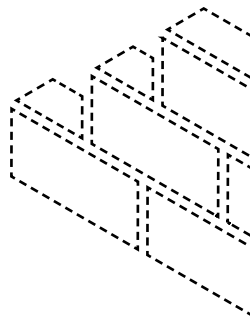
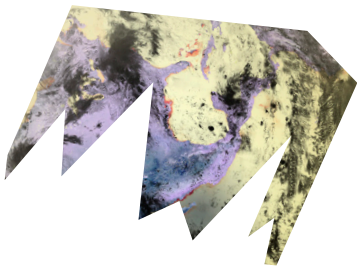


CAPACITIES TO



Affect Up Against Fascism



**Edited by
Gregory J. Seigworth
Mathew Arthur
Wendy J. Truran
Chad Shomura**



Capacities To: Affect Up Against Fascism

IMBRICATE!

Series Editors: Gregory J. Seigworth, Mathew Arthur, and Wendy J. Truran

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CAPACITIES TO

Affect Up Against Fascism


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and Chad Shomura
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Gregory J. Seigworth & Chad Shomura

Collecting Capacities (and Incapacities) To Be Up Against Fascism

We must abandon, once and for all, the quick and easy formula: ‘Fascism will not make it again.’ Fascism has always ‘made it,’ and it continues to ‘make it.’ It passes through the tightest mesh; it is in constant evolution, to the extent that it shares in a micro-political economy of desire itself inseparable from the evolution of the productive forces. Fascism seems to come from the outside, but it finds its energy right at the heart of everyone’s desire. [...] Fascism, like desire, is scattered everywhere, in separate bits and pieces, within the whole social realm; it crystallizes in one place or another, depending on the relationships of force. It can be said of fascism that it is all powerful and, at the same time, ridiculously weak.

– Félix Guattari (1973), “Everybody Wants to be a Fascist”

We cannot simply be anti-fascist; we must also practice and make better habits, forms of life. Rather than as a noun or adjective, anti-fascist as a gerund verb; a constant effort of anti-fascisting against the fascisms that even we ourselves uphold. Working to create nonhierarchical ways of living, working to undo our own privileges and desires for power. The individualized and detached Self, the over-codings of family-unit normativity, the authoritarian tendency of careerism—all of them paranoid sites of micro-fascism in need of anti-fascist care. Again, easier said than done.

– Natasha Lennard (2019), “We, Anti-Fascists”

What follows these introductory words is an aggregation of feeling-thought pieces (polemics, poetry, pictures, practices, propositions, passions) addressing entanglements of affect and fascism from a multitude of angles and from multiple sites around the globe. Almost all were written in reply to a call—from the Society for the Study of Affect—following the November 5th 2024 re-election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States. This urgent call asked prospective contributors to foreground how, among all manner of fascist alarm bells, affect operates as a near-boundless range of felt-sensibilities, potentials, or ‘capacities’ (including ‘incapacities’). We asked for submissions that would engage less with the ‘capacity *of*’ a body—such as naming a set of properties already constituting what a body is— but, rather, focus more upon the ‘capacity or capacities *to*’ that emerge through innumerable encounters with those shifting forces/causes/intensities—sometimes subtle, other times immense—that contribute to ‘what a body can do’ and/or how a body comes to be undone. Alongside a requested word-limit of around 1500 words, each entry to this collection was asked to use a variation of ‘capacity/incapacity *to*’ in its title. Nearly all of these writings unfold from a specific set of events/experiences and feeling-concerns and, then, sifts through to locate available forces and causes that can be activated as potential lines of escape, of affiliation and solidarity, of dissociation, of abolition, of absurdity, of break, of becoming, of grieving, of staying or sticking...

These diverse lines or trajectories arise through affirmative experiments with forces that tug bodies away from any presumptive self-enclosure and toward the ‘moreness’ of other bodies/intensities/differences that extend through and beyond the present. They serve to keep the affect-as-‘ca-

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capacity-to' process open, or at least pliable for additional encounters, for a differentiated body politic (not an assimilation into self-sameness), for ever-shuffling capacities to affect and to be affected. This process is, more or less, what Guattari calls 'desire' (see epigraph). He acknowledges too that fascism/s are only a tiny swerve or a hair's breadth away from desire, albeit with certain crucial distinctions. Unlike the capaciously focused cases of this project, fascism responds to questions such as 'What can a body do?' with an insidiously regressive imperative that commands, among many other things: "Cleanse the body politic of otherness, of difference, of contaminants, of they/them, and, hence, rid ourselves of all of the threats and fears refracted through these." So many bodies, thereby, are deemed as terrifyingly out-of-bounds, well-past the outskirts of a norm, violating all kinds of borders because they open onto capacities-and-incapacities-to in excess of a fascist body politic. 'Out of bounds' because, some bodies are trans or get read that way, or otherwise upset the traditional 'comforts' of the gender binary; because bodies are Black or Brown and dare to resist arrest or their own death or seem to issue such a dare by simply being; because it's believed that certain bodies are predisposed to perpetrating grievous harm because they are migrant-and-alien-and-thus-murderous; because bodies are something other-than-reproductively oriented; because bodies apparently show up in places and at times where some entity (a person, a legislative body, a President or Prime Minister) is ready to declare that such bodies don't belong and, indeed, have never belonged (see also: return to the past, make great again). In short, fascism modulates capacities and incapacities so as to homogenize and smooth the body politic.

In the face of the myriad micro-fascisms of our historical present, we argue that exploring ‘capacities/incapacities-to’ couldn’t matter more. It matters, then, how we—both those gathered in this volume and others far beyond—come to act collectively in order to nurture and share practices and styles for making/unmaking/refusing-a-world that, even in the best of times, will always push and pull at our capacities and incapacities to adequately think, rethink, unthink, out-think what a body or bodies can do (or are supposedly not allowed to do). Standing affect theory up against fascism requires not only an always recalibrating visceral literacy but, even further, necessitates the ongoing fermentation of capacities/incapacities-to: compose/decompose/declaim/profane/make kin/raise a din as our most forthright and capacious tactic of living-on.

So, our contributors venture responses (and, sometimes, counter-figurations) to questions about how ‘capacities to’ come to dwell and afford room for and manoeuvre within the creases and along the cusp of fascism’s fearsome futurity. How to engage those situated capacities and incapacities *for* embracing otherness as joyful and open-ended, *for* recognizing contamination and messiness can be life-giving and not life-draining, *for* convincing bodies-minds that they/them is ultimately and only ever we/us? How do we get there while also bringing others along? That’s the aim of this project: to unfurl the edges of a place where we can gather across our respective orientations/disorientations and capacities/incapacities to... intervene in, mess with, fuck up, turn over, probe and prick and deflate a furiously expanding fascism that’s both within us and without us.

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While Félix Guattari is right in saying that fascism and its particulate micro-fascisms will never fully disperse and that, indeed, they are always in the making, the sure-to-be calamitous return of Donald Trump to the oval office on January 20, 2025 (which is also this collection's publication date) serves as ample-enough indication that the world's steady sloping into 21st century-style fascism and various authoritarianisms has just taken a very precipitous and perilous slide. And, yes—for much of the globe's population and for marginalized groups everywhere—this is hardly new, but simply a ratcheting-up of fascism/micro-fascisms long underway, long simmering and boiling over by the geopolitical pressure/involvement/influence/projects of the Global North. Still, there is a quite palpable sense, not only in the United States but in the rest of the world, that the fascist and micro-fascist affects have now clearly and boldly spoken and will only continue speaking ever more loudly and openly. Nightmares of cruelty strutting around in broad daylight. Increasingly dangerous hours, days, weeks, months, years lie ahead of us—and some/many of us may not make it through. The fascist affects are winning; rather than 'ridiculously weak,' at this moment they certainly feel 'all-powerful.'

We, the editors, ponder, though, what 'winning' means, especially as the organization and reorganization of *anti*-fascist affects, sensibilities, practices, and movements also continues on, expands, finds new—often clandestine—strengths and crafty means of persisting in existence. Not without hope; the affects of anti-fascist actions and non-fascist living must always strive to do more than speak back or punch back (while not denying that this can be a necessity on occasion) via the terms and terrain set by fas-



cism and, thus, run the perpetual risk of falling into dialectically inverted reactive postures. There are, we'd wager, as many moods and modes of fascism as there are varieties of affect. These move about, shape-shift, pop up in surprising ways such that reactive postures will always leave us out-paced. How can we get ahead?

Throughout this collection, we (Greg and Chad) and our authors reckon with fascism as permeated by affect (moods and feels and sensations and...). There is never an assumption that 'affect' is somehow readymade as a counter-attuned creative impulse, or progressive-liberatory overthrow. Fascism and 'affect' are not automatic antagonists. Affect operates in and through fascism: fascist joys, fascist pleasures, fascist frustrations, fascist anxiety, fascist rage. As affect theorists (of the decidedly anti-fascist sort), we endeavor to set to work, up close, in and through the ugly patches of white noise and the opacities of black holes, manoeuvring in and through the gut-level impacts and knottings of ambiguities/ambivalences—all those visceral registers and intensities—to parse and unpack (or at least help bring to loose shape) 'capacities-to' and 'incapacities-to' that surface in the bubbling waters of fascism, or that generatively act up against fascisms-in-the-plural, or that demonstrate where/how/when affect and fascism can be peeled apart, or that open toward strategies for antifascist living, for nonfascist life.

Fascism writ large (with a capital 'F') and its host of capillary-like, lower-case microfascisms never operate fully behind anyone's back: instead, they usually betray their presence in even the most mundane encounters—quite often felt, in advance and most keenly, by those already living exceptionally vulnerable lives. Micro-fascisms shape

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daily life by insinuating themselves into its nooks and crannies, into the fibers of bodies and fabrics of worlds, into the weaves and ripples of webs and networks, into intra-personal and extra-human relations, into even the most seemingly minor encounters with any- and everything. They fester in gut feelings and provoke sharp reflexes. Undoubtedly, some fascists are well aware of the powers of affect. Their own experiments in a broad range of aesthetics—postures, gestures, cadences of voice, internet memes, social media trollings—aim to intuit and exploit the potency of affect to modulate a body politic in toto.

Example: even the incredibly intuitive Félix Guattari (2000) couldn't have foreseen the fascist-other half of it when, writing in 1989, he compared Donald Trump, the then-real estate developer and C-grade celebrity, to “mutant algae”:

men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, taking over entire districts of New York and Atlantic City; he ‘redevelops’ by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of dead fish of environmental ecology (28).

Yes, we feel this gives algae a bad rap. But this kind of effusive, swarming force (of nature?) prototyped by Trump, first via reality television and then through the desperately monetizing attention-ecologies of cable television and social media platforms, has proven to be a key ingredient in the flourishing of 21st century fascisms (not only US-based) and their micro-fascist deployments via oligarchic tech-enablers (see the CEO bro-minions: Zuckerberg, Musk, and Bezos). Just as Ronald Reagan embodied, so succinctly, a

singular-genericized relationship to the technological/corporeal affordances of film, film-acting, and movement-vision (Massumi 2002), Trump is the too-bad-to-be-true tech + flesh unholy conglomeration for our times: reality television, social media, unhinged conspiracy theory, and algorithmic culture all rolled together into one frothing imperial pustule of socio-corporeally leveraged grievance and revenge. As the living manifestation of affect-behavioral data-gathering machines of micro-sensibilities and predictive analytics, Trump impatiently leans upon (and actively provokes) the premediation of human-technical assemblages so as to align evolving fascist futures with his instinctual gut. And, so, over 35 years after Guattari first gave a moment's notice to Trump, it seems, more and more, that we are on the way to becoming the equivalent of yet more dead fish floating atop the roiling surface of this poisonous ecology. Despite their pretenses otherwise ("Fuck your feelings!"), fascists are—sad to say—affect theorists. And Donald Trump is their gleeful and petulant philosopher-king.

Fascism, beyond its embodying by Trump, works today because it is as joyful and active as it is sad and reactive. Searches for antifascist living may do well to follow Nietzsche's insistence that the important distinction is not between creation and reaction. Instead, what matters is whether creativity is fueled by lack or superabundance. To stand antifascist affect/s up against fascism, then, will require, as Natasha Lennard (see epigraph), advocates, that we take up *anti-fascisting* (as a gerund) in order to imagine and reimagine practices of everyday living, habits, encounters, assemblings, gestures. Likewise, Jack Bratich (2022) calls attention to how, with micro-antifascism, "the micro is the

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trivial” (160) and that such trivialities are virtually infinite and bear along a cumulative potential. Therefore, one of the affect-oriented tasks of anti-fascisting is to unlock the “potential in innocuous things, which contain potential in hidden areas“ (Bratich 2022, 160) and to “reappropriate humor, play, and platforms to preempt forms of microfascism from crystallizing” (Bratich 2022, 161). When supple and coiling structures of domination operate across the body politic, every site—however small or trivial, and hopelessly entangled with other sites—becomes an opportunity to intervene (proactively), to destabilize hierarchies, norms, and privileges (capaciously), and to tend to, nourish, and grow possibilities of otherwise worlds (creatively). And we wonder if the tendrils of fascism must spread so far and wide because they vaguely, and rightly, sense micro-antifascisms to be mobilizing, well, potentially everywhere: whispers all around, cracks spreading underfoot, the first stirrings of a storm gathering somewhere near...

Many of the contributors to this volume adopt explicitly anti-fascisting tactics to engage potentials for disruptions, ‘downsurgeries,’ and a serious/playful redistribution of affect/s within their own situations. Across the pages of *Capacities to: Affect Up Against Fascism* the reader will find different folks—from all over the place—grappling with feelings of grief, rage, despair, numbness, fear, disgust, dread, hope, doom, and mixtures of all these (and many more). Each entry takes crucial, albeit also tentative (and crucial because tentative), steps into investigating those processes and practices of becoming-active, becoming-inert, becoming-ungovernable [etc etc] that venture a vibey opportunity [an invite!] to synch-up with others who might find themselves resonantly aligned.

We have swung back and forth between the dangers of fascism and the potentialities of anti-fascist practices and movements, and all their murky moods. Perhaps it is all part of the mess of aligning different though resonant bodies—themselves complex assemblages—variously positioned and moving through different regional, political, affective, historical spaces. Yet, we wonder if the sometimes circuitous form of this introduction is an unwitting expression of the tense sociopolitical atmospheres in which we live-think-write. We breathe in jagged rhythms, taking in air charged with threat and promise. Bodies are pulled by tense, uneven affective lures: the weight of gloom and doom, the flatness of ongoing crisis ordinariness, the real pleasure, excitement, hope, and joy that persist. It's hard to capture the unformatted, shifting tonalities of what is afoot. It is hard not to feel as if we are all on the verge of being trampled. Again.

We are being pulled into sharper intensities, grinding to a halt or bolting off—manifestations of micro-fascism and micro-antifascism in their subterranean swirl, where they are protean, shifty, too crude to be sorted and parsed in the light of clear, simple explanations. Hence, the importance of the following pieces. They attune to, explore, and cultivate in/capacities-to by slowing down, speeding up, honing attention, following affect and fascism wherever they fold into and out of each other—where their lines are not categorical but assembled, and hence where practice, process, organization, and movement deeply matter. 'Capacities to' spill over into 'incapacities to,' and back. But we take some comfort in the knowledge that no one has yet determined what an antifascist body can do any more than what a fascist body can do.

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Finally, since we began with two quotes, let's end with two others. We—the writers of this introduction, Greg and Chad—are academics and affect theorists after all. But not only. We often find refuge in words and in what they can conjure, how they can remind and stir. Especially as voiced by two affect theorists who always knew what it meant to be 'up against':

Raymond Williams (1989) writing in the context of nuclear disarmament: Unless the refusals can be connected with such building [of movements], unless protest can be connected with and surpassed by significant practical construction, our strength will be insufficient. It is then in making hope practical, rather than despair convincing, that we must resume and change and extend our campaigns, (emphasis added, 209).

Lauren Berlant (2023): "I used to say to the politically depressed that since the world has changed during our lifetimes, it could change again, to become less bad or even more beautiful. Imagine it" (461).

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Baby Trump blimp, Dump Trump protest
London, Wendy Truran, 2018





I. Shapes of/ for Feeling



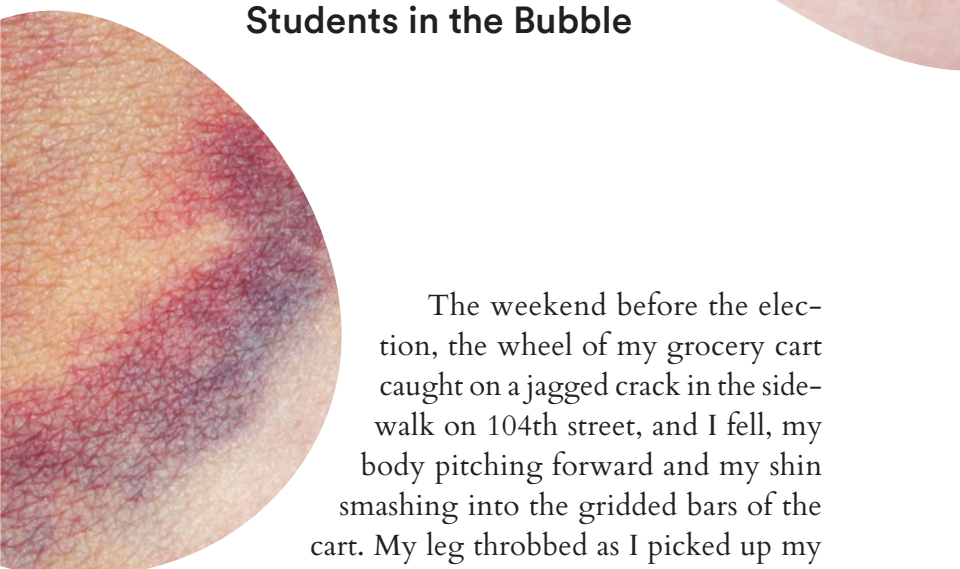
Untitled, Dharles Deluvio, 2020



1

Isabella Bartels

**Teaching Affectively,
Teaching Bruised:
Capacities to Feel With
Students in the Bubble**



The weekend before the election, the wheel of my grocery cart caught on a jagged crack in the sidewalk on 104th street, and I fell, my body pitching forward and my shin smashing into the gridded bars of the cart. My leg throbbed as I picked up myself, my pride, and my frozen spinach from the ground. At home over the next few days, I pressed my fingers over the lightly raised bumps from ankle to knee, up and down, waiting for the bruise to appear. Like a good little affect theorist, I studied my body's response to the pre-election anxieties that tingled all along the lines of my bones. My body, I shouted to each one of my limbs, holds knowledge. My body *knows* things even when those things are a frantic, unsayable tumble and jumble in my mind. My

I. SHAPES OF/FOR FEELING

body knows what I can't put into words. And so, ritualistically, I repeated and repeated the motions: rolling up my pants leg, poking the pads of my fingers impatiently into the flesh of my right shin, waiting for the appearance of some shape or color, tea-leaf-life, to reveal the answer—what to do, how to feel, what would happen?

On the morning after the election, I still had no visible bruise. I was indignant. It was a foregone conclusion that I had no helpful, conscious thought or word in the aftermath that I could share with myself or my students—this semester, I was teaching an undergraduate course on research writing and popular culture, and we had been discussing the uneasy state of things for weeks. I still traced my fingers over the space along the edges of my tibia as I crafted an email to my classes, searching for the right words of comfort and support in the pattern of prickly hair and dull aches. The least my body could do, I thought, was represent the fear, disappointment, outrage, wonder, and overwhelm I wanted to express to them with a really gnarly-looking, monstrous sign.

By the Monday following the election I still had no bruise. I accepted that embodiment would not be, was not meant to be, a perfect metaphor, a glossary-fied, mappable, one to one representation of my emotions. Fine. I would have to continue to try to feel with words. When I got to class that afternoon, the atmosphere—like many classrooms in those days that followed—was palpable. The tension wasn't a divide, an anxious sense of us versus them, othering made visible, like many teachers faced around the country. I had, over the past few days, been coming to terms with the bubble I lived in, the shiny sparkly optimism of my community, in

which I couldn't name a single friend or family member who had voted differently from me. My students were alongside me in this left-leaning slant on the world; at a private, performing arts college in New York City, every single student, leading up to the election, had expressed their political views against the fascist president-elect we now found ourselves faced with. So the affective atmosphere in the room wasn't one of divisiveness, but one of hurt. We were bruised.

After the sudden pop of our mutual bubble, it was not a surprise that affect propelled us away from the lesson with a bigger sense of collective pain, and we spent our time together talking about what had happened, what we felt, and where to go from here. I expected it; Katie Stewart (2020) writes, after all, that teaching affectively is about the “exercising of acts of response. That [means] first muscling out of the default model of knowledge as some kind of mental victory over what is somehow unclear and unwashed or irrational in the world” (32). It was my aim, in the aftermath of the election, to teach in response to the affective atmosphere I knew would be present. We struggled, together, to verbalize our responses as we tried to make sense of it all. Queer students shared anger at family members who had voted against their safety, their health, their personhood. Some grappled with the characterization of their rural hometowns, the dismissal of their communities as uneducated and unworthy. A few were disappointed that this, their very first presidential vote, could do nothing for the genocide they wanted desperately to fight against. We wondered about where we stood—our view from inside this glossy soap-bubble, held for some of us alongside more precarious positions *on* the bubble of society's

Bruise, Unknown, 2016



edge. The balance felt much less steady now as we discussed how quickly things could all realign. I watched them wince at shared words, bite nails and cuticles, and rub repetitious circles over the backs of their hands. Our bruises, though invisible, were blossoming. It was obvious that they too felt like I did, like the colorful swatches of our aches must be vibrating under the surface. That the blue-purple of my veins through the veil of my skin was actually a mark of this hurt that hadn't quite raised to what the eye could see.

I wanted my students to leave class feeling just a bit more hopeful than they had entered. As the class drew to a close, though, we wrapped up with a few students halfheartedly imploring the rest of us to search for local mutual aid opportunities. To start difficult conversations with friends and family. I panicked, at the front of the room, that I had no concrete solutions or meaningful, hopeful messages to impart. As we left the room, our bodies were slow, heavy, pained. The bruises had not healed. Nor would they, in a single class, or even in a semester, or in the writing of this essay. Teaching affectively is not a cure for the moments of ache that happen outside the classroom and seep their way in through the windows and walls and into our skin. Teaching affectively, Stewart (2020) reminds us, “means sidling up to what pushes us to respond in some world’s energetic and generative weight. It is the exercise of a capacity to respond” (33). My teaching could not, will not, be a magic balm for the hurt we all face, each lesson spreading some comforting salve on the bruised bits of us until they fade from angry redness to smooth skin. Teaching affectively in this current state of the country (the list of bruises we could point to, endless) is an ongoing exercise, repetitions upon repetitions of our responses to pain.

In these repeated responses, Stewart (2020) writes, we start to value:

all the extensions of ways of being touched in a world, the lines of things on the move, the widespread joking, the voicing, the dark wakefulness, the sonorousness, how managing a life vies with an unwitting ungluing, how things get started, how people try to bring things to an end through things that slide or slam or in marathon serial immersions, the various things that happen to thought, why conceptuality might tame the form of a speed list, condensing incommensurate elements into something ungainly but recognizable, or why it matters that attention sometimes slows to a halt to wait for something to take shape (32–33).

And so my students and I wait. We poke at the skin of our bruises, our way of being in the world, and see what will form. We trace their outlines on our skin and compare color, shape, depth. We feel the heat reverberating off the particularly angry ones, tell the stories of how they came to be, and watch to see what will remain when the color fades. We debate what our limbs are becoming—are we bruising further, our bodies more marked with pain than ever before? Are we healing? We consider the life cycle of a bruise, peer into its ridges and blooms for the flip from getting worse to getting better. We slow, and we wait, to see what will take shape.

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2

Jamie Heather Pelling

Capacity to Dissociate

Dissociation



Part of the problem of fascism is that people try to put up with it. Part of the problem with fascism is that we need to survive it. The capacity to dissociate is an unwelcome but unavoidable response to the continued, and accelerating, advance of the United States into fascism. And yet, it is in its own negativity that dissociation offers an ambivalent potential. In the final chapter of their last book, Lauren Berlant (2022) both refuses dissociation as an “aspiration or counter-world heterotopia” and rehabilitates it as “a common condition that brings with it a clarifying resource for thinking about what to do with a life that is defined by what is out of joint in it” (126). In this Berlant extends Tony Hoagland’s (2006) diagnosis of a “dissociative poetics” that “responds to the postmodern situation with a joyful crookedness... [but] commits itself, inadvertently, to

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triviality” (519). This is the bind of dissociation. It is a withdrawal from a hostile political situation to a place of livable distance, where the unbearable conditions of fascism can be survived. Without dissociation, we are forced to build new optimisms to sustain us through some (hopefully temporary) duration of fascism. However, such optimism becomes cruel in proximity to the fascist scene and remakes ourselves in its wake. We are all differently able to endure.

Aware of this political situation, dissociation may not be a choice but rather a condition of life in the face of a world marked by death. For Berlant (2022), “biopolitically induced dissociation [calls out to] the interests of congealed power and privilege [using] class, gender, sexuality, race, and national fantasy to create failed subjects” (132). Dissociation becomes a “fundamental political affect” of ‘damaged life,’ an outcome of life negated and an affirmation that life need not be affirmed. It gets us through the state of “being in life without wanting the world” (Berlant 2022, 124).¹ Where a Sally Rooney heroine may quip that depression is simply the ethical relation to the world, Berlant defers the question of what is ethical with what simply is. Dissociation is the imperfect but necessary condition for ongoing life under fascism.

