be understood as an effort to make access to that data more valuable, more rarefied. And the same people positioning this data as so valuable and authoritative are typically the ones who own it and routinely sell access to it.

Data science need not be an elitist practice. We should pursue a popular approach to large data sets that better understands and comes to terms with Big Data's own smallness, emphasizing how much of the intricacies of fluid social life cannot be held still in a database. We shouldn't let the positivist veneer on data science cause us to overlook its valuable research potential.

But for Big Data to really enhance what we know about the social world, researchers need to fight against the very cultural ideology that, in the short term, overfunds and overvalues it. The view from nowhere that informs books like *Dataclysm* and much of the corporate and commercialized data science must be unmasked as a view from a very specific and familiar somewhere. TNI

The Ladies Vanish

By SHAWN WEN

The most magical innovation of the app economy is making the female workers it depends on mostly invisible.

ANDREW Norman Wilson was fired from his contracting job at Google for interacting with what he called a different "class of workers." He had been watching them for months as they exited the office building adjacent to his. Everyday they left at 2 PM (he later learned that their shifts began at 4 AM). "They were purposefully kept separate. They carried yellow badges that restricted access everywhere besides their own building," Wilson said.

They were mostly black and Latino—a rare sight on Google's predominantly white campus. They worked for ScanOps, the team that did the painstaking work of scanning texts that make up Google Books. Intrigued, Wilson attempted to interview some of them. He managed to get a

few minutes of tape before he was caught by Google security. He was fired shortly thereafter.

Of course books don't digitize themselves. Human hands have to individually scan the books, to open the covers and flip the pages. But when Google promotes its project—a database of "millions of books from libraries and publishers worldwide"—they put the technology, the search function and the expansive virtual library in the forefront. The laborers are erased from the narrative, even as we experience their work firsthand when we look at Google Books.

There is a tradition of humans posing as machines called "mechanical turking." The tradition is named after the "Automaton Chess-player." Unveiled in Austria in 1770, the automaton appeared to be a robot dressed in Orientalist clothing (hence the "turk"). But in reality, a human being hid inside the machine and moved the chess pieces with magnets. The best chess masters of the time crouched beneath that chessboard.

Much like the man who jams a chess grandmaster into a dark cage in order to be celebrated for "inventing" the cage, Amazon has built a massive network of casualized internet laborers whose hidden work helps programmers and technological innovators appear brilliant. Their Mechanical Turk program, taking its name from the 18th century curiosity, hires people to do invisible work online—work which makes their client companies' software look flawless. Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos calls it "artificial artificial intelligence."

Amazon's Mechanical Turk is a marketplace that allows companies to post jobs that anyone can sign up to complete. These are tasks that come easily to people but are hard to program a computer to perform: accurately transcribing text from audio, detecting the quality or tone in a piece of writing, identifying what's depicted in a photograph. Amazon refers to these as Human Intelligence Tasks. Ninety percent of human intelligence tasks pay under $0.10 per task.

Such "crowdworking" exists in a legal gray area. While workers are required to report their income for taxes, employers are not required to pay payroll taxes, overtime compensation, or honor minimum wage. The *New York Times* reports that workers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk earn an estimated range of $1.20 to $5 per hour on average. Even more controversially, the terms of service allow employers to "accept" or "reject" the work after they receive it, no questions asked. The company is allowed to keep the work after they "reject" it, but the worker is denied pay and receives a lower online rating, making it harder to obtain future work on the site.

But the legal structure of Mechanical Turk is such that Amazon can pretend this incredible imbalance isn't their fault. As the company is only a "marketplace", Amazon claims that it's "not responsible for the actions of any Requester," since they're only providing "the capacity of a payment processor in facilitating the transactions between Requesters and Providers."

Tech entrepreneurs are well aware of the asymmetrical power dynamic this situation creates. "Before the Internet, it would be really difficult to find someone, sit them down for ten minutes and get them to work for you, and then fire them after those ten minutes. But with technology, you can actually find them, pay them the tiny amount of money, and then get rid of them when you don't need them anymore," Lukas Biewald, CEO of the site CrowdFlower, was quoted as saying in *The Nation*.