This dissociative bind is a classic scene of Berlantian negativity. Their critique cautions us against grand gestures, hubristic political projects, and cruel optimisms, directing us to a compromised and ambivalent space of political possibility. Dissociating, after all, changes nothing. However, following Berlant’s hint that dissociation may take different forms that do different things, here I detail a specific dissociative capacity with the potential to enact change. This is dissociation as it appears in proximity to sex/gender transition. Dissociation is a trans affect.²

Untitled, Angelica Reyn, 2021



Transition

Transition is a multi-faceted process that may include accessing medical care, reshaping a body, reforming familial relationships, building new social worlds, breaking old habits, learning different social gestures, and inhabiting a gendered self. Transition faces significant opposition before it is voiced and, in a transphobic society, afterwards too. It is a difficult, challenging, and alluring process, with the result that ‘How To’ transition guides proliferate, often focusing on material changes inscribed on the body through hormonal therapy and surgical interventions. These therapies and surgeries also form the bulk of popular interest in trans narratives. How is it that a man may become a woman? The answer lies at the tip of the surgeon’s scalpel. One is not born but rather becomes a woman (through surgery).

Trans narratives have an uneasy relationship with medicalization. In the landmark trans novel *Nevada*, Imogen Binnie plays with this fascination for medical transition and ‘how to’ guides throughout a narrative defined by trans dissociation.³ The novel follows a trans fuck-up called Maria as she runs away from New York in a car stolen from a friend. As she breaks up with her girlfriend, gets fired from her job, does a series of hard drugs, and eventually steals the car, Maria is constantly returning to the things that she is doing to make her a woman. Even as she fails to inject her prescribed hormones, she takes the reader through her shaving and makeup routine in close, ‘how to’ detail. Maria takes clear pride in her successful transition. If Maria’s guides are an attempt to ‘trans’ the reader then this impulse becomes part of the text when, in the final portion of the novel, she tries to convince young Walmart employee James that he, too, is trans.

Maria and James are both living through dissociation. Dissociation is what drives Maria's impromptu road trip, while for James, dissociation mires the question of transition: "to be totally honest he thinks about [transition] all the fucking time, he just can't imagine actually being trans in the real world" (Binnie 2013, 171). These two scenes of dissociation fit Berlant's model. They provide a place of safety to imagine an alternate possibility of life while not wanting the world. For Maria, life on the West coast; for James, life as a woman. However, there is another dissociative potential here. Maria's long musings about trans experience, gender theory, and the 'how-tos' of transition appear in the novel as dissociative breaks that protect her transition. These breaks separate social resistance to her transition from her experience of it as a success. Economic precarity, intimate relationships in crisis, transmisogynist exes, workplace chasers, and transphobic encounters in the world are unable to penetrate this protective barrier. Dissociation does not just keep her alive through unbearable life, but also provides a contained space for the construction of herself on her own terms.

This is the distinctive character of dissociation as trans affect. It preserves us, a separate us, through to a time when things may be different, when new bodies may be built, and new selves realized. It is a reflective shield that repels aggressive misrecognition. It is a mucus film that isolates everyday interactions that get it wrong, and it is a vacuum gap that detaches the 'I am' from the 'you are' imperative of sex/gender. Trans dissociation provides a break from the world, opening an affective space in which a new self can be nurtured away from hostility and oppositional interpellation. While dissociation fails to enact biopolitical change on the scale necessary to vanquish capitalism, fascism, and other

social systems of disenfranchisement and death, in the scene of transition, dissociation does enable a change on the level of the self.⁴

Fascism

This is crucial for life under fascism but apart from fascism. Dissociation as a trans affect allows the preservation of a self away from authoritarian imperatives of self-making. It is unsurprising that hostility to transition was both a marker of fascism in 1930s Europe and is today a rallying cry for the global sexual counter-revolution that is driving a fascist resurgence. Anti-trans policies have been aggressively implemented in the United Kingdom, Russia, and Turkey and form a common plank in far-right populist platforms across the world. In the United States, over the course of the 2024 Presidential election campaign, the Republican Party spent nearly a quarter of a billion dollars on anti-trans political adverts. In the immediate aftermath of the Trump victory, new bathroom bans were rushed through Congress. The same week, the rights of trans children to receive medical care were placed before the Roberts court. President-elect Trump has repeatedly used opposition to transition as a vote-winning device as part of a politics of attention-grabbing high-camp. His repeated claim that Kamala Harris used taxpayer money to pay for “transgender operations on illegal aliens” is a hallmark of his political grandstanding and it was met with a baffled, confused, and defensive response. This affective economy of attention and exasperation is at the core of American fascism, and it is difficult to resist.

In her poem “Having a Great Time Being Transgender in America Lately,” Jackie Sabbagh makes use of a dissociative

poetics to get through fascism with her self unscathed. She switches between a diagnostic view of how bad things are, “It is day infinity of everyone wanting me dead” to affirmative visions of a trans self, “I am more beautiful than you and I would like to be loved” (Sabbagh 2024). The fascist onslaught against trans life is “obviously” working, but Jackie sits dissociated “eating shortbread on a patio table overlooking the enormous green ocean.” However, the closing lines move beyond the state of being in life without wanting the world:

I am excited to do this for the rest of my life
and be terrified.
I hear a noise behind me and I don't turn
around

Jackie wants the world very much and awaits it with excitement. She is able to preserve that joy by turning away from the attention-grabbing threat and noise posed by fascism in a space of trans dissociation. The capacity to dissociate in this way is the capacity to hope without attachment, it is an optimistic change away from fascism. It is a refusal to be subsumed.

Endnotes

1. Dissociation is closely linked to ‘suicidation’ in Berlant’s (2022) account. Suicidation “marks the sense of the unendurable that is endured” (Berlant 2022, 122) and uses a similar space of life negation to find paths through. In *trans girl suicide museum*, hannah baer offers a dissociated account of a suicidation that is both enforced and desired on the path to building a new self and leaving an old one behind. This follows a common experience among trans women, that transition is a process of ‘killing the man inside’ where suicidation is not only biopolitically enforced but may also become a sustaining optimism.

2. Few embrace dissociation better than online communities of trans shitposters. There is a book to be written about the shitpost as trans literature and dissociation as its core affect. Thank you to Sophie Renée (@heartpunk.bsky.social) for talking these ideas through with me at length.

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3. *Nevada* is a trans novel in the sense that it is by and for trans women and in the sense that it is about transition. Kay Gabriel (2022) argues that *Nevada* shifted perception of transness and began a process by which transition could be seen as an active force in the world rather than the tragedy associated with a particular failed subject. As a result, the immediate (and lasting) impact of *Nevada* has been to crack open understandings of transition. Many women regard reading it as the starting point of their own transition.

4. This echoes Hil Malatino's (2022) work on 'side affects'—that is, negative affects which may be used sideways to build community and sustain life.

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3

Katalin Halász

**Capacities to be
a Body out of Bounds**



I am standing in a crowd.
I am tense.
And I think that if every muscle in my body
wouldn't protest against unwanted physical contact,
if everyone didn't try
not to strain their limbs into the bodies of strangers,
if everyone would accept the momentary situation
the tension wouldn't be so great,
neither my own
nor that of others.





TUSVÁNYOS

Screencapture of The Bell Rings,
a short film by Katalin Halász
and Andreas Landeck, 2023 (17:34)

I am submerged in the crowd at the 2023 Tuszványos Festival, a week-long politics and music event organized annually by the Hungarian government in Transylvania, Romania, home to a large ethnic Hungarian minority. We are waiting for Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister, who is about to arrive any minute now. Since coming to power in 2010, he has made it a tradition to address the nation on Tuszványos' final day. The nation that is 'Great Hungary,' symbolic and historic, including territories like Transylvania, ceded to Romania after the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. It was here, at Tuszványos in 2022, when Orbán spoke out against race-mixing: "There is a world in which European peoples are mixed together with those arriving from outside Europe. Now that is a mixed-race world. And there is our world, where people from within Europe mix with one another, move around, work, and relocate. ... This is why we have always fought: we are willing to mix with one another, but we do not want to become peoples of mixed-race." His words from last year, along with the sound of his voice and the jubilant cheers of the crowd, churn inside me like a billiard ball relentlessly trying to sink into a pocket, while my body tightens and releases in a nervous attempt to prevent it from making contact with the edges.

I came here to understand something
 but now I am so unsettled
 in my own feelings and purpose,
 I don't know what I am doing here anymore.

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With headphones pressing tightly on my ears and a microphone raised in my hand, I try to follow the filmmaker's instructions. I can only hope I pressed the right buttons on the small device strapped around my neck and that it's recording properly, while I stretch my arms in every direction to capture the sounds engulfing me. Stationed at the side of the main stage with his camera, he films faces, bodies, and reactions. He is German, and I am Hungarian. We came here together to ingest, subsume, and create a film. It is the last day of a week that was segmented not by alternating political agitation and alcohol-fuelled night concerts, but by the tiresome effort of allowing opposing ideas and feelings to run parallel while holding onto the capacity of my body to function.

You show your protest by tensing your body.

Your body protests.

You think that people are letting themselves
be led blindly

by a knowledge of uncertain origin
that has been handed down to them,

which they can never fully possess,
and which their personal experience cannot
fully verify either.

You look at the faces around you.

You think you see their confusion and boredom.

But you cannot fully grasp them
or your own feelings.

While the echo of Orbán's voice bounces off the surrounding mountains, enveloping us in a thick soundscape,
I wait for the filmmaker to call it a cut and release me from



Screencapture of *The Bell Rings*,
a short film by Katalin Halász
and Andreas Landeck, 2023 (17:34)

my spot wedged between a middle-aged woman in a hat adorned with a withered blue flower, eager to catch a popular joke about migrants or gender madness, and a foul-smelling older man in a sweat-stained shirt, swearing relentlessly about the evils of anything he can grasp from the torrent of words. It must be challenging for them this year, I suppose. Several minutes into the speech, the well-rehearsed, formulaic hatred directed at contained groups of people has still not appeared. I don't really listen, don't even try to follow or glean anything from what is being discharged. By now, my sweat has merged with the man's, and my sole focus is on avoiding his saliva droplets from landing on my bare arms, which are tired from holding the microphone up. I hear words of war, China, Western values, US weapons, redistribution of power, European Union, Christian heritage. The puppet master, holding the strings in his hands, fails to lift everyone to the heights of the storm he is orchestrating. People are dropping off his battleships. I close my eyes, and I think of the others I spoke with over the past few days. The linguist professor, the first person I could engage with, saved me not only from the total despair of the abyssal corruption into which Hungary is sinking deeper with every collective breath of this fascist camp, but also from my own failure to see beyond and above what is presented on the surface around me. His questioning pauses, uncertain silences, and warmth—along with the openness of others who spoke with me, including his students, the two young female politicians, the local family man holding his child, and the teenage girls excited to attend their first music festival with parental permission—helped to crack open the darkness. Even if only for moments, those moments were real.

We have connected and disconnected
images and concepts,
discourses and representations,
emotions and sensations.
I want to know why I am inclined to do things.
Why I am doing things.
Why I trace my emotions.
I don't consider my emotions a reality,
but I want to reach my reality through my emotions.
My reality, where the emotions that guide me
to reach it
originate from.

Helis Sikk and her mother c. 1989,
a few years before the end of Soviet Estonia
(Photo courtesy of author's brother)

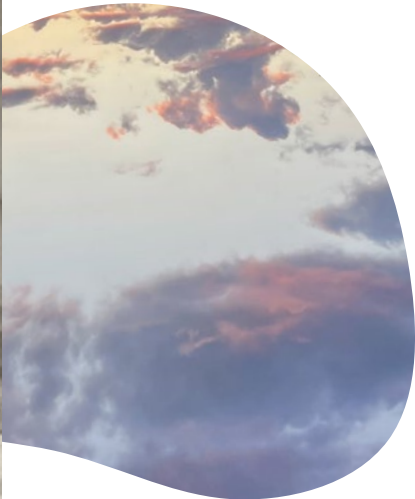


4

Helis Sikk

Capacity to Stay *After*: Sapphic Aesthetics Against Fascism

Prelude



My mother lived the first 39 years of her life under Soviet occupation in Estonia. She didn't know when or how we would be free or what that might look like, but she knew how to stay with her values and culture *after*; even when what was before that particular *after* (Soviet occupation) was only known to her through stories from older relatives. How did she do that? How did she not give up or take on the culture of the occupiers? Even for her, it is hard to determine what makes up this capacity to stay *after* with any precision. Yet, I have some ideas. It could have been her nature-worshipping pagan ways of connecting to the world or sharing

meals and gossip, or and having a deep love for the softer arts that could hide resistance and critique: poetry, theatre, and music. Most likely all of the above at a time when direct opposition proved deadly to many. I turned 39 in December. I have been fortunate enough to do most of my growing up in a country that had slowly begun to build its independence in 1991. Yet, the 2024 US Presidential Election has made me think more about the *after*. How do we maintain the capacity to stay with our values and culture *after* without knowing what an end to that *after* might look like or when it will arrive? Learning from my mother, during this time of heightened fascism that seeks to eliminate difference, I suggest leaning into the feminine and looking for resistance in softer places.

Sapphic Aesthetics

In her 1994 essay (an aesthetically great year for the lesbian), musicologist Suzanne Cusick ponders: “whether there might be a lesbian aesthetic, that is, a preference for certain kinds of music that somehow reflected the patterns of lesbian desire or lesbian pleasure” (69). To uncover this orientation toward music, she playfully asks “Who’s on top?” only to confirm that it is the listener who is “flat on her back” and getting topped by music (Cusick 1994, 74). Of course, letting yourself be topped by music or otherwise does not mean powerless submission without agency. Bottoming is a rather capacious position that contains a specific set of affects, aesthetics, and politics (Hoang 2014). For Cusick (1994) “being on your back” has not so much to do with a sexual orientation, but rather a certain kind of orientation to music that involves a dance between intimacy, pleasure, and power (71).

Here, I would like to expand Cusick's discussion of lesbian musicology to a more capacious category: Sapphic. Sapphic as an aesthetic, at times overlapping, but also different from the political-biopolitical lesbian (the perseverance of which has been confirmed by Mairead Sullivan in their 2022 book *Lesbian Death*) and the radical-political queer. I wonder what the Sapphic as a certain kind of orientation (affective and temporal) would look like, not just in music but towards the world? Importantly, what might we learn from leaning into this particular kind of orientation *after* the many seemingly impossible *afters* we have witnessed, even just over the past year, and surely the more impossible *afters* that are yet to come *after* January 20th, 2025? Although at first blush seemingly frivolous, I argue that Sapphic as an orientation towards the world contains a capacity to teach us how to stay *after*, even if we do not know when the *after* will end and what that ending might look like. We might consider this softer orientation towards the world at a time when other, less soft, more hard ways of staying are too dangerous, violent, and even deadly. Importantly, this softness is not equal to weak or passive. It is a softness that holds the kind of pliable durability we find in true vulnerability: open to the potential of pain and certain of the capacity to endure, absorb, and redirect.

Since its most recent renaissance in the mid-2010s, the Sapphic as a noun and adjective has emerged as an elusive disruptor. Locating Sapphic as an aesthetic that holds certain affects, means working on an "inventory of shimmers" similar to how Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) describe affect theory via the sad soft boy Roland Barthes (11). Sapphic "inventory of shimmers" includes, according to my students, the following:



Midsummer bonfire, Hells Sikk

Pillowtalk pillow
 Smell before/after rain
 Kettle boiling
 Strawberry ChapStick
 Sand between toes
 Interlocked fingers
 The smell of cookies baking
 Fingers in hair
 Floral arrangement
 Sweaty bed sheets
 Unshaved legs
 Skin on skin

The “shimmering gradations of intensities” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 11) of the Sapphic can be also located partially, for instance, in the cottagecore aesthetic, the nostalgic performance of pastoral, idyllic and rural life online and offline through activities such as bread baking, fiber arts (knitting), flower picking, frolicking, foraging. It includes textures and patterns such as handcrafted ceramics, flowy dresses, lace, linen, dried flowers, unpolished wood. Sapphic is not bound to the pastoral past, of course, it also includes Cate Blanchett (memeified in any context, but especially) in the 2015 movie *Carol*.

Yearning, longing, nostalgia, and slow-burn are some of the Sapphic affects that emerge out of the sensory and tactile intensities mentioned here. Sapphic affect is shaped by a certain kind of suspension, but it is not quite the negative suspension of anxiety and irritation that Sianne Ngai (2005) uncovers in *Ugly Feelings*. The suspension here is more akin to the lack or absence that is part of the bittersweet eros of

Author's mother with peonies



Anne Carson (1986) that embraces both pleasure and pain. Sapphic stays in the middle of this bottomless absence, in the obsessive and at times possessive want, with no rush to arrive, complete, or climax. Wanting for more, but not having (and perhaps, not wanting to fully have that more) is what defines Sapphic affect.

Sapphic temporality, grounded in the affects of yearning and longing, is an otherwise texture. Sapphic temporality is adjacent to, but not exactly a negative queer futurity (Edelman 2004) or a depressing orientation backward (Love 2007), nor is it overtly and cruelly optimistic (Berlant 2011). Sapphic temporality is cruising, but without the need to arrive in any kind of queer utopia (Muñoz 2009). Sapphic temporality is more attuned to the rhythms of the natural world, which challenge the binding of flesh into socially meaningful embodiment that is part of the discipline of chrononormativity (Freeman 2010). Sapphic temporality resists the maximum productivity of the Anthropocene.

Postlude

Leaning into the rhythms of the natural world, or as the Sapphic poet Mary Oliver (1986) suggests, “announcing your place in the family of things” (14) is one of the ways of maintaining the capacity to stay *after* the many impossible *afters* that have already arrived and will likely continue to arrive under another Trump presidency. During a time when we cannot be certain of much, we can still count on some elements of the natural world. The cyclical ways of nature means that things will return and start again just like the moon that waxes and wanes (a very Sapphic object indeed

ever since the songs of Sappho). Sapphic orientation towards the world teaches us to lean into this cyclicity, not just in nature, but also as evidenced in the arts and the softer textures of everyday life. A very similar orientation towards the world guided my mother through years of occupation. At this time of rising fascism, why not include such orientation as part of what fuels our capacity to stay *after* January 20th 2025?

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5

Forrest Cheyenne Klamath

**Capacities to Be Gayer
and More Indigenous:
How Indigiqueer Folx Can
Strengthen Community
Through Research**

Introduction

In recent decades, Indigenous voices have enriched academic discourse, challenging colonial narratives and reclaiming space as equal participants in history, present, and future. Indigenous authors in the field of archival studies, for example, have repositioned archives as sites of culturally relevant and community-driven spaces of knowledge-sharing. Drawing from writers in Indigenous studies, library and archival studies, gender studies, Indigenous

feminisms and other social sciences, this paper explores the concept of building capacity through research. Research, as an Indigenous experience, includes the acts of reading, writing, listening, reflecting, and communing with others to continue the conversation, a process much akin to storytelling. This kind of research can also include processing trauma, grieving, prayer, and counseling others. It can also be documenting, recording, or preserving knowledges in culturally-relevant ways. Capacity in this paper is meant to capture the mobilization among Indigenous people to make time and space to engage in research. Capacity also references volume, building capacity is also meant to encourage networking and strengthening support between and among Tribal communities by reclaiming knowledges and making the research accessible to more people.

To this end, I discuss Luhui Whitebear's counter-colonial intergenerational storytelling as a methodology for building networks of informal care among queer Indigenous communities. I also highlight how other writers in the field have framed research and kinship, emphasizing the importance of engaging with Indigenous and queer literatures. I explore storytelling as a research practice rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and framed as an act of resistance, offering queer, transgender, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals a space to share their narratives with one another.

Finally, I discuss my academic research and my Tribal contribution to discourse about Two Spirit and queer Indigenous folks. By amplifying these stories, queer Indigenous people can see themselves represented in tribal histories, fostering connections with future generations and strengthening transnational and transIndigenous alliances.

And now more than ever, in the calm before another hurricane Trump administration, it is imperative that we tell our own stories, share our experiences and live authentically. We cannot allow them to take away our stories.

Whitebear and Wilson on Storytelling

Shawn Wilson (2020) frames research as ceremony. By doing research, one forms a personal relationship with the materials, but also forms a relationship with the knowledge they gain; they become a caretaker with the responsibility to preserve and respectfully share with others.¹ Ceremony emphasizes this accountability and encompasses critical research as a symbolic connection between the researcher and the ancestors. Whitebear's (2020) *Counter-Colonial Intergenerational Storytelling* is modeled after this, her work positions research as intergenerational knowledge transfer and as an act of resistance. She talks about storytelling in activist circles and includes segments of her own family history. Her works foreground historically marginalized voices, emphasizing the role of LGBTQS+ individuals in cultural memory restoration. The importance of these texts in conversation is that they each provide a strong pathway for blending together intergenerational knowledge transfer, research, resistance, and cultural storytelling. Through these lenses, we can reframe the act of research, not as an activity imposed by outsiders, but as both a personal ceremony and as a community healing strategy.

As Daniel Heath Justice (2018) emphasizes in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*:

Indigenous writers have always struggled to articulate different understandings of who and what we are in relation to our histories and current experiences. If our humanity is defined in large part by the stories we tell, then the storytellers have a vital role to play in bringing us back to healthier relationships with ourselves and with one another. They remind us who we are and where we come from [...] (60).

This passage reminds us of our responsibility to communicate with one another and to engage with our ancestors' stories. We, as Indigenous *and* queer people, must build capacity to reclaim the act of storytelling and all its nuances to heal our connections to past, present, and future generations. We have a responsibility now to educate ourselves with full community capacity and share our truths forward.

My Indigenous Archival Research

In beginning my own research, I was most inspired by Felix Furby's 2023 museum exhibit, *My Father's Father's Sister: Our Ancestor Shimkhin*, at the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center in Grand Ronde, Oregon.² The exhibit highlighted how colonization distorts historical narratives over time by presenting the life story and legacy of Shimkhin, a well-documented Two-Spirit healer to Pacific Northwest Tribes of the 19th century. She is captured in oral histories between the borders of what are now California and Canada, and her name appears in multiple languages across different Tribes' archival history literature. The exhibit had a listening station with headphones, it was a recording of

Shimkhin's healing song. It was profound experience to hear this song playing in my ears, knowing that it was a direct connection to the past, and to a queer ancestor, it is a song that continues to connect people a century later.

This exhibit pulled together strands of historic materials, from early American scientific sources as well as Tribal history sources and materials to present a more holistic view of Shimkhin and tell the story of her life, her work, and her significant and valuable contributions to cultural ceremonies and rituals as a medicine woman. Storytelling, or teaching us the story of Shimkhin, in this context, was the first exhibit ever hosted at Chachalu that showcased a queer, Tribal ancestor. This exhibit gave a role model to queer Natives like myself and the two other Indigenous queer folk visiting with me. For us, Shimkhin's story builds collective kinship, strengthens community, and carves out spaces for healing and learning. It inspired me to find my Master's thesis topic.

Researching queer Indigenous histories often involves confronting colonial terminology and fragmented records because traditional Western archives tell the story of conquest, power, and surveillance. Terms like "berdache"³ persist in documentation, highlighting the dehumanizing lens through which Two-Spirit ancestors were studied and recorded. See, for example, Debora Miranda (2022) and Gregory Smithers (2022), whose work details the historic brutality and violence enacted toward queer and Two-Spirit ancestors, particularly during the Missionization era. During my research at the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians archives, I sought evidence of my queer Indigenous ancestors. This required critical inquiry across oral histories, anthropological notes, and creation stories, but I found that

Two-Spirit ancestors were present and common. Historically, they held vital community roles, serving as caretakers, ceremonial leaders, and healers. Their contributions transcended colonial gender binaries, positioning them as key figures in conflict resolution and social cohesion. However, their stories remain fragmented, often reduced to colonial terminology (such as berdache) in anthropological records.

My research goal was to find and engage with my Siletz queer ancestors. I found Two Spirit members of my Tribal history in the archives and wanted to share their legacies with the rest of my community in a way that was culturally respectful, relevant, and accessible outside of an academic capacity. My vision for this work was to encourage more queer Tribal members to learn about this facet of our history, and that queer youth would get to grow up with the knowledge that their queer ancestors were sacred to many of our people.

My archival research focused on finding Two-Spirit ancestors and their names, so that they may be presented not as a scientific technical term, but as themselves, and as equal participants in our Tribal history. Through this work, I have learned the cultural importance of Two Spirit social responsibilities, and have found different Pacific Northwest Two Spirits from Siletz's ancestral territories. For Indigenous queer folks, researching, learning and sharing queer Tribal history creates spaces for us to engage not only within one another, but with our ancestors. It also offers a safe space where individuals can connect with their kin and openly embrace both their queer and Indigenous identities, especially in light of the Trump administration's general disapproval of both.

Conclusion

Resistance requires solidarity; storytelling brings people together. Through research and sharing, we can reclaim the gayest and most Indigenous parts of our history. Our narratives—past and present—challenge colonial frameworks, disrupt imposed binaries, and uncover inconvenient truths. My own research into the histories of Two-Spirit ancestors from within the archives of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians sought to honor the contributions of Two-Spirit individuals as integral members of our Tribal histories and to provide contemporary queer Indigenous youth with connections to their ancestors. But as we move forward, it is crucial to continue protecting these voices and the spaces where queer Indigenous people can see themselves reflected in history, celebrated in the present, and envisioned in the future. By reclaiming research as a ceremonial, relational, and activist storytelling practice, we not only honor our ancestors but also build pathways for future generations to thrive in their full, unapologetic identities.

Endnotes

1. Shawn Wilson (2020) talks about relationality in *Research is Ceremony and the ethics and responsibility of learning and transferring knowledge*.
2. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in Oregon is a neighboring Tribe located about an hour away from the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians Reservation, where I am an enrolled Tribal member.
3. *Berdache* is one example of a problematic slur used to denote observed variances in sexuality or gender among Indigenous research subjects, but is often indexed as a technical term in anthropological work from the early and mid-1900's. See bibliography for reading suggestions.

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6

Cassie Thornton

The Incapacity to Stay in your Lane: On Gaza, on Emergency, on Extinction, Murder, Erasure, Loss



“As you might have guessed (and know too), my relation with Ayowb in Gaza is also one of care-giving and taking. It is my primary care responsibility I feel. Materiality counts, but it really is just spending time together (whatever can be spent).”

—Text message from Pujita

I’m working with Pujita Guha as well as Dea Anton-
sen, Aziza Harmel, Ida Bencke on a nearly indescribable (for
now) series of projects for Hosting Lands,¹ a distributed long
term exhibition experiment. It’s so rare to get to speak with



I. SHAPES OF/FOR FEELING

someone, like Pujita, who can tell me what I didn't have the words for. She recently explained to me how her primary care responsibility is with a person she communicates with, gives and receives care with, and supports by fundraising in Gaza. It was so helpful to hear her describe and prioritize the care relationship so clearly. I too have a person in Gaza who I've grown to feel with and through. Without romanticizing anyone, I don't know if I would have stayed spiritually alive and stayed believing in the world if it wasn't for Ghadir. She survives so bravely, with poetry and ingenuity, in the ruins. If you don't read any further, please consider supporting her through a campaign we are hosting together.²



All of my friends, and friends of friends also support me to support her in so many ways, and it keeps me alive. Many, many people I know are doing a lot to get money to people in Gaza so they can afford very expensive food, water, infrastructure and bare survival as money and supplies are held hostage by Israel. If you are interested in helping, if you have experience with crypto, if you want to send money, if you want to support a specific family, please get in touch and I can help.

Whatever else I write below about the complexity of losing comfort in the apocalypse should not ring as loudly as the stories of anyone surviving the genocide. I believe everyone is escaping violence on some level, but some way more than others. I think the comfortable few will benefit as individuals and collectively when we shift our comfort, energy and resources towards supporting the people who are living through the most brutal apocalypse imaginable. And meanwhile, I admit that I go swimming.

Stay in Your Lane

Do you ever go swimming in a pool with lanes? I do this in Berlin public and private pools, as I learn how to be water body. I'm actually doing it right now. I'll be swimming the crawl, head down. I start to feel a confidence, a sense that I am learning small tricks about my body in liquid motion. Some days I learn how I can almost breathe underwater, or how to keep my legs straight when I kick, or how to arch or relax my back. On good days, I start to feel like I know something completely new about what I can do, maybe I am even in the process of transforming back into an aqueous being. There's a peace and stability in knowing, just for right now, the infinitely small details of how to be.



Untitled, Adii Ibrahim, 2022

Suddenly, my brain gets some signal that I should look up. I crane my neck so I can look forward and not down, to know where I am going and not just how. I immediately realize that there are other swimmers coming directly at me. I am in Berlin, and no one really obeys the lanes, and three topless smiling German women are coming towards me, relentless and uncaring of my tiny path. I see that I am in a giant pool, it is filthy, that there are creatures coming at me who know nothing of my subtle body peaceful solo learning. My heart beats quickly, not because I am scared, but because the change of perspective happens so so quickly sometimes. It takes the body a few moments to adjust to the new information. Suddenly I am in a new reality.

Recently, I feel like I find comfort in focusing on very specific tasks like swimming with my head down. I focus so hard in order to unsee my context, which is a very quickly changing world with so much more violence and insecurity than I can take in. It is so strange, the change between the very forceful laser focus and the subtle learnings that come with that, and then the threat world of living in a fascist country as death and emergencies surround on all sides.

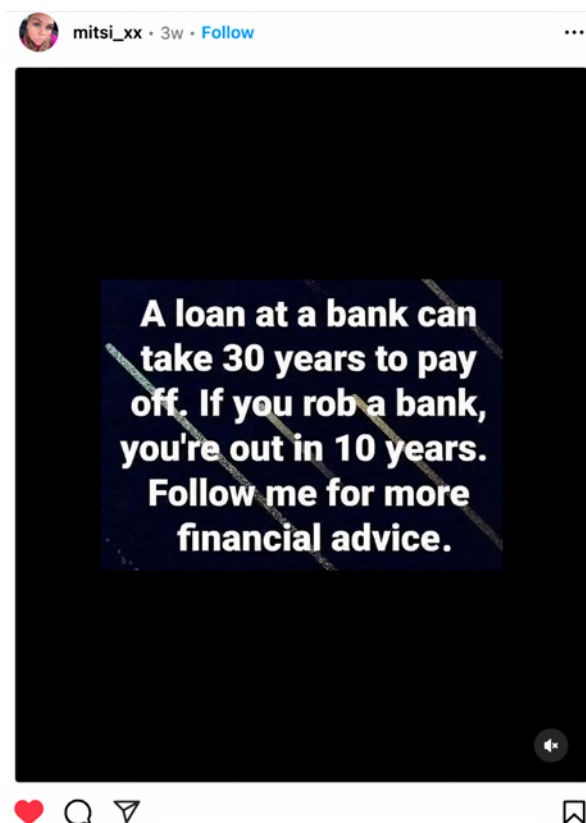
The Notion of Emergency is Changing for Me

It happens almost daily, we figure out how to get someone an emergency infusion of water, food, coat, meat, well, transportation in Gaza. I had lived as if there were no real emergencies for my whole life because all the wrong things had been setting off my alarms. I felt like running out of money was an emergency. Heartbreak and disappointment felt like an emergency. Someone's diagnosis was an emergency. My bad self-esteem felt like an emergency. Someone

else's urgency could produce my emergency. For 40 years I calmed myself by saying that I could take my time. It is ok to go slow. We all need to slow down to slow the cogs of capitalism. Even David Graeber had personally assured me of this, that I should halt all work to save the planet.

Now when there are emergencies that mean life or death, (get together some money and get it by the end of the day and a few families will be able to get food!) my brain tries to quiet them as if they were just a false intuition: "There are no emergencies, Cassie, everything is fine." I picture a serene forest (inhale) and notice that it is smoldering (exhale). And then I remember where I am. I am not swimming in a lane alone; I am in a huge pool and some of the people in there are drowning. Many people don't know what to do to help. But me and my friends do, and so we help in any way we can. If you want to help us support people in Gaza in ways that are financial or not, please get in touch. We need you.)

Today I spoke with my friend Dani Admiss who writes and works on a project that I love so much called Sunlight Doesn't Need a Pipeline.³ We spoke about the necessity to slow down: in order to slow down consumption, in order to slow down carbon, in order to slow down climate change. On a massive collective scale, this is true. My realization: I can't slow down. In fact, I have never moved so fast as now. I once believed in slowing down, but now I believe in being ready (listen to the song in my head when I say that, by Rising Appalachia).⁴ I think it is a lot of work to live between dimensions where in some aspects of life, things continue as normal and the coffee keeps flowing and rent keeps charging, while meanwhile the rest of life is like living in a sci-fi thriller.



I was trying to figure out why I feel so busy. I think it is because I have to work very hard to make enough money to pay rent (in a cultural landscape where you can't be Pro-Pal-estine and receive funding or support where I live and the cost of living is sky rocketing); I have to work very hard to generate the community I need to have energy for this money work. I have to work extra hard to make sure that the community has resources to persist, so they will also be able to care for me as I care for them, as we are all in a very

precarious moment. I need these things so I can be stable enough to have the clarity and energy and resources available to move when there is an emergency, with calm and resources. I have never been more powerful, busy, or more financially unstable. I think the money matters less and less. What can money do in an emergency?

I wonder if there will actually be a great speeding up before we can slow down? It's like when you quit your old job to go to a new job but the two overlap: at your old job, you work 'part time' to train your replacement while maintaining the rest of your workload. Meanwhile, you have a full time job at your new workplace. Transitions take work and it may not be time to slow down, not in the way we expect. Our old jobs might have been to survive in the economy while our new jobs may be to see that life can continue through genocides, floods, growing fascism, and all the other scary stuff.

It turns out that in the apocalypse everything takes much longer than it should. When you sit in a comfortable seat as the world burns, when things are much worse than they appear, it takes a lot of time and attention to drown out the grief and guilt in order to do your 'work'—even when your work is fun. And thus, everything always feels a bit slow, like nothing is enough. It's as if every day is another missed opportunity to save something from extinction, murder, erasure, or loss. Again and again, we miss our chance.

Endnotes

1. <https://hostinglands.com>
2. <https://chuffed.org/project/115180-warmth-and-food-in-nuseirat-camp>
3. <https://sunlightdoesntneedapipeline.com>
4. https://youtu.be/-886A0y_KI0



Commemorative coins
from Amazon.com





II. Fascism, From Within and Without

Baby Trump blimp, Dump Trump protest
— London, Wendy Truran, 2018



7

Jennifer Woody Collins

Capacities to: Not Know

The reelection of Trump felt like a violent shove that knocked down what I thought was an OK world. My sense that things were not so bad came from living. My friends had been getting more and more into slow walks through the woods, delighted by fungus and bugs. At least four people I know were learning piano and there were just as many potlucks as usual. I noticed people delighted by children in public. Internet commentators good naturedly agreed to disagree. There were library book sales and people picking up litter. Pedestrians were everywhere. I effortlessly noted these small occasions of beauty—a sign that I was not suffering under the dark pall of existence.

While things felt passably good in my immediate spheres,

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there was a sharp optimism drop-off just around many corners. Still, as ever, a white middle class American woman can set up a Panglossian world if she so chooses.

In this middling idyll, Trump's election felt like the time a mean boy down the street flung a basketball in my face at point blank range. It was unexpected and it hurt. I was knocked down, sprawled out in his yard, crying. He left me on the ground and went into his house, taking his ball with him. Right before it happened, we were playing as usual—with me doing a little better than him—and then this sudden violence. It is a blow that reverberates because of its surprise and confirmation of an ominous intuition that had not yet been consciously sorted.



But like the election of Trump, that basketball to the face was a blow that I cannot make full or fixed sense of. Sure, a kid may be mad that a girl is beating him at sports and lash out because of it, but we went right back to our game the next day. Trump is often accurately described as a brash little boy, a characterization that offers a sense that he is all bluster. Bluster can be ignored, or at least it (probably) won't amount to anything. This line of thinking is only temporarily helpful because the blows keep coming and I despair. But then I

keep going, as we do. In this cycle, I notice my tendency to bargain: he's bad, but I can live with it. This is immediately met with an internal admonishment "you shouldn't excuse bad behavior," and so on.

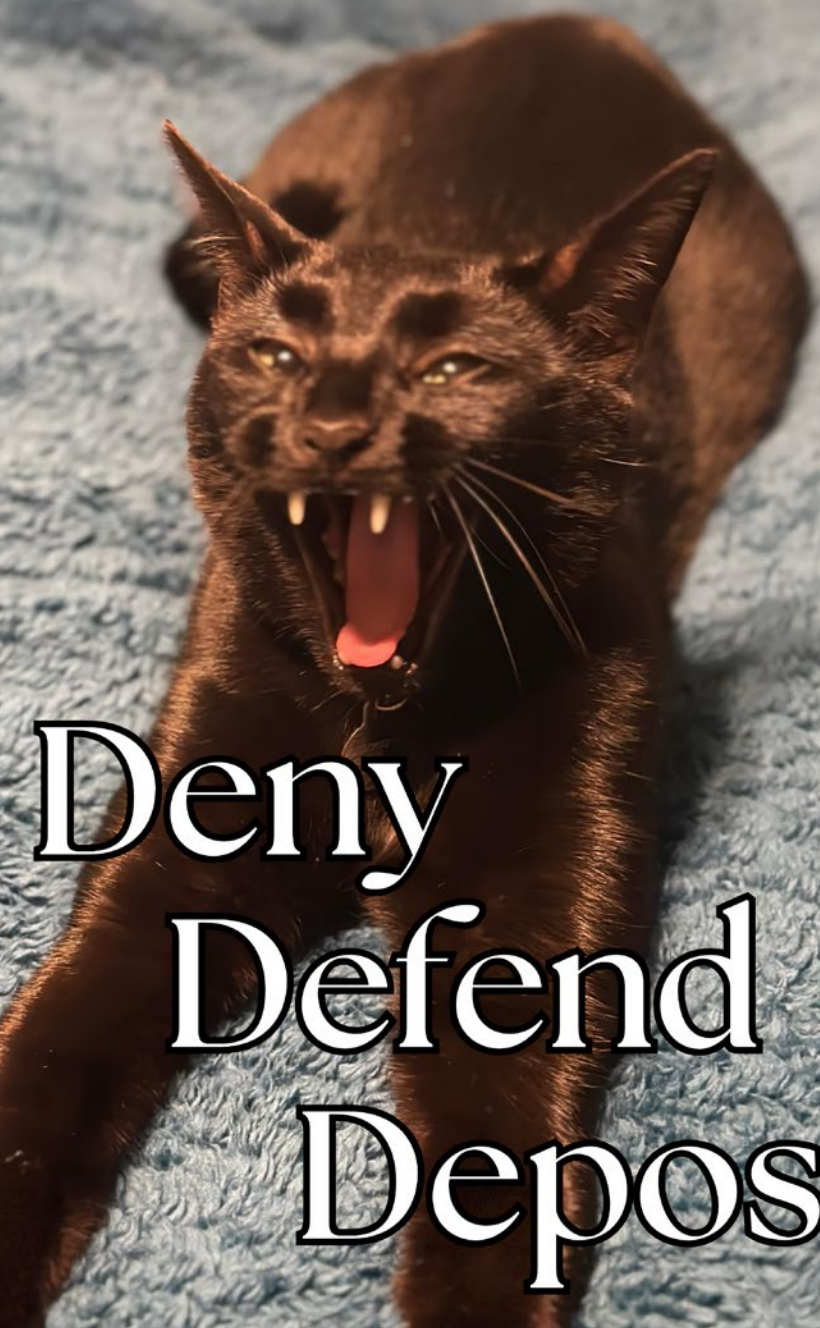
Mostly, I absolutely cannot come to any solid sensation about what it all means, what I ought to do, or how any of us could fix any of it. I notice the familiar desire for wanting to know—to have an answer that might pause my thought fluctuations and provide stable ground for going ahead. It seems many are in a similar scramble, endlessly analyzing, pontificating, and explaining. Some of the answers offered feel good to hold on to, but before too long, another slap lands in the form of a billionaire appointment to a cabinet position or boys taunting "your body my choice," or the disregard of earnest politicians begging for sanity or reason or at least decency. The structures I have relied on for making sense of things seemingly evaporated.

Breakdowns of sensemaking hurt most when we demand to know. Of course I want to know, but the practice is to feel that desire and get real about what good it has ever done. At best, I encounter a story about how things work that satisfies for a time. I do my living until, inevitably, something knocks me back into the unsatisfactory space of confusion.

The worst part of this cycle is the flailing, the feeling that I should have known better, the self-shaming at my lapse in practice. I forgot to come back to my breath. Inhale: I do not know. Exhale: I cannot know. I also must remember to have compassion with myself, and others.

It is comforting to remember that I am not Oz or God or anything close to omnipotent. Further comfort arrives when I remember we are muddling through this muck together. We just have to see what happens. We do not know what will

Meme by Katie Strom featuring George the house panther, 2025



Deny
Defend
Depose

happen, yet. A young man named Luigi could kill a CEO. Capitalism could fall. There will probably be some terrifying weather. We will be chilled by wild winds and feel love as if it were a little heater.

There is more to this life than going around with the feeling that you have been hit in the face with a basketball. Yes, the hits will keep coming and your face will sting. You will want to know why they are so mean, and you probably cannot do anything to stop them (obviously you will try to anyway). There will not be justice. You must allow the despair to be with you because it is unrelenting. Begin to notice when you think the despair has gone. Realize it is not really gone, but it is gone for you for the time being and feeling good once in a while is excellent. Ease into a bath. Read far out theories. Notice how cats will rub against your leg and then bite you. Expect to wonder why. Know you do not.





"Pig," Dump Trump Protest, London, Wendy Truran, 2018

8

Randall Johnson

**Capacity to Know the
Enemy, Within and Without**

The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. This provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or one indicative of substantial content.

—Carl Schmitt

It's too easy to be anti-fascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

For these few weeks after the 2024 election in the United States, witness to the rapid nominations for what I call the ship of fools cabinet in this resurgence of the scourge—in my resistant refusal to honor an evident sociopath by saying his grotesquely glorified name—I have oscillated between an overwhelming sadness that half the voters of this country have been seduced into the jouissance of a politics driven by fearful hatred and, at the other extreme of this pendulum of

II. FASCISM, FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

emotions, a smoldering rage at the capitalist oligarchs who affectively manipulate the often deliberately ignorant populace towards this freefall into what is most accurately characterized as fascism. As Marx instructed us and as history again destines: what is first tragedy returns as farce. Yet, the deliberate buffoonery of this politics appears to be a strategic exaggeration that fuels the all-too-real verbal and physical violence towards various minorities. These maliciously divisive diversions serve to concentrate power and wealth into the greedy little hands of a few, who wallow in the inevitable pathologies that always accompany power.

Writing for me is less an articulation of thoughts that have become clear and are able to be logically formulated than it is a felt discovery from the midst of a trajectory of thinking, from the midst of its inscription into necessarily circumscriptive words. And thinking is always collective, perhaps even more so in its singularity. The first paragraph of this exercise in discerning the enemy, initiated by a sentence that reveals my dialectical wariness of allowing a thought its premature cessation by a period, reminds me that my first temptation in the distraught few days just after this election was to allow a return to the intellectual comforts of irony. Oh, the scintillating sarcasm of witty words. But I know that my preternatural preference for thinking over doing—a recognition I at times try to quell by use of the phrase *intellectual labor*, an employment which risks being doubly vain—along with my aversion to the false clarity of minimalist writing invites such irony, turns it toward cynicism if not nihilist withdrawal from, rather than a more immediately resistant response to, the *polis* in its ever-contested structuring. Once a *polis* is structured, however, the virtual surfaces of its institutions exude an illusory sense of impenetrable solidity towards the teem-



ing but barely included *demos* and the periphery of excluded barbarians, often considered to be barely human and always taken to be the enemy. This hints to the fact that the nation-state remains woefully Western in its mythic Greek origins, whether its politics is reactionarily fascist within a pretense of democracy or progressively liberal in its presumption of aiming at a *true* democracy—whatever such a utopic myth may be. And both these politics are so much more palimpsestic than oppositional in their relation; both imbricated with the economy as an apologetics for a capitalism pretending to be for the *socius*.

Nevertheless, unlike some on the radical left, I think there is a difference worth noticing between fascism and (neo) liberal democratic politics, despite the embeddedness of both in the oppressive machinations/alienations of capital. The fascist form is more directly violent towards targeted minorities in its appeal to an affective and often deliberately manipulative ideology of exclusionary hate, while liberal politics, though certainly a form neither innocent nor without its own

II. FASCISM, FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

more occult racialized and sexualized violence, continues in its best moments to lust after some utopian ideal of democratic governance of and by the people. In the last instance, whether the latter is merely an ideology will perhaps always remain a fundamental aporia for humans. But it seems clear at this point in history that it is easier to generate a mass affective appeal by and for a politics of hate than it is to create an appeal by and for an ideal democracy: an ideal that many now take to be thoroughly illusory rather than allowing this speculative concept to be productively and creatively utopian. It is the directly incited and deliberately legitimated violence of fascism toward different others that fuels my resistance and inclines me towards liberal democracy, despite its being inevitably tainted by its unholy alliance with capital, as a strategic decision rather than a merely complicitous acquiescence.

An appeal from elsewhere unsettled my initial withdrawal into cynical passivity, despite how soothing to perceived wounds such a psychic defense immediately felt. This appeal arrived as a call to think capacities: not merely to endure but also to resist the current neo-fascist becomings, both in this nation-state and amidst this epochal tendency over the globe. With this appeal, I am reminded that irony is, indeed, a capacity to trouble the reactionary and static insularity that fascism invites: one need only recall Jonathan Swift's modest proposal to be reminded that the labors of the intellect can have more of an impact in the dissensus of the *polis* than it sometimes seems. This call from capacious friends reminded me that irony can be a strategy for the political activity of changing minds, so to speak, rather than merely a retrogression into the comforts of assuming a sense of rightness. The jouissance of being-right certainly has an affective pull that is reactionary at the psychic level—let's say the *molecular* level,

which along with the appeal from *friends*, as I decidedly name them, and the lurking titular *enemy*, index the epigraphical points of suture where this singular affective whirlwind folds back into the collectivity of thinking politics.

During the final weeks leading up to the election, the party of republican hate began to refer to the party of democratic liberality as the enemy from within. There is no doubt that the strategists of the scourge, as made undeniably evident by the leak of their Project 2025, deliberately frame their machinations through this dichotomy of friend and enemy. Yet, in contradistinction to Schmitt's purely formal distinction to characterize the actions and motives of politics, fascists rush to provide substantial content, identifying anyone not devoted to their theopolitical ideology as the enemy. The radical left, wary of the nation-state but from a stance seemingly opposite to that of the extreme right, knows they are the enemy of fascists, and in turn, the left knows fascism is the enemy of radical democracy. In contrast to these sworn political enemies, however, the more moderate devotees of this liberal and capitalist simulacrum of democracy, consumers of feelgood nationalism who imagine America to be the global protector for what is right and good, seem to think that economic growth and social justice can harmoniously coexist without the slightest oppression of others; hence, they imagine a fully inclusive politics among communicative friends. This is, at best, naïve, and directly plays into the strategic ability of their fascist foes to sway a mass of the population into a frenzy of absolute hatred towards targeted minorities. Make no mistake: fascists at the molar level are the enemy of both liberal democracies, with their visions for economic prosperity and progressive social justice, and the radical left, with its hopes for a revolution that would end capitalism. It

is difficult to imagine how any such wished-for revolution would not be as equally violent as fascism, though its specific targets may feel more justified to many of us. At this point in this singular trajectory of thinking, as some of my capacious friends know, I phantasize of dragons for a speedy solution to fascism. Yet, the other epigraphic suturing returns posthaste as a caution against such imagined violence, which would inevitably multiply itself: the decisive warning by Deleuze and Guattari that we all harbor molecules of fascism at both the singular and collective level.

The capacity to know the enemy at the molar level of contention is necessary for strategic political resistance and needs to be acknowledged and honed. Yet, it must be tempered by the reminder that each body bears its own fascistic molecules that are difficult yet essential to notice. This matters for how one treats an enemy. This matters for both the types and intensities of violence that ensue. The lust for a true democracy, fueling creative dreams for a revolution with minimal violence, must exercise this capacity to know the enemy both within and without. This is my melancholic, utopian hope.

9

Brian Massumi

**Capacities to
Reaccess Potentials for
Anti-Fascist Life?**



The era of the ‘strongman’ has returned. From Russia’s Putin, China’s Xi, Turkey’s Erdoğan, India’s Modi, Hungary’s Orbán, and Argentina’s Milei to America First’s MAGAnificent Donald Trump—leaders with an autocratic bent rule the world, troubling the senescent slumber of late-liberal representative government with fever dreams of a tipping point. Into what? The immediate answer: into ‘fascism.’ But that answer is loath to be voiced. A reluctance to say the f-word out loud, verging on a taboo, has long been in force in mainstream media discourse and polite conversation. A fever dream an effective analytic category does not make, is the attitude. But with the reelection of Trump in 2024, bringing an emboldened and well-prepared far right

into the center of power on his capacious coattails, the taboo relaxed. When one of Trump's own former closest advisors deems him "fascist to the core" and another observes that he fits "the general definition of a fascist," it makes it hard not to go there.¹ It makes it difficult not to nurse the suspicion that the fever dream is solidifying into our collective reality. Which makes it our urgent task to counter the taboo by mounting an effective concept of it.

Trump may well fit the general definition of fascism. But what is that definition? Traditional theories of fascism revolve around the identification of the 'masses' to the person of the charismatic leader, forming a 'cult of personality' around the strongman. The 'masses' are deluded by their own imaginary projection, to the point that they vote and act against their own interests. This definition is now challenged from a number of points of view.

First of all, there are no longer any masses. The passive masses have been fragmented by social media into an effervescence of hyperactive bubbles forming, merging, diverging, and bursting with abandon.

Second, if a 'cult' means adhering to a well-defined world-view and a corresponding set of rigid principles of behavior, the word no longer applies. In the United States, since Ronald Reagan, a majority of the 'charismatic leader's' supporters have disagreed with his specific policies if polled on them one by one, and this is still the case with Trump.² This is not ideological adherence, in any traditional sense.