The contract workforce keeps much of Silicon Valley running. *New York Magazine* reported that companies like Lyft, Uber, Homejoy, Handy, Postmates, Spoonrocket, TaskRabbit, DoorDash, and Washio all classify their workers as independent contractors rather than employees. This has massive financial benefits for the companies: allowing them to forego benefits and minimum wages, to say nothing of pensions or unemployment insurance, while forcing employees to pay for necessary business expenses (e.g the Uber driver's car). It also has huge legal advantages:

by claiming they are just a "marketplace," the services can deny all legal responsibility for the behavior of their contractor-employees, letting them ignore labor and safety regulations, and potentially saving them millions in individual liability lawsuits.

But, crucially, these apps don't flourish because of low prices—these "savings" on the part of the start-ups typically don't go to customers in the form of dramatically lowering costs. Instead, the appeal of apps like Uber is that anyone with a smartphone can press a button and a driver shows up. Press a button and lunch is ready, flowers are sent out, laundry gets done, the house is cleaned. It's like magic.

It is precisely the feeling of magic—the instant gratification of desire being met the very moment it's felt—on which the apps market themselves. The entire discourse surrounding the app economy centers on the thrilling ease achieved by high tech efficiency: it's this magic that the apps sell, the thing that differentiates them from traditional modes of purchase. Because otherwise the consumer is just getting a cab ride, just buying groceries, just hiring a housecleaner.

It's like magic, but it's not magic. The magic is founded on grossly underpaid, casualized labor. Press a button and a human being is dispatched to do menial work. Press a button and an independent contractor, without the same rights and protections as an employee, springs into action. Amazon's Mechanical Turk is merely the most literal and obvious manifestation of this trend. The actual magic trick is making the worker disappear.

Who exactly are these disappearing workers? And if they are the same workers who historically have performed invisible, unappreciated work, what does it mean about the "innovation" of the app economy?

It's very hard to get accurate statistics on the contingent workforce in the tech industry, as tech companies are less than forthcoming. But researching the demographics of mechanical turkers is even harder, as they are decentralized and anonymous. In 2010, New York University professor Panos Ipeirotis conducted a rare study to assess Amazon's Mechanical Turk workforce. Ipeirotis discovered that almost half of the work force is American. (In fact, the percentage of Americans on the site has significantly increased since Ipeirotis' study. Amazon changed its terms of service, requiring identity verification of its turkers, which ruled out many Indian workers who could not provide proper forms.) This upends a common argument used by the company's defenders, who claim that $0.10 a task or $1.20 an hour goes a long way in countries like Pakistan and India.

But would workers be better off without the site? This was the question Ipeirotis leveled to me when I asked him about the mechanical turkers' low wages and lack of power. People were on the site "voluntarily"—as much as capitalism allows anyone to work "voluntarily." Workers on the site were free to leave. Workers on the site tended to be American. They tended to be young. Many were caregivers of young children or the elderly and so it benefited them to work from home. And they tended to be women.

Ipeirotis found that almost 70% of mechanical turkers were women. How shocking: the low prestige, invisible, poorly paid jobs on the internet are filled by women. Women provide the behind the scenes labor that is mystified as the work of computers, unglamorous work transformed into apparent algorithmic perfection.

In fact, beyond simply doing work that computers cannot do, mechanical turkers actually improve computers. When a turker works on a project, she creates a data set which the computer can then learn from. "Computers document the signals generated by humans. They can use this data to start learning. Computer algorithms get generated by data created by Amazon Mechanical Turk workers," said Ipeirotis.

Relying on data from mechanical turkers, computers have dramatically improved in recent years at facial recognition, translation, and transcription. These were tasks previously thought to be impossible for computers to complete accurately. Which means that mechanical turkers (mostly

women) teach computers to do what engineers (mostly men) cannot on their own program computers to do.