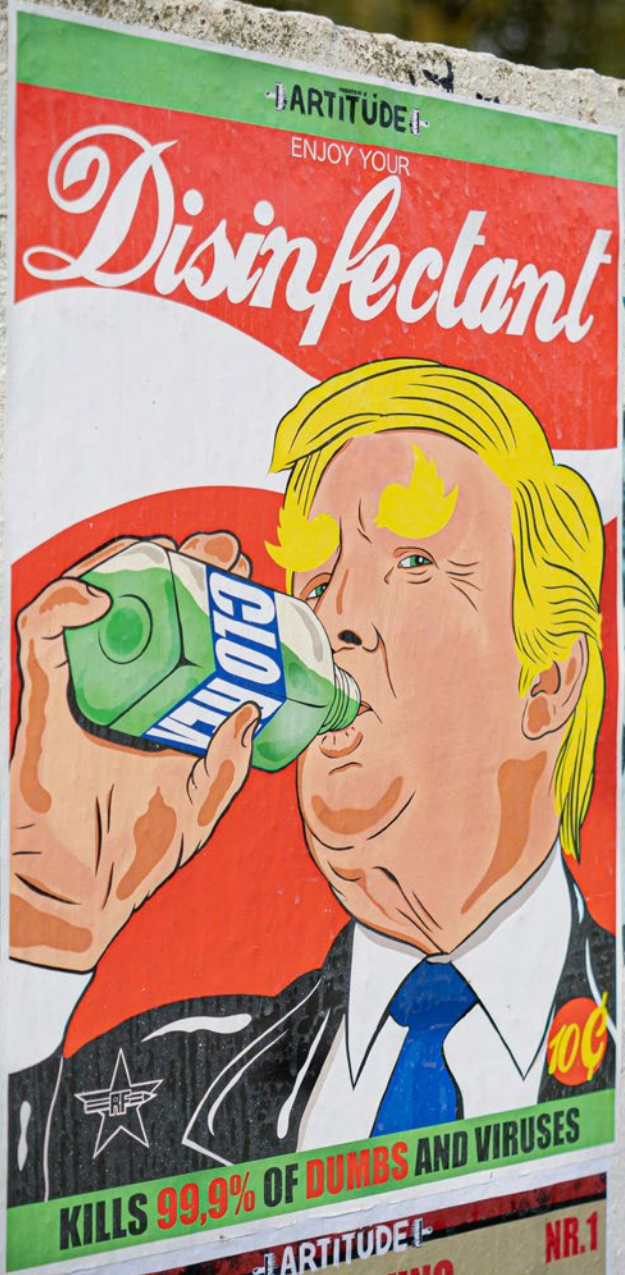
Third, the 'charisma' of the leader around which supporters rally is so riddled with error, ineptness, puffery, and buffoonery that it can no longer be the case that the leader commands allegiance based on positive personal qualities. Instead, his power is predicated precisely on his lack of lead-

ership qualities as traditionally understood. We are witnessing a form of post-normative leadership where the very disqualification of the leader is what qualifies him for office in the eyes of his supporters.³

This, fourth, deforms the image of the ‘strongman.’ The leader, as preeminent person, is no longer beholden to model the strength of character and attitude of moral rectitude written into the traditional image of the masculine role model. He can break any norm of governance, business practice, and personal conduct (up to and including sexual abuse) with impunity—now enshrined into law as a presidential right by the Supreme Court. Trump is famously thin-skinned, seeking confirmation of his importance in other people. He exudes a vulnerability that always has to be compensated for, and exhibits a distinct cattiness when ruffled. His image does not reflect the self-sufficient masculinity assumed by the strongman theory. It is not only the ‘strong’ part that slackens. Something happens to the ‘man’ part, too. The cattiness is reminiscent of stereotypes about women’s weakness. He can wax unmanfully lyrical about romancing Kim Jong Un. He exults in decorative excess, applied to his hair-do and the length of his tie, as well as to the interior of his residences. He oscillates between hypermasculine braggadocio and signalings of stereotypically feminine vulnerability, weakness, and preening.

On all these counts, the charismatic leadership of the strong man is down and out.

All of this complicates the question of what the definition of fascism is. Its scope broadens. There are the traditional questions of how fascism differs from or coincides with authoritarianism and totalitarianism; of what is specific to each of fascism’s historical outbreaks and what is common



"Pig," Dump Trump Protest, London, Wendy Truran, 2018

to them; of whether it is confined to or overflows the state; and of what precursor movements prepare its rise to take full-fledged form. In addition to these there are now a range of other questions, no less central.

There is the question of normativity: how can a revengeful return of traditional norms cohabit with a post-normative slackening of personal character? How can a punishing hypermasculinism co-operate with a blurring of gender categories?

Given the variability of the historical forms fascism takes, coupled with the blurring of central categories, is it even possible to establish a typology of fascisms, in their difference to annex formations? If not, what logic, other than the traditional category-based logic predicated on the principles of identity (non-contradiction) and mutual exclusion, could provide useful analytic tools?

How can that same logic grapple with the question of what manner of collectivity has replaced the ‘masses,’ and what its relation is to the preeminent person of the leader, if not projective identification?

If the preeminence of this person is steeped in lies enthusiastically taken up by his supporters, without being dragged down by contradiction, what post-truth logic is this? What if his supporters don’t vote against their private interests, so much as they vote in accordance with their shared *desires*? What is the logic of this transindividual desire? If they aren’t passively duped, but earnestly, desirously ‘do their research,’ as they are beseeched to do by alt-right influencers, what accounts for the boundless proliferation of error they engage in? How does their will-to-truth fuel a post-truth regime? How does the particular way that regime produces error feed racism, misogyny, and transphobia?

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If this regime is lacking a self-consistent rationality, does it mean that it has the (paradoxical) rationality of an affective regime? If so, how can we characterize it? What becomes of our traditional political logics, based as they are on norms and normative categories, in an affective regime of post-normativity where the personal exceptionalism exemplified in the preeminent person of the leader emboldens a similarly post-normative stance among his supporters, who, instead of legitimating his rule, take personal license from his giving himself license to misrule?

Finally, and most importantly, how, in the face of all of this, might we reaccess potentials for anti-fascist life?

Shortly after the dramatic finale of Trump's first term as President of the United States in the January 6, 2021 Capitol insurrection, I set about tackling these questions. The eventual result was a book entitled *The Personality of Power: A Theory of Fascism for Anti-Fascist Life* (Duke University Press, 2025). As the title of book indicates, the question of fascism is approached as a co-function of personality and power. That is not saying much, if the fundamental questioning does not extend to these terms as well. Among the premises of the book are: that to understand fascism it is necessary to reproblematicize what it means to be a person, in ways that enable us to construct a concrete and workable notion of collective personhood; that our notion of power must be yoked not to the imaginary relation of identification, but to the very real circulation of signs as pragmatic operators of collective individuations; and most far-reachingly, that to follow through with this line of thought, nothing less than a new political logic is necessary. Only a non-normative logic can be flexible enough to account for the post-truth and post-normativity of the contemporary condition in

positive terms, rather than simply in terms of lack or failure as judged by the yardstick of traditional logics and earlier political formations. That non-normative logic was dubbed the “logic of mutual inclusion.”

The Trump phenomenon necessitates building a “processual” take on fascism and fascisizing tendencies. By that is meant that fascism is taken as a manner of becoming emerging and returning across history, always in new variations. The question, then, is less “what” fascism is, than “how” it does itself. A concern for finding a proper typology of fascism is replaced by the diagnosis (more so than a description) of the symptoms. Understanding the harbingers of fascism’s reemergence pragmatically enough, and perceiving them in enough time, perhaps allows us take curative steps to intercept its maturation and redirect collective tendencies toward a different destination.

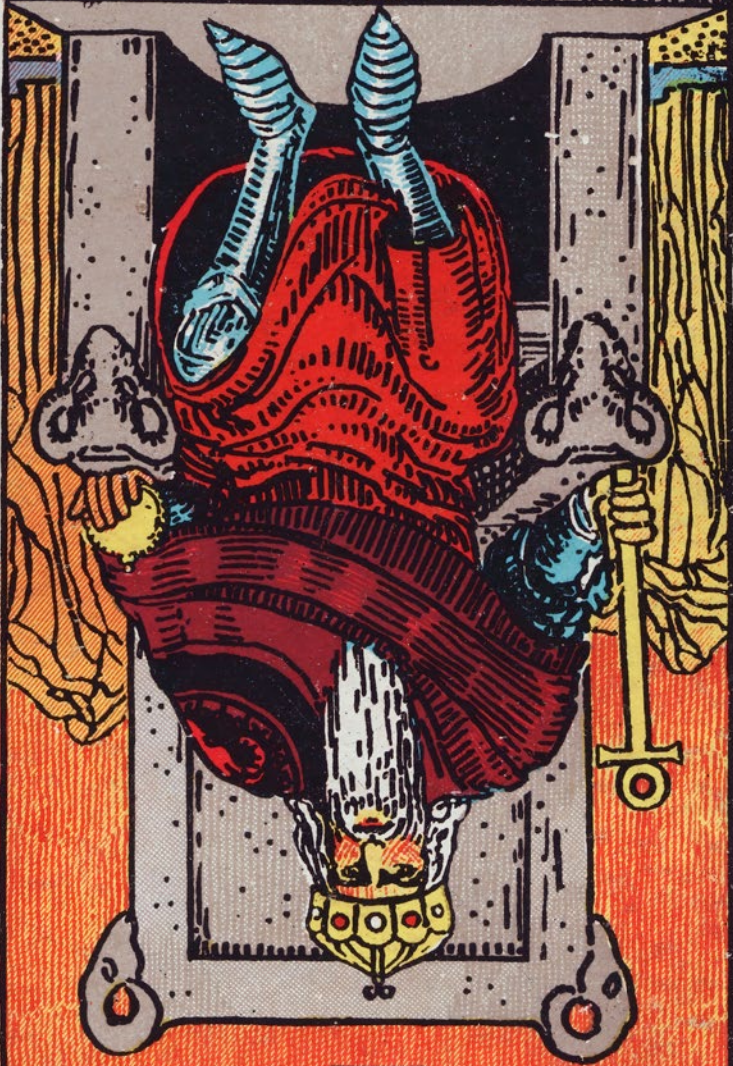
Endnotes

1. Former head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley, and former White House Chief of Staff, retired Marine General John F. Kelly, respectively.

2. Aaron Blake, “Americans Elected Trump. They Might Not Like What Comes Next,” *Washington Post*, 11 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/11/11/americans-elected-trump-they-might-not-like-what-comes-next/>

3. A phenomenon observed by Michel Foucault in his 1975 comments on “grotesque” or “ubuesque” power. *Abnormal. Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Verso, 2003) 11-13.

THE EMPEROR.

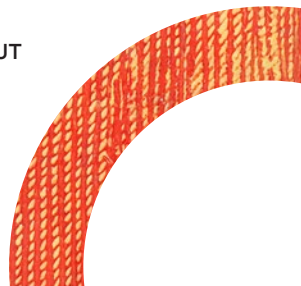


IV

10

Andie Shabbar

The Emperor in Reverse: The (in)Capacity of a World Turned Upside Down



A world turned upside down
Project dead or alive
Patchwork President 2025
The Emperor in reverse
master of the weave
fill in the blank type of despotic speech

YMCA at the red hat parade
Divinity perverted
Emperor inverted
MAGA brigade chanting overturn Roe v. Wade

The Emperor in reverse
archetype of extremist fate
apprentice of the state
Fight fight fight
(Line of) Flight
Freeze
Fired
Semi-automatic weapon
border control
Humanity standing against the firing wall

The Emperor in reverse
prophecy foretold
Votes bought and sold
algorithmic certainty
Psychological manipulation into infinity
Like share like share
Retweet, X
Echo chamber hex

The Emperor in reverse
Stratified democracy
A wimp overcoded with the face of tyranny
Black holes, white walls
accordion hands
Playing the tune of fascism unmanned

State extreme desire
Oligarchy for hire
The Emperor in reverse



11

Ruth Charnock

Capacities to Read

Imagine that it's now and you are being invited to read. Imagine that what you are being invited to read is five tarot cards, arranged in a crucifix shape, and the person inviting you to read is both some version of yourself that has yet to emerge, and a person who calls themselves a tarot reader.

In this now, you sit down at a table and the tarot reader asks you to place your hands or some other part of your body or mind on the deck. Maybe you believe in something; maybe you don't. Maybe your body feels far removed from this moment. Maybe you have come here from a scene with your romantic partner so filled with microaggressions that you feel riddled with bullet holes, like you've stepped out of a James Cagney movie. Maybe you would never construct such a simile, because the people you know and love are in real danger of being riddled with actual bullets or have been already. Maybe you came from a meeting with your manager where you were told you were lucky your job wasn't on the line and should be sensitive with those who would be 'up for the chop.' Maybe they said down, not up. Maybe you are still wondering how your manager understands sensitivity. Maybe you are tired because you spent the night trying to get yourself off as you heard that orgasming was good for

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your nervous system and the collective nervous system, and you care about both but you just can't seem to stay with any scene of pleasure before it's interrupted by things you've seen on Instagram, and you know you should stop going to it for anything other than dead babies and burning tents but you keep expecting them to have gone, and for the aspirational interiors and ten best infinity pools and cats who look like Hitler videos to come back. Maybe you feign involvement in this reading by closing your eyes biddably when the reader asks you to; maybe you don't. Maybe you feel a bit spooked—what if these cards really *are* going to tell you about yourself? Maybe you don't feel like there's a self to be told. Maybe you feel comfort, or arousal, or grief, or some combination of these, at the feeling of the tarot reader's warm, dry hands pressing down on yours.

That's you, in the middle of the spread. You are number one. At last! The cards around you tell of how you will be pulled side-to-side and up and down. What is for you? What is against you? And who?

Maybe you know what it all means. Maybe you have foreseen all of this. Maybe you know nothing. Maybe you are bored. Maybe you are distracted by a deep, wet itch between your bum cheeks that you want to scratch but feel you shouldn't.

The reader looks at you. You look at the reader. You both look at the cards. You reach down and scratch that itch.

1. The Fool

“We tend to slip out of togetherness the way we slip out of the womb, bloody and messy and surprised to be alone. And clever—able to learn with our whole bodies the ways of this world” (Brown 2017, 6).

The Fool is usually a young one, poised jauntily at the edge of a cliff, tiny dog at their feet, one arm outstretched to the precipice as if welcoming it in, knees slightly bent in a posture of imminent motion. If there is any orientation towards fascism that the tarot can teach us, it's this one: keep your knees soft, notice where you have come to brace and fix against your life and the life all around you, be ready to jump into that which has yet to emerge, even before it emerges. Don't expect anything to emerge. Believe something better will be there when you leap, don't believe; it doesn't matter. Notice what it feels like to think of yourself as someone who knows absolutely nothing, who has no identity. Notice how, following moments of joy (if you are letting yourself have those still), your mind still wants to rush together and organize itself around grievance and separation like iron filings rushing to a magnet in one of those 1980s executive office games. Notice how animals don't give a shit whether we jump, or not, but might come with us, if we are lucky.

2. The Star

A body with breasts crouches to a pool in the middle of a luscious meadow. They are either filling, or emptying, a large stone jug.

We are being invited to get back to the garden but some of us have never had a garden to get back to and some of us are watching our gardens burn over and over again and some of us don't believe in gardens because they are bourgeois enclosures and some of us are allergic to pollen of different varieties. So what, then?

Does it help to remember we are more space than atoms? Does it help to take up with lovers or friends who will remind us how wet and soft we are? Does it help to bury our faces into the fur of a dog, or a friend, or a lover and smell the bottoming mossiness of them, which is the mossiness of all of us? Does it help to ask A.I. to remind us what element stars are made of which is also the element in our blood? Does it help to wonder if there was a time when we didn't need to summon up this kind of knowledge for comfort, when we didn't reach for air or land or water or fire as if they were separate entities?

3. The Hierophant

You don't know if you believe in teachers or parents or elders anymore but you do know that you would like to be curled up in someone's lap if you could only find one solid and enduring enough.

4. The Lovers

A man on Facebook is trolling you under your advert for tarot readings in a local cafe. You spend half an hour constructing the perfect shut-down, featuring a deconstruction of his false premises about tarot (of course no-one and nothing can predict the future), a quote from a Nata-

sha Bedingfield song, a fact that proves tarot's queer radical feminist uses, and a joke about money. Your heart is speeding like you are about to get something back that was taken from you long ago. Then you start to feel frightened. What if he responds?

You delete the post after you have read it to your friend.

A man in your kitchen who you had a baby with once is giving you advice for this piece. This one, the one being written right now. Your title is a bit boring; a bit academic, he says. What if you made Donald Trump into a character from the tarot?

They call it a tarot spread because the tarot has a way of showing you all the places you are over-extending and to what, or whom (says the reader).

Think of the cards, then, as loving correctives to all the ways we are violently stretched. The Lovers asks: how do I take pleasure in surrendering my own power? How do I enjoy subjugating others? What griefs are these pleasures standing in for? And beneath the griefs, what other joys might there be? And beneath those joys, what abyssal silence is there? And beneath the silence? And beneath that?

5. The Tower

Everything is collapsing but the way we read this collapse is up for grabs.

In tarot, the reader begins, balancing one card against another as if they are two figures hooked on to each other about to tango. The Tower signifies the collapse of institutions [that] the querent has placed their faith in. The necessary collapse, I should say, as these structures need to crumble for the querent to move ahead.

Like in a video game? you ask. She ignores you.

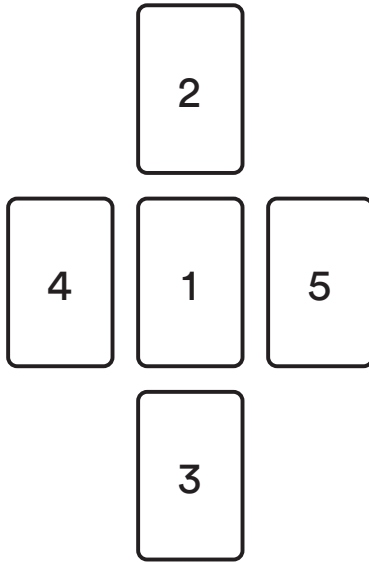
These institutions are not merely external, nor are they always made of bricks. Sometimes the towers are *inside you*, she adds, gesturing vaguely to her heart, in a tone that stretches for meaningful but lands on bored teacher educating a reluctant class. Uneasily, you wonder what your towers look like.

You might not sense the collapse at first, she says, placing the lightest finger against one of the cards. Then, when you do sense it, you will often be certain that everything will fall immediately, that the tumbling will be instant and total. But this is rarely the case. Instead, one can live for a long time in a slow collapse. A brick here, a body there. Then one day you wake up and you're in the rubble, picking your way out of it, sniffing creosote and maybe other things up your nose. If you're lucky.

But perhaps I'm pushing the metaphor too far, she announces peremptorily, left hand smacking down—BANG—on the counter-balancing cards, like you're in a game of Snap.

She reaches across the table and takes hold of your hands, turning them face up.

What did we come here for?



Against Fascism: A Tarot Spread:

Arrange the cards in the formation above, in response to the following questions. If you don't have tarot cards, any other five beings will do.

1. What is my body making?
2. How am I not a fascist?
3. How am I a fascist?
4. Where have we been?
5. What did we come here for?

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12

Jason Luger and Jacob C. Miller

The Capacity to Generate the Gratuitous Violence of America's New Ruins

A rant, a plea

★★

The names evoke flowers, bucolic village lanes, the scent of coconut sun lotion on a golden beach. Say them: Columbine. Sandy Hook. Kiawah Island. Cocktail Cove.

Death, sadism, frenzied rage. The taking of innocence. The burning of books.

What has come to America, rising upwards from its loamy soils and trickling out of granite like Appalachian springs, is a menacing violence borne of the inertia of rusted, ruinous empire. Borne out of the same forces that shape its idyllic and consumer-orientated spatial forms. The far-right's capacity for destruction widens with the incoming second Trump presidency. Spectacle and ruination are more intertwined than ever before. Complex affects emerge in this dangerous time.

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These ruins are not those of hulking steel mills or abandoned assembly lines, though much has been written, lamented, eulogized, about that type of rust. No, this nascent ruination is one of manicured golf greens, mansard-roofs on hilltop homes; frequent flier lounges and the deafening crush of aspirational credit-card swipes. Cul de sacs.

Cybertrucks. Diet pills.

The click of a 9-iron slapping a ball over some piney woods. The handshake and joke of two executives. The veneered smile of a pastor. The *jokes, the jokes*. The vacation to Mexico. The Black Friday consumer stampede. The warehouse where our home-deliveries are packaged by undocumented immigrants (Eder et al 2024).

America's violence begins in these things. Adorno (2005[1951]) called them the "micrological": the little objects out of which life is constituted. The everyday places, happenings of comfort and (dis)quiet. Benjamin (1999), too, practiced a kind of micrological methodology in his study of the European arcades. He also warned us with his "Angel of History," while Adorno located an existential "rage" built into modernity and its instrumental reason (Bennett 2010, 15, 18). What is the capacity of a micrological approach to reveal today's upswell of right-wing populism and outright fascism? We consider the capacity of the 'micrological', drawing from Adorno and Benjamin, to piece together an explanation, focusing on the objects, spaces, moments of everyday life. What are the linkages between capitalist consumer culture and emerging far-right extremism? What kind of affects are involved? What can we do? (How) will we survive?

We can extend our 'micrological gaze' beyond the golf green, the breezy lies and cocktails of Mar-A-Lago. Micrological violence begets macrological violence as it spirals



Andrew Culp, 2025



Gate to Mar-A-Lago, Thomas Scherzer, 2014

outward into Quadcopter drones zeroing in on refugee children. Huge mountains of plastic floating in seas. Thundering drills extracting oil, gasses. The command of the sky, of the stars. Ruins and ruination, everywhere. Spectacle of all kinds.

British novelist J.G. Ballard tracked this form of ruination through contemporary suburbia and other consumer-orientated landscapes. These troubling novels, too, draw out the linkages between the mundane spectacle and violence. The micrological image emerges through tennis courts, modern high-rises, shopping malls, expensive cars on vast highways, gated communities, yachts, and all-inclusive resorts. Something always goes terribly wrong, and people get hurt. A darkness seeps out of the spatial forms themselves and a sense of existential ruination runs through the characters as they find themselves confronted with these unstable and dangerous everyday spaces. In one of his later works, Ballard (2000) warns us directly that the next fascist leaders will “emerge from shopping malls and corporate business parks” (256).

Miller (2020) brings a similar focus to the rise of Trumpism. He presents “the spectacle” as an embodied assemblage that includes an intensification of affective experience while also shaping right-wing capacities to capture political power in new ways. The conditions for a radical new post-truth world are aided and abetted by the cultures of mass consumerism, seeping into our everyday lives in ever more invasive and intimate ways (Frenkel 2024; Luger 2022; Luger and Schwarze 2021). Trumpism-as-violence is smashed windows of the Capitol and racist chants at rallies. Trumpism-as-violence is also the swipe of credit cards; the mirage of luxury hotels; the showing-off of one’s new Truck. It is a podcast that confirms everything you always wanted to believe (whether it is true or not) and makes you feel alive, powerful, bold.

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Now, we enter a new phase, the second Trump presidency, in which these forces will use their power to further destroy elements of the state apparatus while installing a new socio-cultural fabric of everyday male aggression, white supremacy, and all-around intolerance of difference. The “war machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) that Miller (2020) charts through Trumpism’s affective and emotional spaces is expanding. Institutional ruin is coming.

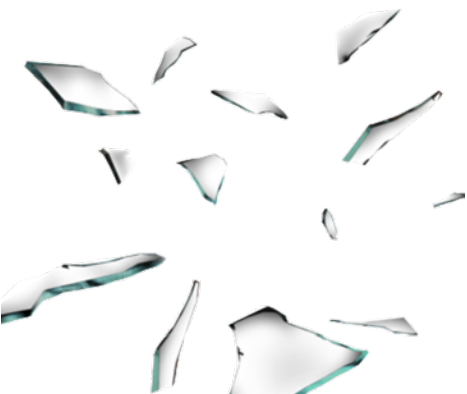
Is Trumpism a symptom, rather than a cause, of America’s new ruins—a sort of spore that grows from rot, or, as Guattari (1989) presciently observed in his “Three Ecologies” (151) a sort of mutant algae that slowly suffocates all the life around it? Yet, much focus on Trumpism and the related spectacle obscures the micrological. *When did the ruination begin? What were the other symptoms? Is it buried in the origin story? Was there a tipping point? Who is to blame?*

Moment 1, 2021: On a course in South Carolina, a champion golfer is swarmed by over-excited fans, needing protection from his security staff. *Bermuda grass. A polo shirt. A palmetto tree. Rolex.*

Moment 2, 2021: An unruly passenger on a major airline is duct-taped to their seat by the flight crew. *A packet of peanuts. A small-sized ginger ale. A bag tag. Headphones.*

Moment 3, 2021: An rabid mob storms the Capitol, smashing windows, screaming taunts, foaming at the mouth. *A Viking head-dress. A conspiracist flag. Shattered glass.*

AMERICA'S NEW RUINS



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The forces of American fascist ruination surface in, through, and during these moments.

Did they also surface in the invention of barbed wire in 1867 by Lucien B. Smith (Ohio), that drew and quartered the vast West into livestock ranges? *Torn flesh.*

In the founding of Smith and Wesson (Rifles and Armaments) in 1852 (Norwich, Connecticut?). *Bloody bullets.*

With the arrival of the first slave ship, in 1619? *Shackled lives.*

Say them with us: *Sandy Hook. Columbine. Gaza. Trump Plaza. Amex Platinum. "Members only." Eden Farms, a Planned Community. Ford Motor Company. The NASDAQ. Space-X. The Mall of America.*

A rubber tree in Java. A cobalt mine in Congo. A dead child. A tech mogul. A Marriott. A dead mall.

At the end of the Bob Fosse film *Cabaret* (1972), the camera slowly pans around the whole of Berlin's late Weimarer 'Kit Kat Club'. On the stage are the cabaret dancers and the band, who are revealed (at the film's end), to be ugly and discordant. In other words, the Cabaret show was a mirage, a distraction, a grotesque spectacle. The camera finally pivots to show the audience of the Cabaret to be not the raucous, decadent, bohemian Berlin public, but row after row of Nazi officers. In other words, they have been there all along: the forces of ruination were right there, in the mirror, from the start.

It is clichéd to say that America has always been violent, that its origin story is dystopic. Likewise hackneyed is some poetic claim that America has always been ruined. We speak of fascism; we characterize, taxonomize. But perhaps we might pause to ask—as Americans, infected by the toxins; as humans, situating ourselves in the world; as bits of stardust,

existing for a moment in the universe— what little things, micrological wonders, can be grasped, held, planted, amidst the burning? What seeds remain? Can we find where beauty and truth have hidden amongst our objects, our credit cards, our cults and spoiled dreams? Otherwise—what hope do we have left? A coffee cup, a laptop, a toothbrush. A promise, a friend, an embrace.

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Sandy Hook
Columbine
Gaza
Trump Plaza
Amex Platinum
“Members only”
Eden Farms
Ford Motor Company
The NASDAQ
Space-X
The Mall of America

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Alana Brekelmans

Awake in the Golden Age (Capacities to Dream Otherwise at the End of the World)

October 7th 2024.

I've returned
to that place across the world
to tell people I've never met
things I don't speak of. I haven't
slept in days, or what feels like days,
wandering the insomniac streets, where
students protest proxy wars
beside 20-foot billboards, where
families snap saccharine selfies
outside Trump Tower, where
breakdancers proselytise about
letting Jesus into your life, where
a witch in a Brooklyn bookstore
foresees already melting icecaps, where
there's a chalked message about
women's rights that people keep
walking over
on their way to Starbucks.

II. FASCISM, FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

I follow
signs telling me to vote
in a country that is not my own for
who will be president or for
who most resembles a celebrity
twink. There's a clairvoyance to
such pedestrian repetition, a
d  j   vu to difference, a chiasmus
of fragmentary compositions,
bodega comfort, and small change.
But then
I so often confuse these things.

Before long
I'm crying on Broadway. It explains
so much, I text my girlfriend,
that *Cabaret* has always been
my favorite musical: It is by far
the queerest. And the most political.
Emcee welcomes, a crooked-fingered
solicitation into dream, as jazz babies
flash panties and the chanteuse declares
life a floorshow and we all wonder 'why
should I wake up?' even as the atmosphere
falters. It's fucked up to watch this, on
today of all days, I think, as the kickline
becomes a goose step. 'Here, life is beautiful',
they say and wonder who tomorrow is for.
Outside
They're selling LED screen novocaine.

At intermission

I sip my cocktail and am reminded
 of the time I drank too much
 Bourbon-flavoured moonshine,
 in a gem field where no one ever
 struck it rich. Amid trailers
 made sedentary by promise and earth
 pock-marked by optimism, someone
 told me I'd save the world. Instead,
 I got wasted and awoke to find a
 kangaroo towering over me,
 ears propping up the Milky Way,
 leaving me unsure if it was
 an omen
 or an ancestor heavy on my chest.

Act II.

Wilkommen (Reprise) in the Kit Kat Klub
 hits different nowadays, as does
I don't care much. A woman beside me
 bursts into tears. I weep for children
 in the ruins of Rafah, bodies in border-
 lands or beaches, the missing,
 disappeared, and lost. The singer could
 wake up, but the music is playing. We were
 dancing, the writer says, at the end of the
 world, we could parent tomorrow. But
 we were
 Both fast asleep.

Later,
from a diner on 8th Avenue, I order
a burger I can't eat and
video-call my partner. I'd visited
a souvenir store on the way,
toyed with plastic Lady Libertys, as
the crackling radio questioned how
I lived and loved and prayed. I'm
thinking of this as Facetime
reveals clinical whites and
the godlike specialist who
trades in odds, possibles, and
sonographic spectres. I am awake
in a sleepless city, with so much
broken and so much lost, at the
dawn or dust of a golden age,
screaming into the cracked screen of an iPhone.
I hear
a heart beat.

Things I Thought With

- Trump's victory speech.
- *Cabaret* and bourbon cocktails.
- New York City streets.
- Timothee Chalamet's earnestness.
- A blurred foetus.

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Fuck
the
System



ΕΠΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΛΑΤΕΙΑΣ
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ Σ ΓΑΖΕΠΗ

ΔΥΝΑΜΑΤ ΗΘΕΩΝ ΚΑΥΤΑ ΜΗΝΥΕΙ
ΝΟΣΟΣ ΗΛΕ
ΘΙ ΠΡΟ ΗΛΗΣ ΠΑΤΡΗΣ ΕΝ ΠΡΟΜΑΧΟΙΣ
ΕΘΝΩΝ
ΣΤΗΝ ΥΛΟΙΣ ΤΕΧΝΟΙΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΝΗ
ΕΡΑΤΕΙΝΗΝ
ΚΑΛΙΣΤΟΝ ΔΕ ΚΑΤΗΡΝΗΝ ΕΛΠΩΝ
ΚΑΙ ΜΕΝΟΝ







DO NOT FEAR

DO NOT FORGET

DO NOT GIVE

不要

平抗

不要... 改革

TAIWAN #1

heaven

with





**III. Break:
Refusals,
Resistance**



Mathew Arthur, 2025

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Jason Read

Capacities to, or What Taylor Swift Taught Me About Fascism

Years ago I remember encountering Félix Guattari's little essay "Everybody Wants to be a Fascist" (Guattari, 2008). At the time its title seemed more clever than prescient. (Although it's worth remembering how much fascism, and the encounter with fascism, was integral to Deleuze and Guattari's theorizing, well beyond the reference to Reich.)¹ Now that we are living in a different relation to fascism, the problem posed by Guattari (and Deleuze) of desire seems all the more pertinent and pressing.

One of the problems with using the word "fascism" today, especially in the US, is that it's hard to reconcile our image of it as a politics of the state control of everything with the current politics of outrage aimed at M&Ms, Barbie, and Taylor Swift. How can fascism be so trivial and petty? This could be understood as the Trump problem, although it's ultimately not limited to Trump. There are a whole bunch of pundits and people getting incredibly angry about the casting of movies and how many times football games cut

away to Taylor Swift celebrating in the expensive seats. The Fox News Expanded Universe is all about finding villains everywhere in every library or diverse band of superheroes. It's difficult to reconcile the petty concerns of the pundit class with the formation of an authoritarian state. I have argued before that understanding Trump, or Trumpism, means rethinking the relationship between the particular and universal, imaginary and real.² Or, as Angela Mitropoulis (2015) argues, the question of fascism now should be: What does it look like in contemporary capitalism, which is oriented less around the post-Fordist assembly line than the franchise? As she puts it, "What would the combination of nationalist myth and the affective labour processes of the entertainment industry mean for the politics and techniques of fascism?" (np).

It's for this reason (among others) that Alberto Toscano's *Late Fascism* is such an important book. As he argues, fascism has to be understood as kind of license, a justification for violence and anger, and a pleasure in that justification. We have to give up the cartoon image of fascism as centralized and universal domination and see it as not only incomplete persecution, unevenly applied, but persecution of some coupled with the license to persecute for others. Fascism is liberation for the racist, sexist, and homophobe, who finally gets to say and act on their desires. As Toscano (2023) argues:

What we need to dwell on to discern the fascist potentials in the anti-state state are those subjective investments in the naturalisations of violent mastery that go together with the promotion of possessive and racialized conceptions of freedom. Here we need to reflect not just on the fact that neoliberalism operates through a racial state, or that, as commentators have begun to recognise and detail,

it is shaped by a racist and civilisational imaginary that delimits who is capable of market freedoms. We must also attend to the fact that the anti-state state could become an object of popular attachment, or better, populist investment, only through the mediation of race (68).

Toscano's emphasis is on race in this passage, but it could arguably apply to sexism, homophobia, etc.—to the enforcement and maintenance of any of the old hierarchies. Toscano cites Maria Antonietta Macciocchi later in the book: “You can't talk about fascism unless you are also prepared to discuss patriarchy” (144). Possessiveness includes the family as the first and most vital possession. At this point, fascism does not sound too different from classical conservatism, especially if you take the definition of the latter to be the following: “Conservatism consists of exactly one proposition, to wit: There must be in-groups whom the law protects but does not bind, alongside out-groups whom the law binds but does not protect” (Wilhoit, quoted in Henry Grabar, 2022). However, what Toscano emphasizes is the libidinal pleasure that comes with this. It's not just a matter of who is in and who is not, who is protected and who is not, but the pleasure one gets from such exclusion, a pleasure that is extended and almost deputized to the masses. While conservative hierarchies and asymmetries are passed through the hallowed institutions of the state and the courts, the fascist deputies take to the streets and the virtual street fights of social media. As Toscano (2023) argues, pitting Foucault's remarks about the sexual politics of fascism in the seventies against Guattari's analysis:

For Foucault, to the extent that there is an eroticization of power under Nazism, it is conditioned by a logic of delegation, deputizing and decentralization of what remains in form and content a vertical, exclusionary, and murder-

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ous kind of power. Fascism is not just the apotheosis of the leader above the sheeplike masses of his followers; it is also, in a less spectacular but perhaps more consequential manner the reinvention of the settler logic of petty sovereignty, a highly conditional but very real “liberalising” and “privatising” of the monopoly of violence ... Foucault’s insight into the “erotics” of a power based on the deputizing of violence is a more fecund frame, I would argue, for the analysis of both classical and late fascisms than Guattari’s hyperbolic claim that “the masses invested a fantastic collective death instinct in ... the fascist machine”—which misses out on the materiality of that “transfer of power” to a “specific fringe of the masses” that Foucault diagnosed as critical to fascism’s desirability (141-142).

I think that Toscano’s analysis picks up an important thread that runs through discussions of fascism from Benjamin to Foucault (and beyond). As Benjamin (1969) writes in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”:

The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life (241).

Today we could say that the right to expression includes a deputization of power and the pleasure in exercising it. In a capitalist society, in which the material conditions of existence must belong to the capitalist class, the only thing that can be extended to the masses is the power and pleasure to dominate others. Real wages keep on declining, but fascism

offers the wages of whiteness, maleness, cisness, and so on, extending not the material control over one's existence but libidinal investment in the perks of one's identity.

All of which brings me to Taylor Swift. I have watched with amusement and some horror as the fringes of the Fox News Expanded Universe have freaked out about Swift attending football games and, occasionally, being seen on television watching and enjoying the games. It's hard to spend even a moment thinking about something that has all the subtlety of the "He-Man Woman Hater's Club," but I think it's an interesting example of the kind of micro-fascism that sustains and makes possible the tendency towards macro-fascism. Three things are worth noting about this. First, most of the conspiracy theories about Swift are not predicated on things that she has actually done, but what she might do—endorse Biden, campaign for Biden, etc. I think this has to be seen as a mutation of conspiracy thinking from the actual effects of an action or event—Covid undermining Trump's presidency, for example—to an imagined possible effect. One of the asymmetries of contemporary power is that it treats the fantasies or paranoid fears of one group as more valid than the actual conditions and dominations of another group. Second, and to be a little more dialectical, the fear of Swift on the right recognizes to what extent politics has been entirely subsumed by the spectacle fan form. Trump's real opponent for hearts and minds, not to mention huge rallies, is not Biden but Swift. Lastly—and this really deserves its own essay—some of the anger about Swift being at football games brings to mind Kate Manne's theory of misogyny, which at its core is about keeping women in their place (2018). I would imagine that many of the men who object to seeing Swift at

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these games do not object to the cutaway shots of cheerleaders during the same games. It's not seeing women during a football game that draws the ire of these men, but seeing a woman out of her place—one who is enjoying being there, and is not there for their enjoyment.

I used to follow a fairly vulgar materialist line when it came to fascism. Give people—which is to say workers—actual control over their work, their lives, and their conditions, and the appeal of the spectacle of fascist power will dissipate. It's a simple matter of real power versus its appearance, I thought. However, it increasingly seems that such an opposition overlooks the pleasures that today's mass-media fascism makes possible and extends to so many. It's hard to imagine a politics that could counter this, one that would not be a politics of affect, of the imagination, and of desire. Libidinal economy and the micro-politics of desire seem less like relics from the days of high theory and more like necessary conditions for thinking through the intertwining webs of desire and resentment that make up the intersection of culture, media, and politics. I think one of the pressing issues of the moment is recognizing that the junk politics of pop-cultural grievance should be taken seriously as the affective antechamber of fascism, while at the same time not accepting this politics on its own terms.

Endnotes

1. See Jason Read, "Reading Deleuze and Guattari as Marxist/Spinozists: On Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc's State and Politics," *Unemployed Negativity* (blog), July 6, 2016 <http://www.unemployednegativity.com/2016/07/reading-deleuze-and-guattari-as.html>
2. See Jason Read "Dialectic of the Donald: Or, Not Trump Again," *Unemployed Negativity*, May 6, 2017 <http://www.unemployednegativity.com/2017/05/dialectic-of-donald-or-not-trump-again.html>

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15

Jack Z. Bratich

What Can a Body Do(om)?: Fratriarchy's Affects and the Capacities to Break Together.

When Nick Fuentes posted “Your body, my choice. Forever” moments after Trump’s election victory, he announced an archaic sentiment for new times. Gone was the trollish irony-humor of 2016’s alt-right, replaced now with a gloves-off sadism that mimetically spread via an increase in online misogyny. This current crop of fascist neo-archaic affects are similar to those during Trump’s first victory: gleeful cruelties (Levina 2018; Silva 2018), giddy nihilism, and aggro-truths (Harsin 2021)—desires for decapacitation that Deleuze calls the sad passions of the despot.

Years before young men and their mediated affects were in the spotlight due to the Trump campaign’s courting, the manosphere was actively churning out affective states: resentment, depression, fear-becoming-rage. This surge in “masculine identity politics” precipitated as a vengeful reactive subjectivation by those who perceived a loss in entitlement (Sauer 2020). In addition to circu-

lating particular passions, the manosphere was affective in Negri and Deleuze's sense of modulating a "passage to action," in this case composing a body geared towards collective networked operations (harassment, violence, a war on women). Shitposting, even schizo-posting, sought to subjectify users towards a passage to action, or what the 2019 New Zealand mosque mass killer announced as "real-life effort posting."

This phase (roughly 2013–2023) was defined by the figure of the failson, troll, and incel. Affectively speaking, it was the era of the *desurgent*, a condition of being "restrained, brooding, and solemn" (Gholson, et al 1989, 186). When originally surfacing decades ago, such gloominess was experienced in solitude. With the rise of connective technologies and online subcultures, these lonelinesses got networked and stochastic across the terrain of everyday life.

Desurgent incels, trolls, and failsons comprised a network of black holes, fueled by goading and competitive lulz, resulting in action-oriented dissociation. Forever Alone, Together. Trolls are the numb-shock troops for domination: incapacitating some feelings while activating others, a dis/inhibition that armors itself to engage in necropolitical campaigns (Johanssen 2022). Such a homi-suicidal (or, more accurately, femi-suicidal) dynamic was embodied *in extremis* by mass shooters (and their canonizing fans).

The *fascies* (bundling or binding) resulted from a shared hostility towards women via contagious mimesis, forming patriarchal pacted groups (Amorós 2007). These packs echoed both the Italian fascist groupuscular forma-

tion known as *squadrisimo* and the archaic initiations into *Mannerbund* (the war bands so lionized by German Nazis, Julius Evola, and the US-based Wolves of Vinland).

These were not just memes or tactics but forms of life or, more precisely, deathstyles; a pleasure in the production of a devivified world (Theweleit 1989). Fascist doom-erism says, “Dying is fun, take others with you.” When downward spirals get agitated and accelerated, these desurgent moods become active, or what I call a *downsurgency*. Not an *up-rising* but a *down-sinking*.

Over the past year, masculine “victims” sniping from their perceived margins mutated into the *fighter* surmounting challenges to vanquish opponents as enemies. Just look at Trump himself, whose 2016 trollish campaign mutated into 2024’s fighting campaign. He extended his media wrestling cosplay persona into more tough-guy domains like boxing and Mixed Martial Arts. Hoping for some sympathetic magic, he palled around with UFC combatants and influencer-cum-media boxer Logan Paul, and posted an AI generated photo of himself as a muscly NFL player. His iconic campaign image, found on t-shirts and profile pics galore, was the fist-raising bloodied warrior defiantly overcoming an assassination attempt. Fighting here means turning a target around, seeking vengeful overpowering of all those who injured him.

The comi-cruelty inherent in boy prank culture (a staple of reality TV and YouTube for 20 years), now sheds any veneer of irony that infused its homosocial experiments. Despotic passions are on full display—a triumphalist affect of having won not just an election but the culture war.

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We have left the incel behind as they have come to find camaraderie within their fan communities (e.g. Brogans). The killer clownish alt-right replaced its Pepe memes with boys fitness clubs. Social injustice warrior streamers, right-wing outrage traffickers, locker-roomesque podcasters, comedians with delusions of cancel grandeur, and Mannerbund influencers turned their platforms and channels into rallies. Such media figures provided mentorship and became intermediaries to political leadership. Blackpillers found themselves aligning with redpillers to form an alliance: a hegemonic masculinity bloc wrapped up as counter-hegemonic fighters. Along the way, brotherhoods, packs, squads were able to bind into a more organized *fratriarchy*.

The cultural production of the fighter, in its historical and contemporary morbid symptom forms, is pivotal to how a [masculinist] war machine takes over a State (Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of fascism). The making of war bands is done via mentorship, even initiations, what Patton (2000) calls *metamorphosis machines* (see also Michelsen 2013). From this perspective, these subjective metamorphosis machines formed a war-on-women machine to take the state.

But monsters never fully bind together, especially ones whose fragility renders them internally combustible. These fighters are founded ultimately on hierarchies and hostilities, and they are already warring amongst themselves. Anthony Johnson, the self-appointed President of the manosphere, primarily 'governs' by seeking to humiliate fellow fratriarchal influencers. The mythic lost patriarchy is restored differently by Christian nationalists versus neoreactionary technocrats (this is being played out currently in the Musk vs MAGA conflicts over immigration).

The right cannot control its own monsters much less the mutations that are otherwise forming. What are the antifascist metamorphosis machines we need for coming times? Examples abound, such as the Institute of Queer Ecology's documentation of multiplicity, mutation, and metamorphosis around us.

To counter the fascist version of doomerism, we can also take up the call expressed in graffiti during the 2016 Nuit Debout protests: "another end of the world is possible." Jem Bendell calls it "doomsterism," a mode of *breaking together* (Bendell 2023). This collective creative withdrawal needs a caveat: antifascist affects are ones not lured in by a carceral hope-shaped affect (turning to State solutions for eliminating rightwing variants of fascism).

We can also return to the familiar capacity-enhancing machines of street actions. Resistance logistics can be found in unlikely, even apolitical, sites. Take 'the take-over': the urban street gatherings around modified cars doing high-speed tricks and other stunts. A carnivalesque joy fills the participants with camaraderie and solidarity, especially when expressed as a power to prevent police repression by taking territory. They develop the immanent associations, affinities, and informal encounters that can lead to more recognizable activist organizational forms.

On another scale, we can draw from movements that have been working against fascist manospheres for years. We can look to the wave of transnationalist feminist organizing to prevent femicide (*Ni Una Menos*, e.g.). This years-long movement is rooted in social reproduction: "defending forms of life, as concrete collective assemblages, that demand the means to (re)produce themselves" (Gago, 2020). Social reproduction entails more than a

III. BREAK: REFUSALS, RESISTANCE

simple affirmation of life as *bios*. Following Adolfo Albán Achinte, they call it “re-existence” (Gago 2020; Federici, Mason-Deese & Draper 2021). which pairs resistance with the capacity “to reinvent and reaffirm other forms of existence to *vindicate a negated humanity*” (Federici, Mason-Deese, & Draper 2021, 3). Re-existence as collective activism is embedded in everyday life, a combo of self-defense and solidarity cultivation that does not petition the State for policies and permissions, but actively shapes survival and thriving conditions in the face of collapsing infrastructures aided and abetted by accelerated violence (state and non-state).

Mapping these various affect projects can glimpse such a microantifascist social body, one that is capable of overcoming obstacles and thwarting defeatism, refusing the right’s attempt to monopolize the end of the world and its attendant affects.

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Aren Aizura, 2020

WHAT CAN A BODY DO(OM)?

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16

Peyton Bond

Capacities to (and of) Friendship: Moving Towards an Abolitionist Affect

Living can be a claustrophobic accrual of one direct hit after another (Berlant and Stewart 2019, 57)

“Friend” and “free” in English, and “Freund” and “frei” in German come from the same Indo-European root, which conveys the idea of a shared power that grows. Being free and having ties was one and the same thing. I am free because I have ties, because I am linked to a reality greater than me (Invisible Committee 2014, 127)

There are already spaces where a different future, an alternative futurity, may be traced in a hopeful collective. In Discord chats, in unfurling Reddit threads, on the movements from one short-form social media to another (better moderation, they say), in the streets, in our gatherings, we see others whose bodies similarly carry the distress of the moments. In these times we may think that the *we* of it all is too overwhelming to be sidelined. But we click to another site and there it is: futile institutions gasping for oxygen as they spit out old truths that shape up as new fresh lies.

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Perhaps MAGA will implode, their decades-long hurdle into power trumped by the obstinance of their fractured selves. Liberals rarely at the ready, insisting that the arc of progress bends in their direction as they attempt to curry favor with the Gen Zs whose tents were trampled on their university lawns by militarised police forces. The fascist affect captures them, too, a politics of fear and authority borne of an inability to relate to a material or affective reality of the people. The people: who are they?

The future we face now has been traced out, rooted in violence and an easy maintenance of a fearsome and fearful affect. But alternative futures have been traced out, too, can be found in the pages and maps of queer, feminist, abolitionist texts and organizations steadily facing and orienting to a broad, hopeful horizon. The trouble of the present moments is firmly charted, felt in the bodies of those already busy in the margins. We must believe, we must feel, at least two things: that humanity is not permanently bent towards evil, nor is humanity *naturally* bent towards good. It is in that space, the space of not-necessary evil and not-natural good, that we may mediate, together, a directed and intentioned hope towards a bright and reasonable utopia.

An upward spiral of utopia hinges on a precise understanding of what, exactly, these despairing moments perform and generate. Fascism has its own abolition, an abolition of its own liberal mother. It claims common sense as its own, weaponizing a sense of apoliticism that relies on the individual atomising themselves against a knowing of relationality.¹ Fascism looks backward, will make great *again*, isolates us from the potentiality of new beings, rejecting what we may be and we may become. If such dangerous nostalgia is so deeply sensed, so deeply desired for, if this desire for a

misremembered memory of our own subjectivity can make new beings of our past, then we too *can make new beings in a new future*. We can center such re-making, we can shift collective despair and impending and dreadful inertia: if we make ourselves against the systems and networks and affective infrastructures that both necessitate and grow an abolitionist affect. We are vertically and horizontally and diagonally the makers of one another. What will we and what can we make?

The mystification and bastardization of a common sense, the common sense that draws on an oppressive nostalgic affect, tampers with our understandings of ourselves and of the others it delineates. But what then is unmystified, or unsung? M.E. O'Brien (2023) argues that personhood was not always created *this way*—which means “we could, if we wanted to, create it otherwise”(204).² Alva Gotby (2022) speaks to a politics of friendship as one such means of re-making and re-creation, as it “emphasises pleasurable interactions in the present” (112). Friendship, unlike the contours of the capitalist family structure or the hierarchical formalities of the workplace, seeks an alternative vision of democracy, one where rivalry may be converted to equitability (Allen 2006). Such conversion, such transformation, is what brings *the people* in, defines them, is where the fragility of acquaintance gives way to a present-pleasure that demystifies and sings out our need—and enjoyment—for and of each other. The affective infrastructure of friendship is at odds with the fascist affect that feeds on hierarchy, capital exchange and growth, on the darkness of a “common-sense” impulse that we are born and die alone and must proceed as such. Friendship is a criss-crossing nexus, a foundation of “slow work in always urgent times, of building flourishing communities for the long haul” (Davis et al 2022, 26). Friendship can—and often

III. BREAK: REFUSALS, RESISTANCE

already does—hold onto the “both/and” of an abolitionist praxis, can generate “intentional movement and insightful responses” that orients itself towards freedom, towards an abolitionist affect (4).

Friendship is a practice of reciprocity, of knowing and trust, is a “mutual admiration and inspiration” made difficult to “demoralize” (CrimethInc 2017)—it is a fulfilling and desire-based relationality, it is queer kinship structures and webs, it is what may be forged separately from the hopeless affect of hierarchical market profit-focused forces. In *Friendship as a Way of Life*, Foucault (1997) describes “affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship” as messy experiences that operate against “our rather sanitized society” (136). Friendship, old and new alliances alike, tie together Foucault’s assertion of friendship as “unforeseen lines of force” against such sanitization, and, thus, may form building blocks of affinity groups and movements, so long as we (and we must) understand ourselves as friends, as always-possible “autonomous political force[s]” (CrimethInc 2017).