Female mechanical turkers meet their parallel in the female computers before them. Before the word "computer" came to describe a machine, it was a job title. David Skinner wrote in *The New Atlantis*, "computing was thought of as women's work and computers were assumed to be female." Female mathematicians embraced computing jobs as an alternative to teaching, and they were often hired in place of men because they commanded a fraction of the wages of a man with a similar education.

Though Ada Lovelace is finally getting some notice almost two hundred years after she wrote the first ever computer algorithm, the women who have advanced math and computer science have largely been ignored. When male scientists from University of Pennsylvania invented the Electronic and Numerical Integrator and Computer, the first electronic computer (which would eventually replace female computers), women debugged the machine and programmed it. When these early female computer programmers unveiled the machine to the military, they were mistaken for models hired to stand attractively next to the new invention.

As computing machines gradually took over, mathematicians often measured its computing time in "girl-hours" and computing power in "kilo-girls." The computer itself is a feminized item. The history of the computer is the history of unappreciated female labor hidden behind "technology," a screen (a literal screen) erected by boy geniuses.

Silicon Valley really is a man's world. Men have great ideas. Men code. Men attract money. Men fund start-ups. Men generate jobs. Men hire other men. Men are the next Steve Jobses, the innovators, the inventors, the disruptors. But women complete the tasks that men have not yet programmed computers to do, the tasks that make their "genius" and their "innovation" possible. And they do it for pennies. TNI

Why These Tweets Are Called My Back

By SHAADI DEVEREAUX

So-called Toxic Twitter is made up of marginalized women of color for whom social media started out as yelling into the void and became a grassroots movement.

WE are Toxic Twitter. The unnamed women frothing at the mouth in our underground internet lair who emerge only during the full moon of each news cycle to drink the blood of your favorite white feminists. Whenever you hear the refrain "Twitter is going to get you!" from the mouths of everyone from Oprah to CNN pundits, we are who they are referring to. We are bad for your career. We are bad for brands. We say good things, but watch out or we'll swallow you whole.

It's no mistake that established media demean what is in many cases the one platform to which marginalized women have access. You've been told to watch us but not engage: the very definition of surveillance. You cannot work in the media without being aware of the conversations we are having, lest you risk becoming obsolete and uninformed, yet you must carefully keep your distance. Our skills and thought are taken, sanitized and offered through different mouths, with different agendas. Our content is gold, but like all gold it must first be

Imp Kerr

extorted, extracted or stolen from wherever it is found, then set free to circulate in other hands.

In a recent digital blackout, a group of feminists of color decided to pull back our labor and take a break from abuse, trolling, content mining and stalking. We found ourselves in a position where those who had the credentials to benefit from the work of poor women of color were centered over our safety to continue the work. Honorariums, flights, speaking engagements, brands, grants and cachet seemed only to flow upward from us as our content and thought were recycled without our bodies present. Surveillance without engagement meant there were no frameworks for inviting us to write essays or speak on official platforms about the issues affecting us most. We saw the use of our disembodied thought without advocacy of our interests.

We have been constantly months ahead of the news cycle, and seen reflections and outright copies of our work in spaces to which we are denied access. Non-profits and big names with large followings present at conferences and lead anti-violence campaigns using our digital framework—and in many cases, stolen work. What does this appropriation by professional activists of anti-violence work mean for poor women of color and their relationship to labor? How do we create anti-violence frameworks that acknowledge existing models of community support among the most vulnerable women?

"Toxic Twitter" is largely made up of Afro-indigenous, Black, and NDN women using technology to discuss our lives. The established media sees us as angry and impossible to please, waiting to rip people apart like a pack of Audre Lorde were-feminists. But we cannot look at the presence of marginalized women in digital spaces without considering our oppression. What some are truly afraid of are the layers that begin to unfold if we take a more careful look at how women are using Twitter to engage with a movement they previously had trouble connecting to because of disability, interpersonal violence that limited their movement, marginalized motherhood with little support, transphobia and class. When our voices come to the fore, mainstream organizations and anti-violence movements have to come to terms with the fact that we might have a different vision.