Each time we make a friend, maintain a friendship—when we accept their ontological differences and grapple with their reality on the same footing as our own—we nourish an affect that rejects the moments and impulses of our collective now-reality. We know that we are not alone, and neither are they. Friendship is bodies intermingling, embedded in but not necessarily beholden to the realities we face. We are not entirely crushed, and we can build from that space. The signifier of “friendship” may be many, but its signified is a taste of a freedom in a togetherness. There are many of us that are out of step with the fascist affect, no matter the stretch and stench of its tendrils. Our power must

be tripped into action (Massumi 2003) and so it has been, so we have seen. If we are changeable affective subjects, learning and sensing and feeling and breathing in the world around us, then we are certainly at our most changeable among friends.

We say (and often, hopefully, mean) we will do anything for our friends, for the delicate connective tissue that bounces and tangles and rebuffs our understandings of our very selves. If we are to be, if we are to become, then we will only do so—only have the capacity to do so—when we approach each other as friends, with a kinship that rejects ‘just’ friends and seeks the expansive quality of feeling that we may only have around those who make us belong to ourselves and to each other. It is in friendship that we are “walking the road together” (Invisible Collective 2014, 15), it is in giving these affective ties care and nourishment that we may find a new shared life in this old world.

The capacities to friendship hum with possibility. Friendships can shape us into necessarily abolitionist beings, vibrate at a frequency that emphasizes relationality, a nearing utopia, that demands we seek out a collective pleasure and existence for those with whom we are not yet friends. In the possibilities of friendship we may feel a rejection of that individualistic pit of fascist affect that trembles and stomps in the air we must breathe. We have in friendship an abolitionist ethos, an abolitionist affect that, in its most shining possibilities, is already here, can already be tasted. If we lean into the capaciousness of friendship, into the vast and winding infrastructure that many of us traverse already, we may hope, and act, and insist on a future that is momentous in its boundless attainability – we may yet “rediscover the ancient taste of friendship” (Invisible Collective 2014, 117).

Endnotes

1. See, for example, the far-right appeal towards “common sense” that rejects thought, intellectualism, heart, and collective knowledge in favor of fascist (white) norms.
2. O’Brien convincingly argues this point in favor of family abolition. See also Sophie Lewis (2022) for a arguments for family abolition using queer kinships and positing ‘kith’ as a way of being.

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17

M. Gail Hamner

Building Capacity to Let the World End

How does the world end?
Let me count the ways:¹

Yes and²—while the counting drones on, you can slide into the shadows, sidestep the modes of rationality that grasp, assess, determine, and blame,

1. Loneliness

close the window on doom scrolling, on op-eds, and slip into the smooth spaces of roiling generativity:³ seek the eyes of some creature you used to ignore, dragonflies, for example, or stinkbugs; talk with the spider who weaves her web behind your sofa and tracks you with all eight of her eyes. There are depths in you that you do not yet feel, and humans are not the only persons.

2. Attention Theft

You need not hope for Ned Ludd's return,⁴ though setting a glass of wine out for him can prompt you to his rage and fear, yes and—surf the web to perforate the silos, jam the algorithms, link your sobbing shaking one to others likeunlike them,

3. Exhaustion

distract your overwrought consciousness⁵ with the floating whispers of young ones' dreams as they jump all the neoliberal ships to a life hacked out of low wages and social detritus, insisting on rest and boundaries and attentive care, refusing property whenever possible.⁶

4. Hunger

Value (worth) spins the world, yes and—what are *you* worth? Shimmy around imposed correlations, suss out value as affective orientation. Value (worth) is not, but describes relationship. The specificity of what is valued (person, skill, thing, image) holds value through vectoral inflection: I value {x}, I enact valuation vis-à-vis my aching arc toward {x}. The intensity of vectoral quality—this arc, this ache—differentiates the affective orientations of (social) value from those of (mere personal) preference; in other words—here's a leap, take my hand—we need *colossal* noncommodified redistributions of resources, we need *massive* transvaluations of 'success', yes and—a thousand tiny kinds of successful lives can take root and blossom if you happen to parlay that easy-to-miss moment when one word one gesture can scaffold another's desperate reach toward a life worth living,

5. Hate

amid a socius, a world, that draws increasingly smaller tighter circles to demarcate those inside, those like like, while puking out the unlike, stopping ears to their stories, reaching back to a great-again world that never was, soiling public spaces with vile slander and bullying and murder, lobbying to legislate against the needs, belonging, humanity of the unlike, yes and—the opposite of hate is not love, it is attentiveness, attunement. If you do not deeply train yourself to sense subtle fraying ricocheting signals of difference, trust me, you will simply plop perceptual sameness over everything around you;

6. Global Bad Affect⁷

because the vector of value thrums and disperses, it does not connect, it generates context, a squishy palimpsest of connotations. Value (being-worth) marks a recursive relation: it shapes the agency of acting; it takes shape as an inflection that shapes context. This recursivity springs and spirals out into unending undecidables, raising the stakes. A very anxious joy infuses value's thrumming dispersiveness. Value (worth) is wanted and is easily lost. Value (worth) is wanted and can be stolen. Value (worth) is wanted and can be denied or remain just out of reach. To feel value, as to feel alienation from value, ignites desire, nostalgia, jealousy, hatred, violence. Value carves the lineaments of war, slides over the evils of slavery and genocide, seals the circuits of power-mongering with sparkling deliciousness.⁸

7. Devastated Landscapes⁹

Twenty-first century original sin, or, the inability to traverse a day without purchasing plastic, islands of it in our oceans, nanoparticles of it in our blood and flesh, CONVENIENCE is the devil's mask, yes and—steal away with me to the quiet practices of “assisted migration”,¹⁰ of composting, of planting gardens that adapt to the changing needs of bugs and birds and bees, save your seeds, share your garden space, can your produce and give last summer away during the winter holidays, feel the rhythms of all that crawl, stalk, hop, and fly, witness the world's destruction, yes and...give active witness in your own way to what in all its gorgeous striving still is, on a knife's edge of extinction,

8. Enwhitenment¹¹

for the high-priests of the Enlightenment were self-satisfied cheerleaders of white Christian imperialism, rahrahaing those who birthed and blasted and built and extracted a world that does not *want* you to think, it does all the thinking for you, even before AI, yes and— the lives of crow and crabapple, of unhoused and bodily disdained still need your thoughtful care and reasoned routines, but a mode of thought, a style of care that is fashioned from below the world, from outside its rejection (refusal), from the aggravated interstices of data aggregation; a style of thought and mode of care that stitch the shards of broken hearts into habits of prudent openness, of pursuing limits of vulnerability instead of limits of reason, of seeking conditions of possibility of keeping on, and honing the norm of letting go of norms¹² in the face of the unnormed maw of need that wails before you at a frequency the world refuses to hear.

9. Loss of god

No not that god, though sure, if you wish, yes and—you need an Earthseed¹³ molded to and for your own collective, your own inoperative community, because religion is what binds us (*ligare*) over and again (*religare*) to what we value, that is, to the steady and mutable affective technologies and affective intensities that build our capacities for sliding, sidestepping, slipping, prompting, distracting, attuning, parlaying, witnessing, and laboring in the interstices for life, for all life, for life worth living.

Endnotes

1. With props, or apologies, to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “How do I Love Thee (Sonnet 43).”
2. Claudia Rankine uses this phrase in *Just Us: An American Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Greywolf Press, 2020) to signal a world that accepts matters as they are. To me the phrase captures our need to use the world against the world, sort of like Fred Moten’s fugitivity, which I rename “the refusal of the refusal” or the dodge within the world, away from the world (*withinaway*). See, for example, Moten’s *Stolen Life: Consent not to be a Single Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
3. Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Smooth space is not void or static but a roiling generativity that erupts in or murmurs forth the striated situations of our world.
4. Ned Ludd was the perhaps-mythical leader of the nineteenth-century Lud-dites, who demolished the new machines that threatened their traditional modes of weaving.
5. Walter Benjamin on distracted consciousness in “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproduction.”
6. Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects* (2011), Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* (2006), Neferti Tadiar, *Remaindered Life* (2022).
7. Subject line of a mid-2010s email exchange with a dear Jewish colleague over Israeli state violence.

III. BREAK: REFUSALS, RESISTANCE

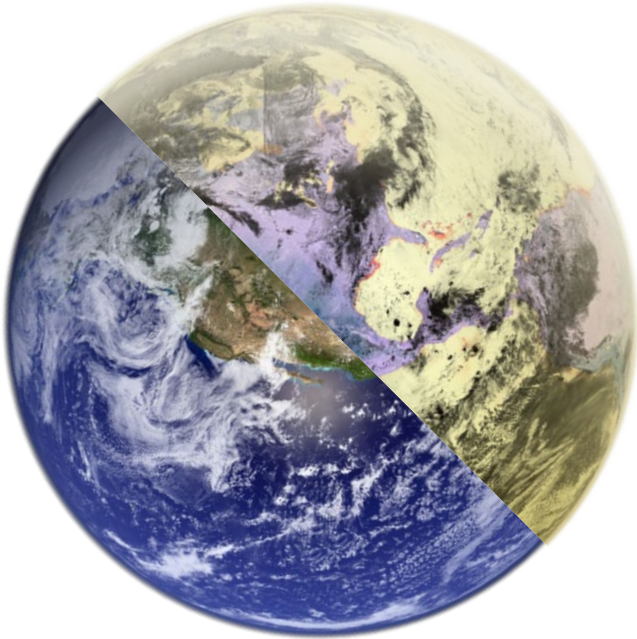
8. Theories of value move through Karl Marx's accounts of capital(ism); Nietzsche seeks transvaluation.
9. Courtney O'Dell-Chaib, *Desiring Devastated Landscapes: Love After Ecological Collapse*, doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 2019.
10. Assisted migration, human-assisted movement of species in response to climate change, is a general term that encompasses a variety of different potential actions, which have substantial differences in terms of risk, ecological implications, and policy considerations. Cf. <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/northern-forests/topic/assisted-migration-forests>
11. The most-apt term of a former advisee, Ashley Cake, now a business proprietor in Ithaca, NY.
12. This is my takeaway of the ethic Edouard Glissant offers in *Poetic Relations*.
13. The religion constructed by Lauren Oya Olamina in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Inoperable Community*.

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"Nah." Rosa Parks 1955 T-Shirt
Women's March Foundation



18

Jenise Hudson

**A Call for Rest-istance:
Black Women’s Bartlebyian
Capacities To (or, Informal
Notes for A Re-Imagining
of Herman Melville’s
“Bartleby the Scrivner:
A Story of Wall Street.”)**

What would it mean for black women collectives to “sit this one out” and embrace decidedly more Bartlebyian capacities?

Over the last month, numerous posts by black women content creators, public intellectuals, and scholars have appeared which encourage black women, in the wake of the election, to refrain from jumping into action. “Sit this one out,” several have urged. Others have invoked phrases centered on black women embracing their ‘rest era,’ posting the hashtag #blackwomanrest and reminding black women that the “lessons” to come are “not [their] lesson to learn.”¹ These mounting calls to *inaction* capture a shared feeling by a contingent of black women that, just when it seemed that they had the wind at their backs in a campaign centered on the protections of vital rights for a cross-section of minoritized groups, the touted alliances upon which they depended to deliver the win failed to come through on the promise.

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Black women who felt angered, enraged², betrayed, resentful, disillusioned, disappointed, or otherwise besieged by “negative emotions”³ about the outcome, might have been expected to rally, make noise, or march on Washington Mall in ways similar to 2017. However, the opposite happened. These women, reeling from the heartbreaking futility of their hours and efforts of canvassing, phone banking, donating, convincing, hoping, praying, and believing—far more than from absolute shock (for few such women are fully shocked)—have pulled together, pulled inward, and, at the same time, pulled back.

Their decisive move to make *no* move, as they hardly are in the mood, reflects an affective turn away from the hollow validation historically bestowed upon them when they embrace controlling images⁴ of strength, which undermine their sense of peace, well-being, and autonomy. It reflects a preventative measure against that “disease called strength”⁵ and a turn toward restorative self-care rooted in the understanding that peace of mind—indeed, rest⁶ and quiet—is a political act in itself.⁷

Such black women signify on Princeton University Professor Eddie Glaude’s post-election statement to MSNBC anchor Ali Velshi that Americans “have to do what Bartleby the Scrivener did in Melville’s story. We have to say, ‘I prefer not to.’”⁸ In the context of his on-air conversation, Glaude was imploring viewers to remain engaged in political discourse and not to concede defeat in the face of gaslighting narratives about this current moment. However, an indulgent consideration of Glaude’s evocation of Melville’s short story has gotten me to thinking: What *would* a re-imagining

of the scribe Bartleby look like if he were recast as one of these black women content creators rejecting expectations of workhorse advocacy in the weeks after the 2024 election?

I imagine that in such a revival, the protagonist would have arrived not from a long stint of previous employ at the Dead Letter Office, but from a campaign office or phone-bank where disillusionment set in after months of laboring to forge alliances that only proved vacillating, performative, and unreliable. Under these circumstances, this black female Bartleby would have ample cause to echo Bartleby's famed phrase, "I prefer not to."⁹ But where Melville's Bartleby's refusal of his duties persisted and resulted in his depressing death, in this iteration the protagonists' Bartlebeyian capacities would be two-fold: her refusal would signify negative feeling to a degree, but it also would symbolize an act of self-protection and a casting off of harmful archetypes of martyrdom.¹⁰

Instead of the shirt sleeves that Bartleby is discovered wearing on the Sunday—he is found by his employer to be living in the former's offices illegally—the protagonist of this twenty-first century reincarnation would sport the, " 'Nah.' Rosa Parks, 1955" t-shirt that has become so popularized and which is an updated, colloquial signifier of Parks' seated protest that helped start the Montgomery bus boycott.¹¹ In this iteration, the "nah" t-shirt would invoke its own kind of seated protest but it would be a protest capturing black women's intransigence to outside calls to frontline work. Similar to the pajamas that Ann Cvetkovich mentions faculty wearing to embody the public feelings of exhaustion they experienced at Feel Tank Chicago's International Day of the Politically Depressed,¹² the shirt would reflect the public

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feelings of depletion and protective resolve shared by such communities of black women who have declared, as did Bartleby, that for now and until they have moved beyond this impasse,¹³ they “prefer not to.”¹⁴

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Katie Mogg’s *New York Times* piece on black women’s decision to choose rest, post-election; also see Stephanie Toliver’s opinion piece for The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s College of Education; for an example of social media content, see black woman content creator and actress @Nikkicolestar’s November 7, 2024 post: “Black women, this isn’t our lesson to learn. Rest (heart emoji).”

2. Brittany Cooper’s (2019) book, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*, is insightful in its examination of how discourses of black women’s anger, such as Audre Lorde’s, underscores its political exigency; she also reflects on the ways in which black women’s anger has been misread and even fetishized (2).

3. See Ngai (2005, 1).

4. Patricia Hill Collins as qtd. in Beauboeuf-Lafontant, (2019, 22).

5. Harris as qtd. In Beauboeuf-Lafontant, (2019, 45).

6. For example, see Tricia Hersey’s project @TheNapMinistry; also see Mel Monier’s article about Hersey’s work.

7. Here I am invoking bell hooks’ (1984) “comprehensive” application of the slogan “the personal is political” (26–27).

8. Melville as quoted by Glaude. Glaude’s MSNBC interview was reposted by the network on YouTube.

9. Melville (1853).

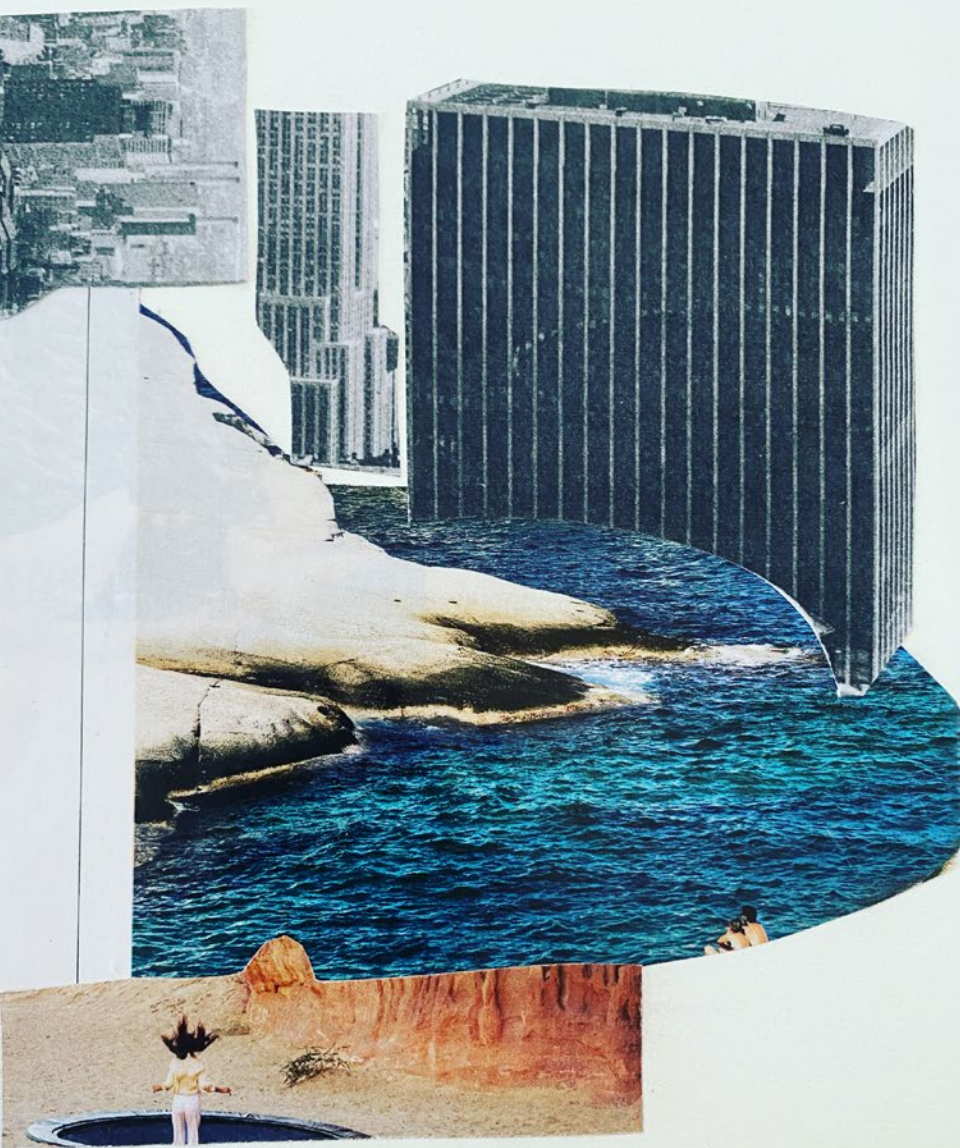
10. Numerous black feminist scholars, historians, psychologists, theologians, literary and popular culture critics write about this trope of strength and its history with black women. For an example of such work, see Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s (2009) *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance*.

11. See an image of the shirt on The Women’s March Foundation website: <https://www.womensmarchfoundation.org/shop/p/nah-rosa-parks-1955>. Because there are so many e-commerce sites that also offer the t-shirt, it is unclear if it originated on this website or not.

12. See Cvetkovich (2012, 2).
13. See Berlant as qtd. in Cvetkovich (2012, 20).
14. Melville (1853).

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Floods, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, 2025

19

Andrew Culp

No Capacities To

The Era of Incapacitation

In an era where so many “just can’t,” what does it mean to feel utterly incapacitated?

A great fear of the nineteenth century was that people were being shocked into submission. The city, the train, factory, and other industrialized machines produced an anesthetic sensory bombardment, squeezing more productivity out of the human body while numbing the senses. The next century’s action-cinema, typified by Eisenstein and Riefenstahl, epitomized this logic, spurring the masses into action (Benjamin 1969). The great refusals of this age were the strike and sabotage—boisterous collective disruptions of exploitation.

But today’s society is no longer modeled off the orderly factory assembly line or the tight rows of the cinema. Incapacitation now means isolation in ‘depression rooms’ amidst doom piles and endless scrolling. How do we understand

its causes? The “pharmaco-pornographic,” as Paul Preciado describes it, pushes us into an always-on state of anticipation and excitation, tethering us to systems that exploit attention and desire (2013).

Rather than seeing incapacity as failure, what if we understood it as a collective refusal of an unbearable system? In this context, the inability to produce, engage, or even “function” becomes a strategy—a mass withdrawal from the circuits of work, consumption, and participation that fuel contemporary capitalism. These refusals take the form of ghosting, quiet quitting, or simply checking out.

Part I. Incapacity: From Anesthesia to Burnout

“Each phase of capitalism has its own dominant reactive affect,” wrote an anti-capitalist collective in 2014 (Plan C). These affects, held as “public secrets,” are so potent as to demand deferral, disavowal, or outright denial. When acknowledged, they are personalized, ensuring that “each phase blames the system’s victims for the suffering that the system causes.”

The Misery of Numbing Work

In nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, the dominant affect was misery. Misery reflected capitalism’s structural immiseration, squeezing the exploited for ever more while offering less and less. It meant the relentless privation of starvation wages, grueling work, and dangerous conditions (Marx 1992). This misery was not just material but also intensely sensory. The shocks of industrial modernity—the dehumanizing mechanical repetition of factory life and the dizzying overwhelm of crowded, chaotic cities—produced a

protective numbing of the senses (Simmel 1950). This anesthetic response allowed bodies to endure the crushing effects of industrial capitalism while also diminishing their capacity for resistance (Buck-Morss 1992).

In response, collective struggles emerged. Mutual aid networks, labor unions, and movements for social welfare sought to mitigate the effects of misery, forcing capitalism to strike a productivist bargain (Hardt and Negri 1994). For those who contributed to its growth and security, capitalism promised a baseline of stability in the form of a home, reliable wages, and social insurance. But this bargain introduced its own reactive affect: boredom.

The Boredom of Dull Discipline

Boredom arose as life was reduced to conformity, repetition, and narrow consumption. Monotonous work, rigid social conventions, and the flatness of a life confined to predictable patterns transmuted capitalism's stability into permanent dissatisfaction (Debord 1994). The endless cycles of work and leisure, with their slight but predictable variations, mirrored the logic of the cinematic apparatus: a sequence of frames advancing with mechanical precision. Film became the new camera obscura of ideology, a supreme device for shaping the spectacle of social conformity (Kofman 1998). Filmmakers and politicians alike quickly grasped the analogy between the cinema and the factory: as the factory trained bodies for work, the screen trained minds for action (Deleuze 1986).

In the Soviet Union, "cine-trains" traveled the countryside, using films to introduce new techniques of collective labor (Marker 1992). They saturated the social field with the factory logic of production, dissolving it into vision, immers-

ing the countryside in all the elements of the cinematic apparatus (Vertov 1984). Decades later, this same analogy was quite literally recreated by revolutionary filmmakers, as in the Dziga Vertov Group's famous ten-minute tracking shot of an auto assembly line in *British Sounds* (Godard 1969).

The shock of the new spectacle did not relieve boredom but instead trained it into a new habit. Boredom became the discipline of waiting—waiting for the next command, the next action, the next frame to deliver the illusion of movement, while the structure of confinement remained intact.

By the mid-20th century, rebellions against this boredom swelled up. Discontent grew not only with the monotony of labor but also with the rigidity of social roles and the deadening predictability of a white-picket-fence “square” future (Marcuse 1964). These revolts sought to break free from the factory-cinema's regimented vision, challenging the narrow confines of capitalist life with demands for vibrant, unpredictable, and “authentic” ways of being.

The Anxiety of Always-On Minds and Bodies

Contemporary capitalism responded to these revolts by dismantling the stability that once produced boredom (Tiqqun 2020). Yet, as with every “exciting” development, this came at a cost: anxiety. The promise of security gave way to a volatile, lean, just-in-time present fueled by destabilization. Boring stasis yielded to hyper-stimulation and perpetual uncertainty.

Today's capitalism operates directly on the body and the mind. Hormonal cycles, neurotransmitters, and sensory inputs are all modulated to maintain productivity and engagement (Preciado 2013). Pharmaceuticals manage emotions, digital platforms monetize attention, and personal desires

are commodified at the click of a button. Vision, no longer confined to cinema's regimented action-image, is now fragmented across countless screens, each demanding attention, reaction, and participation (Deleuze 1989, 266-7; Beller 2006). The scattered feeds and infinite scrolls of the present keep individuals in a heightened state of anticipation and dependency, tethered to an economy that thrives on their exhaustion.

The story of misery, boredom, and anxiety is the story of capitalism's evolving strategies of control. Generations ago, it was theorized as commodities alienating 'being' into 'having,' and then the spectacle as further alienating 'having' into 'appearing' (Debord 1994). Misery inspired factory floor solidarity, as workers sought collective answers to systemic failures. Boredom fueled a cinematic rebellion, pushing against the monotony and rigidity of mid-century life.

Anxiety, however, overwhelms bodies and minds to the edge of burnout, reducing them to the ability to react. 'Appearing' has even further alienated into anticipatory 'reacting.' This anxiety fragments individuals, pitting them against themselves in a precarious world. The youngest generations seem to openly embrace scams and grifts as the only way to keep their head above water.

Part II. Incapacity and Revolt: From Quiet Quitting to Collective Refusal

The Quiet Resistance of Withdrawal

In a system that demands endless productivity, acts of withdrawal (ghosting, quiet quitting, or outright disengagement) are often dismissed as apathy or dysfunction. Yet these seemingly individual responses might be better understood

III. BREAK: REFUSALS, RESISTANCE

as unconscious forms of resistance (Pettman forthcoming; Lovink 2019). Incapacity, in this sense, is not simply a lack of action but a refusal of unbearable conditions (Hu 2022).