All too often, conventional approaches to justice prioritize the production of the abuser over the experience of the victim. One the first things said to me about my abuser when I faced some of my online abuse in the form of misgendering was, "But she does good work." Every discussion of my abuse started not with the transphobic behavior of my abuser, but the work she does. We see a similar dynamic in people's immediate defense of Bill Cosby's and Woody Allen's body of work before we are allowed to discuss the stories of their victims. But what happens when even anti-violence movements center labor and production rather than the safety of marginalized women of color? And, given the focus on "doing good work," why is the labor and production of marginalized women of color so often erased or appropriated in the process?

Anti-violence organizations often truly believe they are doing good work, for the benefit of marginalized women. Depending on the organization, perhaps they are. But when these same women want to have a say in the direction anti-violence work moves in, professional activists have to stop, take stock, and have hard conversations. That is not delaying the movement or putting it behind—it's the necessary work that we have seemed to miss in every generation when the non-profits dull their blades for grants and leave women unsupported. There is no "good of the movement" if women are not safe and valued. You cannot have a sustainable movement for ending violence without marginalized women at the grassroots level booted into its matrix and present in movement spaces. And when women express concerns about exploitation and abuse, it is counterproductive to label us ungrateful, lazy and lacking foresight.

Most of us started our social media accounts as women "yelling into the void," as Twitter user @so_treu says. Her words express the experience most of us had. These spaces were created without us in mind. I doubt marginalized women pushing back against state-led anti-violence initiatives

were high on the list of potential users in Twitter's start-up design. For @so_treu, digital feminism is a space where she can engage with other black women overlooked in the academy, spread their work, and offer her own analysis on black artforms.

We have many different stories but what most of us had in common was this sensation of being isolated and yelling into space. Astonishingly, however, other women began to answer. Soon we noticed the voices of feminists of color everywhere online, shedding the constraints of misogynist respectability, adopting spandex as praxis, and detailing the experiences of marginalized and multifaceted womanhoods. Social media has lifted the barrier between consumers of media and media itself, transforming that relationship into one of active engagement. It has also lifted the barrier between women like us–displaced, disabled, trans, indigenous and black–and the parts of society that were never supposed to deal with us. The nightlights of kyriarchy were turned off and the dark figures of their imagination began to rise from the cellar they had stuffed all of us into. Suddenly a black trans woman denied access to any space you might enter is right here talking back to you with nuanced media critiques. A journalist can put up an article and within seconds readers are challenging the ethics of the reporting and the framing of subjects who can no longer be rendered passive.

There has been a shift from charismatic leaders as gatekeepers to our stories and when they matter, to taking our stories into our own hands using digital platforms. Those of us who never make it to a prized slot on MSNBC or have our names on a who's-who list of young feminists can sign on to Twitter or use google chats to discuss the needs of our community, host teach-ins, work through experiences of sexual violence, build awareness around voices that would never be handed a megaphone at a rally, and bring in younger women to flex their voices and show them that feminism is also for them. As small collectives of women, we created what governments, charities, and corporations dream of: sustainable conversations in a digital space that happen daily and tie in global perspectives, and continuously grow a huge movement base.

The work we do covers a large swathe of global experiences: building understanding of antiblackness, analyzing racial hierarchies, explaining 500 years of colonialism, reimagining settler colonialism to understand Afro-indigeneity, centering trans women of color, and anything else we manage to fit into 140 characters. Marginalized women of color have built a base for a sustainable movement to end violence. How that base is mobilized, however, will depend on how we and women like us are supported. Will others go on labeling us as toxic, or will our experiences finally be centered? Most importantly, whatever happens, we have found each other: Black trans women, Afro Latinas, Afro-indigenous, and NDN women who listened to each other when no one else did, until everyone else did. Our conversations among ourselves, treated throughout colonial history as babble or gossip, turned out to be the best thing on the Internet.