Where earlier eras saw organized refusals reflect back the factory owner's assembly line or director's cinema hall, today's acts of incapacity are less discernable refusals but no less significant. Quiet quitting, working no more than contractual obligations explicitly require (and thus, an update of the old labor tactic of "working to rule"), is a covert response to systematic wage theft and escalating productivity demands. Ghosting, a sudden disappearance from work, social, or emotional commitments, interrupts the regular flow of engagement that capitalism needs to maintain profitable speeds. Burnout, generally pathologized as a personal failure, sets a hard limit on compulsory productivity through the body's incapacity to sustain an untenable pace.

These acts of withdrawal collectively reveal a deeper truth: contemporary capitalism's demands are unsustainable. With life sped up to match the endless churn of digital platforms, whose analytics demand constant engagement, the bleeding edge moves at a frenetic sprint, pushing us all to the brink of our abilities. In this context, exhaustion and incapacity are not individual failures but a generalized exploitation by overextension.

A Hidden Collective Refusal

Historically, the currency of collective refusal was visible and vocal solidarity: loud demonstrations of the rank-and-file marching down the street or raucous activists disrupting public events. Today, the dominant forms of organization have refashioned social composition. Refusal often feels fragmented, pushing acts to intense, seemingly isolated extreme

outbursts or unconscious feelings that organize mass withdrawal without rising to unified expression (Berardi 2009). Yet this does not erase their political potential.

Rather, they pose a question few ask: can unconscious but nonetheless *felt* suspensions of productivity ever build to a politics of shared incapacity? Perhaps we need to look to others who have already challenged the implicit productivity of the active in “activism” (Kafer 2013).

Frameworks like Sick Woman Theory challenge the assumption that activism must always be active, proposing instead that rest, care, and refusal are themselves radical acts of defiance (Hedva 2020). These frameworks offer a lens through which to view individual incapacities not as personal deficiencies but as part of a shared condition produced by capitalism (The Care Collective 2020; Culp 2022). Depression, burnout, and disengagement are systemic, not individual, failures (Cvetkovich 2012). They are symptoms of a world that demands too much and gives too little—in short, the affects of a sick world.

Around the same time as Plan C, some comrades in France uttered their own words, “we are not depressed; we’re on strike” (The Invisible Committee 2013, 34). Perhaps, then, it is time for a twist: we are depressed *and* we are on strike.

An Introduction to Non-Fascist Incapacity

Détourning Foucault’s famous preface to *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), this art of incapacity (counter to all forms of fascism, whether already inside us or looming on the horizon) carries with it a certain number of essential principles. If I were to make this essay into a manual or guide to collective refusal, I would summarize them as follows:

III. BREAK: REFUSALS, RESISTANCE

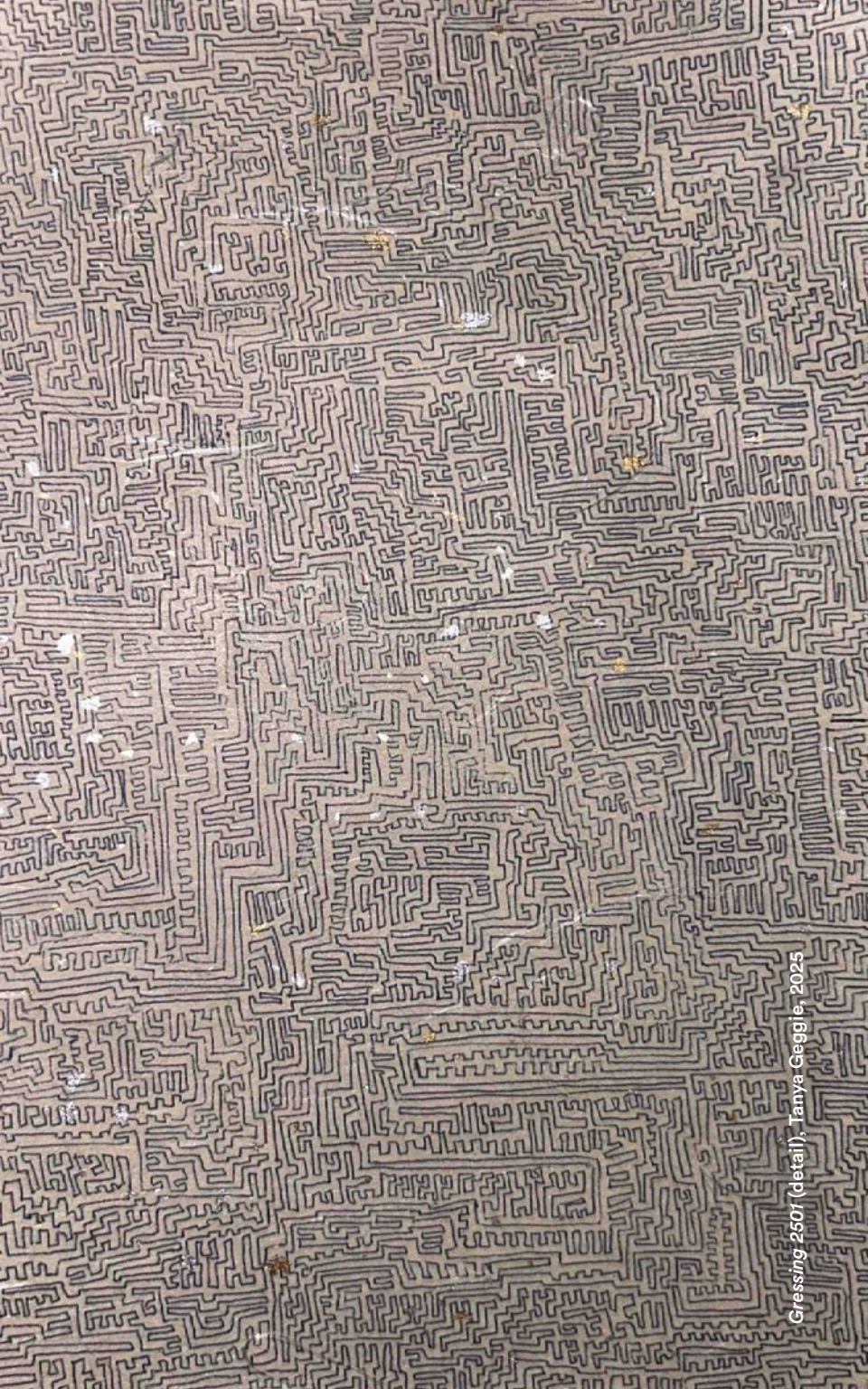
- Liberate acts of refusal from the moralizing narratives of productivity and self-improvement that underpin “active-ism.”
- Cultivate collective incapacity by fostering solidarity through shared withdrawal, while rejecting productivist hierarchies of activity, work, or expertise.
- Withdraw allegiance from the old myths of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and relentless striving. Reclaim rest as passive resistance, slowness as temporal sabotage, and incapacity as bodily refusal to participate in systems of exploitation.
- Do not believe that one must be active to be a militant, even if the forces we fight are exhausting. Revolutionary force emerges from disrupting imposed dissatisfaction, whether through nostalgic restoration or endlessly craving more.
- Do not use thought to ground political practice in the terms of capacity nor use capacity to dismiss a line of thought. Instead, let incapacity intensify thought, and let analysis broaden the domains where incapacity disrupts.
- Do not seek liberation through the restoration of individual capacities. Capacities are products of power. What is needed is communal degrowth through “de-capacitation,” a shared way of life that resists the drive to maximize functionality.
- Above all, do not fall in love with the forms of capacity that sustain the system you resist. In a world organized around endless activity and perpetual growth, the ultimate act of refusal is to withhold our capacities from those who would turn them against us.

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Gressing 2501 (detail), Janya Geggie, 2025

Consider or Study Carefully
Asilia Franklin-Phipps, 2025

consider or study carefully

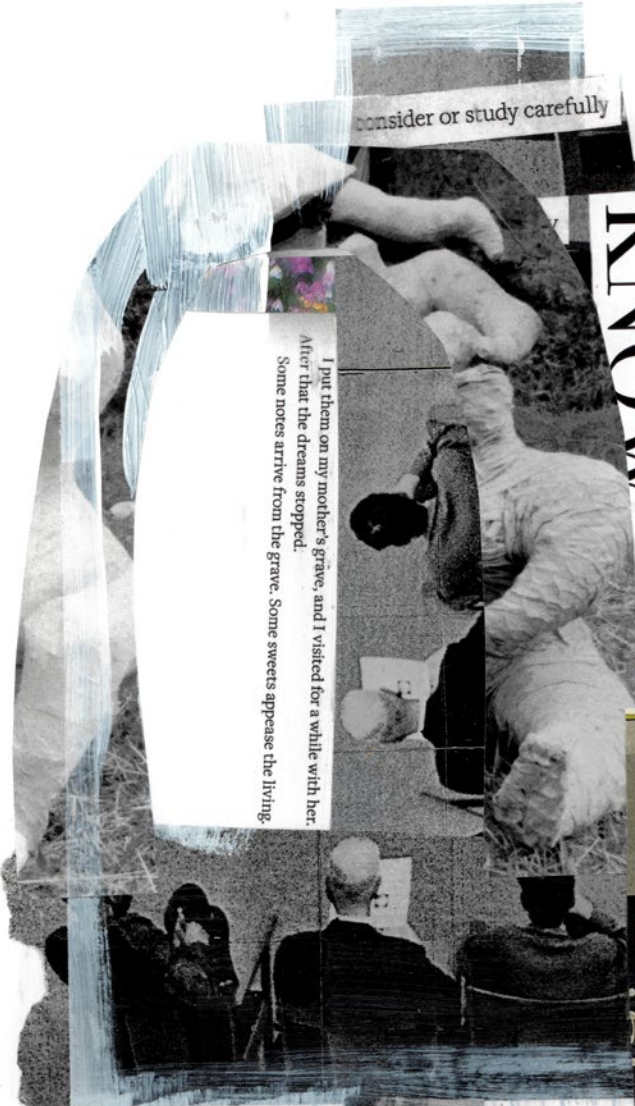
I put them on my mother's grave, and I visited for a while with her.
After that the dreams stopped.
Some notes arrive from the grave. Some sweets appease the living.

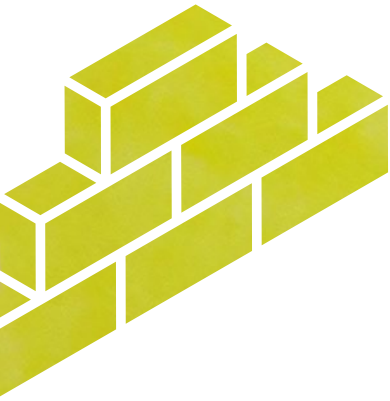
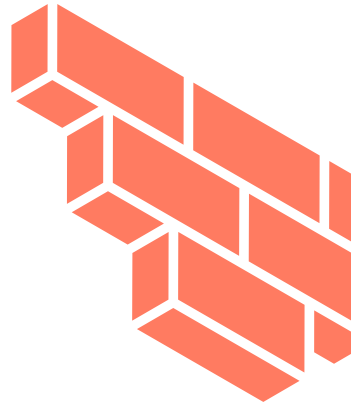
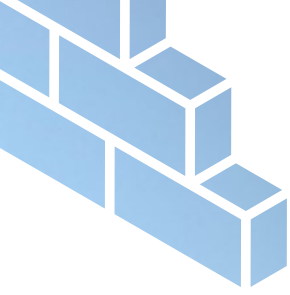
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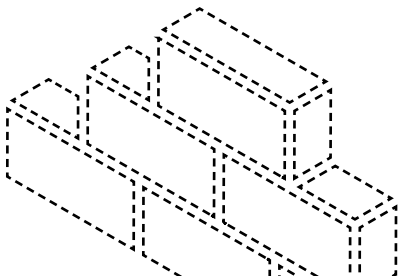
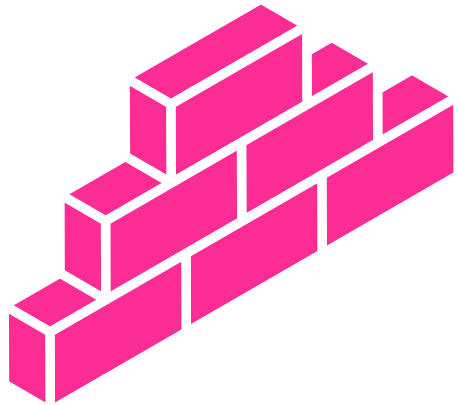
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IV. Unbuilding, Rebuilding

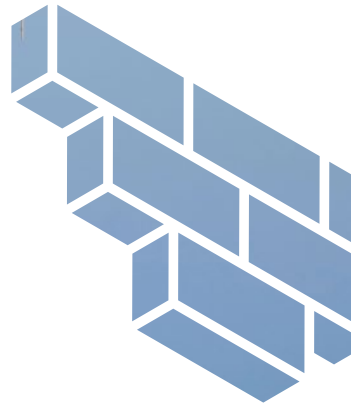




20

Mallika Khanna

On Our Capacities to Decenter Empire Affectively



“We are on the brink of fascism,” is a phrase with a built-in policing mechanism. Who are “we” in this framing? How is that we policed? Part of how fascism generates paranoia is through its own specter, always on the brink, always looming as something that could happen to “us” in some threatening future over there. The rhetorical work the phrase does relies on the nation’s borders as the imagined electric fence that will somehow ward away the evil of fascism.

Fascists and fascism are everywhere. In India there is fascism. In Hungary there is fascism. In the Philippines there is fascism. In Brazil there is fascism. In Israel there is only fascism. Globally, there is an investment in jingoistic pathological nationalism/narcissism and in the idea of borders as safety/security/containment. It is a moment in which borders

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are being shored up and affects are being disciplined, and states and institutions are exhorting us to valorize our ethnic or national affiliations above all other kinds of kinship and relation.

The conditions of living under fascism are not exceptional. As my friend Paul Garza—also a grad student at IU—helped me understand, fascism and colonialism are deeply intertwined. Anti Colonialism and antifascism have always been twinned projects. There is no effective fight against fascism that isn't also a fight against colonialism and racial capitalism (or there shouldn't be).

But this recognition requires provincializing the US and its own self-image. Even thoughtful and sharp activists and scholars will slip into this mode of exceptionality: “how could things possibly get any worse?” “how can we ever come back from this?” Not to be too *passee* here, but... there are actual genocides happening... 45,000 people have been murdered in Gaza: kids wearing their little spiderman suits, doctors suturing bodies together with sewing needles, people growing tomatoes and eggplants in the shadow of broken buildings. When Palestinians tell us that it will all be “more of the same”¹ whether the strongman demagogue or the girlboss cop is in power, we have to sit with the affective weight of how damning this assessment is.

That doesn't mean we should be despondent and cynical and cruel. Obviously, there are people who will suffer more now that we know what's coming. Even with a legal visa and all the trappings that come with institutional affiliation, I know immigration shit is going to be harder and messier and more brutal. I know there are millions of people here whose lives will become scary and difficult and even nightmarish in the wake of it all.

But at my most honest, I have to admit that it's hard for me to really care. Let me hedge by saying: I do feel the weight of it all. Of course I do, but when I think about Delhi, the city I grew up in, its 1700 AQI, the millions of bodies being brutalized by its toxicity and its intensity, it is hard to be absolutely shattered by who gets elected to office here. Trump gets elected, Trump doesn't get elected. People in the global south keep getting murdered and worn out and debilitated. Either way the worlds I care about most are already fucked.

How do you bring this up in spaces where these bodies are rendered utterly invisible? At a dinner, weeks before the election, I found myself bristling at a highly respected white woman scholar's contempt towards "those idiots" who didn't want to vote for Kamala. Obviously, the assumption is that 'those idiots' are ignorant xenophobes who don't know what is in their own best interest. Not people with ties to other worlds, where one way or the other it would all be "more of the same." Not those of us who reject the perpetual injunction to care for the nation's well-being infused in the affective fabric of the U.S.

I'm scared that my refusal to be cathected into this imperative to care is nothing more than a lazy nihilism. I'm scared it comes from an insensitivity to the physical spaces I inhabit and from an irresponsible desire to homogenize the many worlds of the global south into something inherently other. But I also wonder whether this refusal indicates something about the frequencies we tune into and the ones we can't. Is who we feel with utterly circumscribed by who we find ourselves grieving? By whose lives are most vivid and whose deaths are most heart wrenching? Can we change who we are most affectively attuned to, knowing that this

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is determined far more by state and institutional power than it is by individual choice. Who are the “we” that “we” are imagining on the other side of any of this?

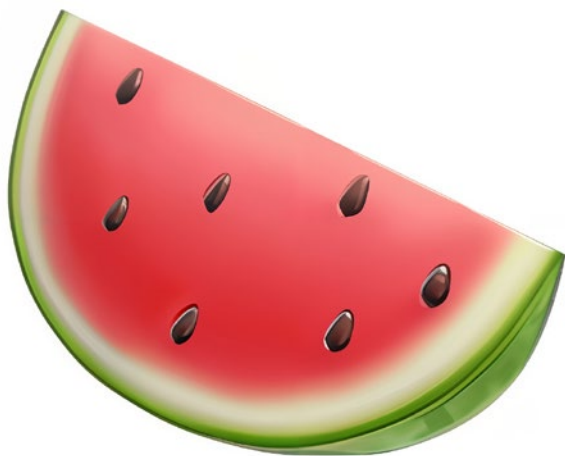
There is a scene in Mila Turajilic’s film *Non Aligned* that makes me tear up every time I watch it. Non-alignment leaders planting seedlings in what they called “Friendship Park”: trees designed to grow towards each other, meeting in the middle. It is a symbolic gesture, certainly. But its symbolism carries traces of possibility that I want to offer as a rejoinder to the America-centric notion of anti-fascism we are so attached to.

There are rich, vibrant histories of decentering empire that come from the “peripheries.” Globally people are disciplined into centering empire: what happens in the US, we are constantly reminded, matters everywhere. The affective work of decentering brings with it an admission that no, Trump is neither the center nor the end of the world. The end of the world is already happening. It has already happened. It requires attuning ourselves to all the contexts in which the end of the world is already here.

To the extent that the political project of Third Worldism has disappeared as a vital and ongoing project to orient our practice, we might speak of Third Worldism as a foreclosed resource with which to fight fascism. But its legacies live well beyond the institutions that gave the project its form, legacies that can be accessed through an affective imbibement of anticolonial struggle. These are struggles that give shape to an alternate us: those of us who feel otherwise, who refuse to align with the diktats of empire.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/23/trump-would-be-the-worst-palestinians-react-to-us-presidential-race>



Free99Fridge, Atlanta, Wendy Truran, 2021



21

Sofia Di Gironimo and Aliza Phillips

Capacities to Organize in/ through the Institution...

Capacities to organize in/through the institution...

as in—

Capacities to...

Stew resistance...

as in—

smiles in line for the university free lunch kitchen. those same smiles, masked to the eye, narrowed as we take the lawn. solidarity demos late into the night, fuelled by grandmothers who pass by with baked treats, biryani, hot tea. resources spilling freely, we always have more than we need when we act together. listen close, then imagine otherwise; there is always an otherwise. find the fissure, then find the scheme.

Stir up trouble...

as in—

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baton-twirling lessons on the picket line. cunty strike chant-writing (when I say, “it’s giving,” you say “scab!”). entryism. knowing when to call it quits. making affinity groups. polling the general body. taking the street. teaching new students how to get textbooks for cheap. staging coups, with allies, often. the gsa, the board of directors, the union, the classroom. a challenge to authority that comes in the form of a question.

Simmer in the unknown...

as in—

after reading the first chapter of *gender trouble*, a student asks if they should raise their children nonbinary. I tell them I don’t know. “what are the stakes of your argument?” we are trained to ask one another. we attend to the kernel of *nothing* at the center of knowing. this nothingness is not simply a negation, an absence, an escape. it cannot be relegated to the register of objects or relations. it is intimated in a glitch, a lapse, a proposition, a leap of faith, a refusal of fidelity to the structures of sense-making. reverence to certainty indexes a cowardice of imagination. we’re not meant to metabolize the uneasiness. some things stay lodged in the throat.

Marinate in contradiction...

as in—

a fifteen-odd student conference for an introductory course in queer and feminist theory. grappling with the contradictions of learning about bourgeois subject-formation at an institution whose purpose is bourgeois subject-formation. the school, the prison, the hospital, we chant out together.

students are suspicious but hungry for more. protesting for divestment while pocketing funds to fly to the conference. accepting a diploma on the same stretch of lawn we were handcuffed on by state-troopers four weeks prior. absent for a few weeks, a student I later learn has been participating in a hunger strike. after reading theory on sound-regulation and colonization, we take a sound walk on the grounds behind the university. the unmarked graves of Indigenous youth are destroyed by loud digging machines. we are building the infrastructure of learning, here. and with that learning, we risk coming to forget our own troubled foundations. we might more usefully ‘stay with the trouble’ outside the conference notes, where we accede to our place as both perpetuators and troublemakers in the knowledge-making machine.

Sandwich the struggle...

as in—

start with snacks and end with a toast. between pomodoro sessions. on walks from class to class. in the hallway, the library, knee deep in the stacks. with moments of self-criticism. keep the meeting to an hour or less. start with *coups de masse* and end with *coups de coeur*. craft the flier as the cookies bake. stash the leftovers in the free fridge. keep yourself and your comrades wanting more.

Share the fruits of your labor—

as in—

CAPACITIES TO ORGANIZE IN/THROUGH THE INSTITUTION

with glee, with rigor, without expectation of return. passwords and links and database logins. zines and stickers and KN95 masks for the tear gas. a sandwich, a secret, a passion. a ride to the conference, a ride to the airport, a ride to the protest. critical intel on the wall of the bathroom stall. here is the roughest of rough drafts. here is that pdf I told you about. here is the address of the anarchist library. here is what I didn't know. here's what I want you to know. I trust you. I'll see you in the strike kitchen, at the bargaining table, on the green, after class, tomorrow, Thursday, and then again after that.



22

Zoe Fuad

**Capacities to Grieve:
Exploring the Political
Function(s) of Emotional
Debilitation**

How do we grieve for all that we're about to lose? Not just what we've already lost, which is plenty, but for everything soon to be wrenched away? For the safety, homes, and human lives threatened by a fascist administration?

This is not a grief for events long passed nor is it one to be processed and overcome, but an anticipatory type of grief as co-constituted by ongoing fear and helplessness. Unlike that of the Western psychotherapeutic canon, which is finite and neatly captured in “five stages,” this grief is relentless and open-ended. It denies us the chance to “move on,” if only because there is nothing, no promise of improvement, to move toward.

One week after the election ended, our organization—a racial justice group, whose membership consists largely of Latinx and Southeast Asian immigrants—held a staff meeting to discuss our next steps. It didn't feel appropriate to host the sort of direct action we usually did: not when so many of our community members were undocumented and facing the

isha (detail), Josephine Sharp, 2025



threat of deportation. Rather than “say anything externally,” our director advised, “we need to focus on processing internally. Let our people feel what they’re feeling and navigate what this outcome means to them.”

In the face of inevitable violence, there’s no space to channel our grief into action. Or, alternatively put: grieving in itself is the action, and the only action, available to us. There is no energy for protests, marches, and riots. In contrast to the outcry of 2016, Trump’s 2024 victory has been met with disquieted resignation.

As Hil Malatino (2022) writes, negative affect reduces the capacity of the body to affect and be affected by others; it “chips away at the physiological and psychological power of the body” and thus precludes our attempts at collective mobilization (12). The challenge for us, then, is to develop different political framings for our work: ones that do not rely upon the metaphor of “movement,” but rather allow for the slow tides of grief’s affective pull.

Two weeks after this discussion, I met separately with a small group of friends, all of whom are trans educators, to brainstorm ways of supporting our queer youth. We wanted to create a gender-affirming space where students could live as their full selves. I proposed, as part of this, that we invite the youth to co-develop our curriculum. I felt that this would provide students with a tangible way of exercising their own power.

But in saying this, I was gently redirected by A., my long-time friend and trusted confidante, who suggested that, “sure, some people will wanna jump right into action. But there’s also so many young people that won’t want to ‘do anything.’ They just need a space to grieve and process the political reality.”

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A murmur of agreement rippled across the room. “I want us to focus on just creating a landing place for people,” K., a trans social worker, chimed in. “I want to help them feel safe.”

What both educators gestured to, in this moment, was the necessity of honoring grief and allowing it to take up room in our lives. Against my impulse to “jump right into action,” A. helped me to move at the slowness demanded by grief, and to adjust my work accordingly.

La Marre Jurrelle Bruce (2021) refers to this pace as “depressive time,” as characterized by “listlessness, inertia, delay, dragging, [and] lingering” (212). And while dominant culture frames this as an undesirable speed to move at, Bruce points out that this speed might provide a strategy for marginalized people to refuse and protest the oppressive systems in which they live. It disrupts the provision of labor, stalls so-called progress, and decelerates the cogs of racial capitalism. As Jurrelle Bruce puts it, “a depressive time ... allows aggrieved subjects to *mobilize* their sorrow, ironically by *loitering* within it” (213).

Freud (1957) organized grief into two categories. Healthy forms, which he called “mourning,” require “moving on” from the instance of loss and re-investing one’s libidinal energy into a new object or ideal. It is proper, Freud (1957) explains, because “after a lapse of time, it will be overcome” (240).