We are constantly told to back away from our computers and do real work and form real community, but if you can't respect us digitally what would make us feel safe enough to engage you in person? If you can't respect us at this very basic level of 140 characters, what makes you think you will be able to beyond "the limits of the medium"? (And what does it mean when those who have structural advantage over us define a space we use with startling proficiency as "limited"?) We are asked to relinquish the physical protection we have in online spaces, show up to and engage in person with a movement that has ignored all our best efforts at talking back to it. We are called upon to physically traverse spaces that consider our safety petty infighting and an impediment to the real work of the movement.

The dominant conversations on grassroots digital feminism—and to be clear, that's what "Toxic Twitter" is—ignore the fact that the last recourse of women who are pushed out of community on every angle is often the Internet. My inbox is flooded with messages from trans women of color rejected by their families, communities, and partners—if they even had access to those things in the first place. Not only do they face

violence from the state, including the police, but also from the people attending any given rally. We fall through the cracks of the LGBTQ movement, anti-violence organizing, race coalitions and non-profits. Trans women of color write to me to express amazement I can simply take up space online, and be heard and recognized.

Grassroots digital feminism is often the only type of work that reaches those who are silenced at every step, and who rediscover their voices online, where no one can hold their mouths closed. Seeing other women do this work acts almost as permission to be alive and to engage the world we live in ourselves. Is it the only way? No. Does it have its limits? Yes. But why do we only focus on the limits of digital space, writing article and didn't-think-piece after didn't-think-piece, as opposed to focusing on the limits of and the interpersonal abuse that goes on in offline spaces?

Others take apart grassroots digital feminism like a HAM radio, finding all the possible reasons for it not to matter, while doing nothing to make other forms of engagement safe and accessible for women. And so we are left floating about in space. We cobble together stars, meteors, black holes, and Milky Ways only for our detractors to then want that too and become incensed that we dare to speak. Women like us are supposed to always be subjects. We are supposed to remain strange aliens who can never quite make a landing and thus freeze in the realm of the theories of those who really matter. We should remain silent on the operating tables in Roswell as they discover that we are different, not because we are toxic, but because we have two hearts instead of one.

The reality is that for most of us the work we do both online and off stems from our dedication to each other. The time we spend together online is devoted to navigating disabilities, helping each other survive sexual or transphobic assaults, confronting antiblack misogyny and violence against Indigenous women, defending Beyoncé, and even sharing horribly hilarious dating stories. This intense solidarity means we have been able to survive entire campaigns directed at silencing us. Just by living and speaking online, we fly in the face of a whole network of capitalist and patriarchal interests: A state that wants to police our labor and restrict our movement, the men who are supposed to be our placeholders, and the movements that center anybody but us while using our pain as legitimation.

In the end, this is a battle over narrative ground, over who gets to tell their own story and receive resources for it. Our feminism is intersectional not merely as cutting-edge praxis but as a result of the community we've built by standing by one another, listening daily to women who don't matter anywhere else, calling out abuse no matter how it hurts our immediate interests, and galvanizing that community in the face of violence. We will never be put forward for prestigious positions, but as a result we are also free. Free black, Afro-indigenous and NDN women, however, are also enemies of the state, and so we complicate the politics of those whose anti-state rhetoric begins and ends on the pages of academic journals.

The number one priority of any movement dedicated to ending violence should be to bring marginalized grassroots women into all spaces, make them feel safe and prioritize their voices. How might the history of our movements have been different if we centered the Fannie Lou Hamers, Sylvia Riveras, Marsha P Johnsons, and Audre Lordes while they were alive instead of making them totems after their deaths?

We can temporarily disable our accounts but we can't temporarily disable our lives. When it comes to marginalized women, we worship their graves instead of honoring their lives in the moment. Why can we only listen to these women once their mouths are closed? And what new ways of resistance might we find if we followed their voices in life? In the memory of these women and all those who were forgotten, we have closed our mouths for a brief moment in life to love one another in life. As this blackout ends and women begin to think more about how they navigate space, will we honor them in life or fight them every step of the way, only to place rings of flowers over their graves? As my mother and grandmother always told me when I was a brat, "Give me my flowers while I'm living." TNI

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