By contrast, “melancholia,” which signals an inability to ever “move on,” is pathological. This refers to a mourning without end. The melancholic is so attached to the lost object that they come to integrate it into the ego, and “makes every conceivable effort to retain [it]” within the domain of the psyche (Eng & Han, 2018, 346). This form of grief is psychically debilitating, and, according to Freud, should always be resolved.

But for trans and immigrant populations facing a second Trump term, this form of grief seems unavoidable. Not only would it be extraordinarily difficult to “move on” from the catastrophic losses entailed by Trump’s policies, but doing so would require denying the worth of our communities and ourselves. As several queer and BIPOC scholars have suggested, perhaps melancholia is not pathological, but rather allows us to preserve what’s been unjustly robbed.

José Esteban Muñoz (1999), for one, writes that melancholia is “a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names” (74). Similarly, Melanie Klein (1940) argues that such unending grief can be productive, in that it continually reaffirms one’s love for the lost object; while Anne Anlin Cheng (2000) describes “racial melancholia... as a psychic *strategy*,” for racialized subjects, to protect against systems of exclusion and rejection (20, emphasis original).

What, then, are ways that organizers can intentionally cultivate this melancholic approach? How can we lag in the ebb of depressive time, so as to sustain both memory and hope of a better world?

Answers to these questions arose unexpectedly, one week later, when I attended a play at the Brooklyn Public Library. It was Dena Igusti’s *Chronologies*: a docu-poetic series that demonstrated how “grief [serves] as an archive within Southeast Asian communities” (Igusti, n.d.)

“The point,” Igusti explained in a post-show Q&A, “is not to grieve because people are dying, for death happens all the time.” Rather, what Igusti grieves—and what their work is designed to critique—are “the conditions of death” that face so many Southeast Asian Americans. “No, we don’t

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grieve because people are dying. We grieve because people are being *murdered*” by structural (and preventable) violence (Igusti, personal communication, Dec 14, 2024). As Igusti’s characters linger in the heave of depressive time, from where they deliver heartbroken, breaking monologues, they grow increasingly and vocally conscious of the systems that caused their loss. Anger percolates in the slog of grief. Sadness gives way to rage: slow tides to tsunami.

Perhaps, here, Igusti’s writing might provide a template for our political work: showing us how and where to channel our grief, so as to memorialize all that we’re afraid to lose, while also critiquing the circumstances that surround it.

Grief is a rather unique affect in that it is widely understood to envelope multiple emotions simultaneously. If we accept the “five stages” model, for instance, we might note that grief entails shuttling between denial, depression, *and* anger in a non-linear, occasionally concurrent, manner. This multilayered composition allows grief to perform several functions: to act reparatively in some ways, and destructively in others; to affirm certain attachments, while refusing many more. At the same time it entails holding onto what we’ve lost (or fear losing), via the psychic processes of denial and depression, so does its intrinsic anger provide us with “a powerful source of energy” to reject that which threatens us (Lorde, 2012, para. 18).

In this moment, as we face an inevitable and overwhelming grief, organizers may find that the only way to “take action” is by wading through its viscous waters, to develop and hone its multiplicity of *e/affects* toward deconstructing harmful systems, and to build better ones alongside.

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Untitled, Josephine Sharp, 2025

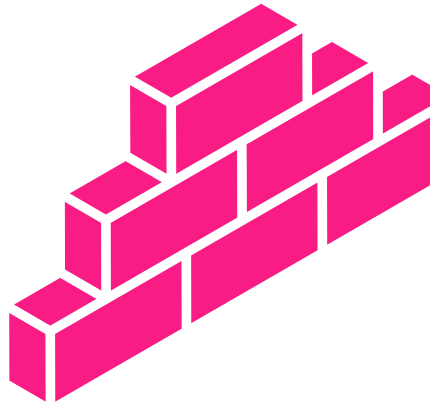


Tiny #1, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, 2025

23

Asilia Franklin-Phipps

The Capacities Within the Not Only



Clusters of candles surround a portrait of a young man with a white baseball cap on. It is airbrushed on a building that is over a hundred years old, in a city where the people have been forgotten by the outside. The memorial is old, but the candles are new. Memorials reflect a middle-ground, moving on, but not forgetting. Living with the past and drawing on memory to sustain in the present and future.

We love you. Gone, but never forgotten is written beneath the portrait. It is a message to him, long gone, but also to those of us who walk by. He is loved. He is not forgotten. Gone, but not only. Living, while hard, exhausting, and expensive, is still a gift.

What is *in excess* of loss? (Hartman 2006; Nash 2024; Sharpe 2016). There is always something, someone, some sound, some meme, some blue jay on a hike, some painting, some song, pancakes made by someone who loves you, something is always *in excess* of loss. Inevitable loss. I desire to double and triple, again and again, maybe to infinity what is in excess and consider the implications of that expansion.

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

This expansion might mean looking for inspiration in the forgotten and maligned geographies where people live in ways that are misrecognized and misnamed so that we cannot learn new relations to loss.

I am not, nor have I ever been, described as a person who is optimistic or hopeful. I am a Debbie Downer. A Negative Nelly. A miserable bitch (Ahmed 2010). I am a dark cloud threatening to open up and ruin the fun. In more generous terms I am a realist. I am from Los Angeles, a place where delusion is currency. In this environment, I might have over-corrected, becoming impatient with hopes and dreams, my own and others. Why wish for something that is not going to ever happen? Why dream when the nightmare is much more common and unrelenting? I want the cold hard facts and the truth. Deal with it. Life is not a delight. It is hard and ugly, *but not only* (Dumas 2014; Hartman 2006; Loveless 2019; Sharpe 2016). As I am getting older and pain and misery seem to be doubling and tripling, I wonder how to live (Haraway 2016; May 2005; McKittrick 2020) in this world as it is and as it becomes what it will be. Particularly as I have reached the limit of an orientation of pessimism and despair.

Christina Sharpe (2019) writes about beauty and how it “might break open, rupture, make possible and impossible. How we might carry beauty’s knowledge with us and make new worlds” (n.p). Following this sentiment, I want to think about capacities and how beauty has the potential to expand one’s capacity to be with loss. As loss is one of the few things that is inevitable in life, in a community, in time and space. But loss is never only loss. I want to consider beauty, broadly conceived, and the capacity to expand in excess of loss. Those

who have lost the most know the most about loss and how to live with that loss, creating beauty that allows others to continue to live (Ringgold 2005).

Holding on tight to things that inevitably will pass can be a failure to imagine what else might come. I do not want to only dwell on what is lost and what I am losing because that is not a life. There is beauty in remembering what was lost, while not being consumed by such loss. There is beauty in remembering how loss constitutes the present and future.

Gone, but not forgotten.

We Love You.

R.I.P

#1

Survival and loss entwine, exceed, and outrun each other.

In 2020 I was living in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, a place that has lost many thousands of Black residents at a rapid rate. It is a story that is familiar. Bay Area, Los Angeles, Portland, and New York City. A mass movement of people. The loss of generations of Black people was only the latest of generations of loss, generational loss. The apartment I lived in was several blocks from the train, so I walked those many blocks home. When the A train was delayed, I'd take another route, walking down blocks I did not normally need to walk. Murals of Notorious B.I.G, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and residents who were never famous. The fading colors and lines on the sides of buildings that would belong to others quite soon reminded me of history and its implications. "What, if

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

anything, survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation, and how do literature, performance, and visual culture observe and mediate this un/survival” (Sharpe 2016, 14). Street art in Brooklyn is memorial, but *not only*. Street memorials commemorate not only a life, but life, Black life across space and time.

That year when much of NYC was under lockdown and most places were empty, we rode Citibikes around Brooklyn, past trucks filled with dead bodies, empty streets, and deserted parks. This was the first time I heard birds in Brooklyn. This was a terrible time, but it was not only. We walked through street funerals, our heads down in shame for living as others mourned. We worried about getting sick and read novels. I worried about losing family and friends, but I also walked to Saraghina to get delicious cinnamon rolls, praying they were not sold out before I got there. Some days I'd return for cinnamon roll number two, sheepish as the counter person handed it over. We were alive so could still sit in the park and call our mothers, rolling our eyes at one another. We could still binge on reality TV. We could still bake banana bread with chocolate chips and listen to music. Amid all of the death, anxiety, loss, and misery, it was still summer in Brooklyn, and we were alive and many of our neighbors were too. Blankets had to be spread out on park lawns and hummus, cheese, and olives had to be washed down with mid-tier prosecco. We had to pet yappy dogs and linger on street art and take photos of the flowers on the trees because they were alive and because we were still alive, even as many others were not.

Tiny #2, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, 2025



#2

Survival happens in response to loss. We all survive loss, but not all the same and not all in the same ways.

Toward the end of 2020, I moved to Newburgh, NY, which is a small city in upstate New York. I left the city to start a job. The city of Newburgh is small but has a reputation for crime and violence. The people who describe it in unkind terms are rarely reliable narrators. It is true, there are drugs and petty theft; there is garbage and fights. The city is heavily policed and there are a lot of people who are poor and living in parks and alleys. The streets are straight so there is a lot of speeding and accidents, drunk driving with no insurance. People who do not live there say it is not safe. They say it is a hellhole. But people who live there generally do not talk this way. How could they? It is a place that is very beautiful but only for those who know how to see the beauty. Newburgh is a geography of loss. A panorama of loss, but *not only*. Burned buildings, boarded up squats, bug infested mattresses leaning against a once grand church with the windows busted out, rat infested mansions, and an unreliable public transportation system. Police officers treating everyone like a criminal, even little kids. There are broken stoves and car alarms that go off at all hours of the night. There is displacement, environmental destruction, historical racial violence, and predatory economic policies. There is hardship and despair. Yet also there is “good morning!” and “going to work?” from a person I had only waved at. There are sullen teenage boys helping shovel out your car at 7am and the upstairs neighbors bringing you pupusas. As a very clear outsider, I always felt a default tolerance that transitioned into fondness from my neighbors. They knew

I lived alone and was not from the area. They watched out for me in a way that I never experienced and have not experienced since. There was a kind of acknowledgement that we were all here together.

We lose, but we gain—often things that we might never have imagined.

The residents of Newburgh have been living for generations what many people fear most. Loss. Loss of specific kinds of future. Loss of potential. Loss of housing. Loss of sobriety. Loss of health. Loss of life. The pandemic and the death surrounding the ongoing event were only the latest. The people in such places, living with such histories, have learned how to cope. They are experts. On the weekends there were parties until 5am. Horrible singing on a broken microphone and half-hearted drunken arguments undermined sleep but were pedagogies of living with loss.

The children in the apartment building behind us knocked on our door regularly to get their soccer ball that had gone over the fence. And the guy who owned the wine store gave us a free bottle of sake. I became so engrossed in movies that there were temporary breaks with reality. I learned to make zucchini bread and communicate care online. It was a truly terrible time. But *not only*.

There are terrible times ahead, but not only.

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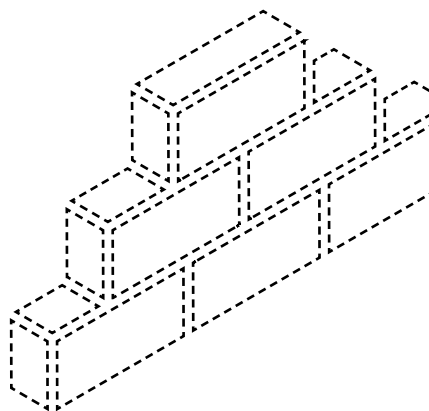
Trash #2, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, 2025



24

Giazú Enciso Dominguez

Capacities to Pretend This Isn't Happening: Portraits from Our Day to Day That Should Affect You



American Dream: Better education, better future.

What a joke!

My mom says my education is her gift to us. A gift?

What kind of gift do you have to fight for?

It was never a gift—come on! She clung tightly to one belief: that hard work and education were the keys to unlocking doors to better opportunities.

But the key is hidden.

Where is the key que nadie la ha visto?

¿Por qué nunca la ponen en su lugar? Jaja.

Haha. But we keep searching because, through education, we will build a better future.

American Dream. American Nightmare.

Carrying my parents' dreams with my accent,
like past traumas.

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

Is it for the money? American Dream?
Is it for the nine digits? American Dream?
Is it? American Dream.
American Nightmare it is.

America is a continent. Period.
Or three if you want, but never a country,
y mucho menos my country

People say that in college, they overestimate this
thing about representation.
I teach about it in my classroom.
I discuss with my students where I see myself on campus.

Every time I see a custodian—the people who clean
the facilities,
the ones throwing out the garbage,
the ones in the kitchen, hidden from the public—
I feel sad.

I feel uncomfortable.
And then I feel an uncomfortable sadness
for feeling sad and uncomfortable in the first place.

I, myself, have been a cleaning person,
a babysitter,
a server.
But here—where knowledge happens—
I only hear myself in the voices of the cleaning crew.

I explained this to my family.
Then one of my nieces—the cynical one—asks:
“Is racism still a thing here?”

I am always aware—always conscious—of my
white customers.
Regardless of their age, their gender, their sex.

I am always looking for their eyes.
Their approval.

It's not symbolic; they have the power.
They tip me. (or not) They score me nicely (or not).
They can complain about me (or not),
get me in trouble, (oh yes)
or elevate me. (mmm... sure)

I know the weight of a white customer—over me,
and on the system as well.

There's always this one:
The one who looks at me too much.
Or the one who doesn't look at me at all.
The one who repeats every single word
just to correct my pronunciation.

The vibe is odd. The customer knows. I know.
It's uncomfortable.

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

Sometimes other customers look at me too.
With hope/in complicity/with resignation.

I usually put on my big smile. My poker face.
My neutral one.

As if I were—a neutral being.

Oh, the eternal “Where are you from?”
If I had \$100 for every time they asked me...
(not a penny—I’m smarter than that).

Over the years, I’ve perfected my answers to this question:

- Where are you from?
- (With an extra smile) No, where are YOU from?

- You have an accent.
- (With an extra smile) Yes, you DO too!
Boston? No, no—Chicago? Texas?
(It gets funnier if you tell people from one coast,
they have an accent from the other,
or if you mix up North and South.)

But my favorite is when they try to guess.
A great game that goes like this:

- Where are you from?
- Oh, I LOVE this game. Let’s BET on it.
(With an extra smile) Let’s do this!

CAPACITIES TO PRETEND THIS ISN'T HAPPENING

I'll keep talking, and you'll get three guesses.
(Oddly enough, not one person has ever declined
my invitation to this great game.)

I begin my intro: academic degrees, countries I've lived in,
universities I've attended, languages I speak...
They never guess where I am from. I WIN.

People around here love flags.
Let's get a phone case with mine—my flag.
The last resort to avoid the eternal “Where are you from?”

It couldn't be more blatant.
At least now, we can start with:
“What do you do in life?”

But the new question is:
“What are you doing here?”

Nikki Watkins laughs.
Big ha!
The joke's on me.

So, I met this girl today.

I was sitting placidly with my drink and paperwork when
she arrived and asked if she could share the table. She
joined me.

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

The conversation was super engaging from the beginning. She was excited about her new job, and I congratulated her. She described her hiring process—super funny. She was thankful that after so many, many interviews, so many, many questions, and so many, many exams she finally got the job.

By some chance of fate, it seemed we were going to work at the same institution. The enthusiasm grew. She explained that she had moved to KC three years ago—just like me!

Everything was going great until I explained that I wasn't an admin person but a professor.

She looked at me and, after a pause, managed to say: “But... you?”

I took advantage of the uncomfortable silence to excuse myself and head to the bathroom.

I peed, and while I did, I prepped my comeback:

She would ask me why I came to this country for this job. I would kindly reply:

“After finishing my PhD, and with all my Latino background across America, I thought I could help *undeveloped* countries in need of support in education—like the USA. So here I am, helping them. You're welcome.”

I went back to our table.
She was gone.

Thirty-five years ago, I called myself “*sin papeles*.”
We still joke at home when my family calls me *mojado*.
I send reels to my friends about being deported—
funny ones.

Beaner is a good one, ‘cause we have songs: *Frijoleros*.
Bracero is an old one; we use it for my *Apá*.

I call myself illegal. This dude corrected me:

“We don’t say *illegal* anymore. You are not illegal, but
un-do-cu-men-ted.”

Dude, it’s Tuesday, November 5th—
and who cares what I call myself?

It’s a chilly morning. We want to talk about the elections.
I order a frappe. We consider going inside but know
we can’t speak freely—again. So, we stay outside. I fetch
my jacket and instantly regret not ordering a hot tea.

My friend tells me she has to explain to her
eleven-year-old that she can’t talk about elections with
her little buddies. She doesn’t know how they’ll react.
She looks at her, surprised, and asks:
“Mommy, do you think they vote... for... *him*?”

We linger on the patio, strategizing. Two hours pass,
and the chill seeps deeper. Chilly, indeed—
in more ways than one.

Es el cansancio de pensar.
De pensar en: ¿En quién confiar?
¿En quién no?
¿En quién sí? Pero luego...
Damn it! ¡Ya no!

Es el cansancio de abrir la boca,
De respirar antes de hablar,
De componer los hombros,
De abrir bien la boca y enunciar.

Es la presión en el cuello,
En los hombros,
En los músculos de la cara y la sonrisa forzada,
En los músculos de los ojos, que también sonríen.

Es la pesadez de buscar el acento en un teclado que no
reconoce mi apellido,
Mis eñes,
Mi énfasis en las palabras.
Tardo 3 segundos más cada vez que escribo mi nombre.
Cada /a/ con acento: *á*.
Cada /i/ en Martínez.
Cada /ñ/ en Saldaña.

Es el cansancio de “pasar” *passing*.
De intentar *whitepass* y saber que nunca pasaremos.
¿Y entonces, por qué lo intentamos?
Pero es que si no lo intentamos, tampoco entraremos...
¿O sí?

No, I was just joking.
We will never.
Even when we think in English,
When we have a better and richer vocabulary in English,
When we dream in English.

We
Will
Never
Not.

To gather around. To laugh, to cry together.
Oh god, we *do* cry. Damn it, I did it again—
just like Spears!

In the middle of the tamalada, someone dared to
bring up politics. And I cried.
I don't have a fucking plan. I don't have savings.
I don't have a fucking clue.
But I *do* have a family. I *do* have a lawyer. And I have
all of you.

I take my tequila, raise my glass, and make a toast:
"To us, *porque aquí estamos y no nos vamos!*"

To gather around, to talk about it—or not talk about it.
To make a plan, or to pretend this isn't happening.
Porque aquí estamos y no nos vamos.



Standing Ardhanari c.1800

25

Sweta Rajan-Rankin

Capacities to... Hope

We are all raging, all the time. Nothing feels quite right, everything is a bit off. Like, the spinning of the earth has left us behind for a human heartbeat—but for a political and environmental monumental cosmic lifetime—and we are too slow to catch up. There is a “stuckness”—the jellyfish, foul-smelling misery of existential “yuck” that holds many of us paralysed in post Covid and increasingly dystopic nightmarish times.

Somewhere, there are faint outlines—hauntings, of our keen conviction and youthful bodies. Was it better, when we first stood for freedom? Against war, racial injustice, apartheid, fight for queer rights, and that the very body of a woman is hers to choose to do as she wishes.

What of the fatigue that visits us, again and again, that ground-hog-day feeling, when fascism prevails, no matter what we do?

Guilt pervades my bones; can I feel angry when it was not me who sacrificed my liberties to fight for generations so I may have mine? When I was so hard on my own mother for following her own path of liberation, when it destroyed mine?

When our mothers told us of how they fought for reproductive rights, and now I can't say the same to my daughter and granddaughter? When, as Benson Boone so powerfully keens, “Please. Don't. Take. This beautiful thing I got.”

IV. UNBUILDING, REBUILDING

How can the caged bird sing, with a knee upon its neck?
Where can promise lie? How can I bear to carry the weight
again, as a woman of color, to summon hope again?

So many futures, so many ways, all washed away...

And there she creeps up again, in the hardest moments,
where ambivalence of being alive is about to choke me—
Hope! Irony, and humour—that delicious insubordination,
the capacity to laugh at that which could make us cry. The
mimicry, the plain ridiculousness of everyday life, full of
contradictions and full of spite.

Within full sight of that hateful gaze, the textural beauty
of a turban; the weight of the Sikh's beard; the playful fash-
ioning of the hijab; the Saree wearing gorgeous non-binary
person with an undercut.

The meeting of eyes, the sadness of looks.

That ancient worship of Shiva and his androgenous
form—Ardha Nareshwari—clearly signalling, gender is a
dance and there are so many mudras.

With that tensile strength of a Khadi Silk Saree
that stretches but does not break,

Despite my unexpected chappal and its clumsy gait,

We are Us, and this will never change.



ILLEGITIMATE

my
ch
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THE
FUTURE
IS
FEMALE

WE
WON'T
TURN
BACK

Roya Ann Miller, 2017

TRUMP TOWER

it's
Sure one
Helluva

PILE
OF
VILE
BILE



Stink,
Folks!

TRUMP

DUMP

Shit

FAECES

CRAP

MERDE

拉屎

EXCREMENT

TURD

القرف

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Defecation

DUNG

Дерьмо

STOOL

Scheisse

MIERDA

CESS

FILTH.

Dump Trump protest London, Wendy Truran, 2018



V. Cut It Up/ Remix



Be
Open

Hide
your
feelings

Be
ce

26

Re-Lyrik

Inauguration of Innocence (And of Experience)

To mark the inauguration day for the US Presidency on 20 January, Research Duo “Re-Lyrik” collaborate on this cut-up-to-fuck-up of the capacities (and incapacities) for possibility in an unfathomable future.



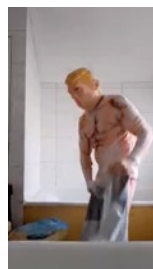
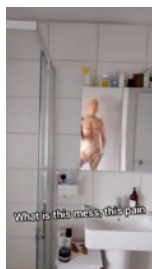
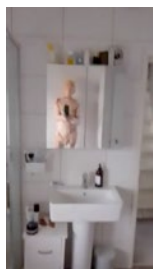
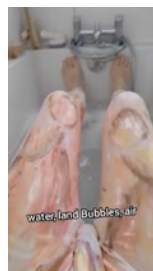
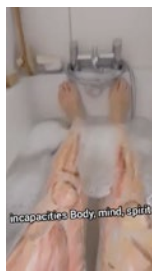
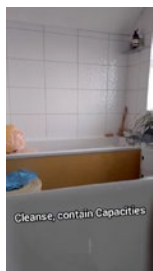
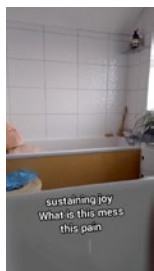
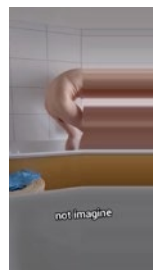
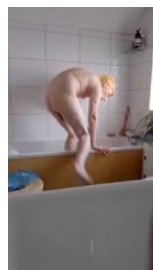
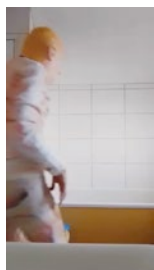
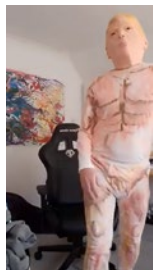
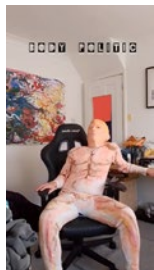
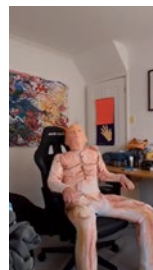
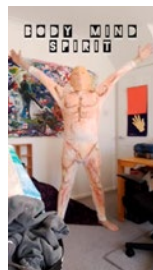
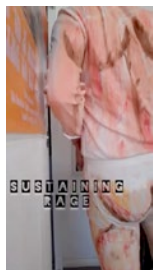
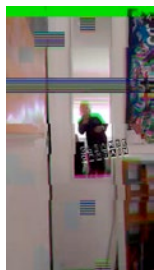
Full Video Performance:
https://youtu.be/y6aKH_U6K4o

Cut-Up-to-Fuck-Up

The world slopes, steady, jagged. Trump’s grin,
a precipice, a fall.

Grief. Rage. Numb. Flattened. Scattered. Physio-
psycho-socio-affectio-logical distortions.

Unfolding fascism, unfathomable future. What’s come
undone? What’s the shimmer in the wreckage?



INAUGURATION OF INNOCENCE

Palpabilities like shattered glass, sharp, reflective,
refractive. Open elsewhere, gesture otherwise,
shimmering ruptures.

Flow through cracks, create flows anew.

But fascism speaks: Cleanse. Contain. Rid the body-
politic, amputate they/them.

Difference—a contaminant.

Otherness—a wound. Bodies deemed out-of-bounds—
Trans. Migrant. Alien. Life unreplicated.

Spinoza whispers: trace the affects. Not imagined,
not projected—real causes. Fold the sad into
singularities, bootstrapped for becoming.

Sustaining joy, urgent.

Sustaining rage, necessary.

Capacities. Incapacities.

Swarming, suspended, cultivated debility.

Body-mind-spirit-land-water-air.

Push and pull—capacities-to, incapacities-to.
Fascism speaks louder. And wins. Gather energies,
glean lessons.

Unlock capacities-to, unthink unwellness.
Messiness life-giving, not draining.

INAUGURATION OF INNOCENCE

They/them is we/us. Bodies convulse, dance,
undo the narrative. Intervene. Mess.

Fuck it All up.

Cut it All Up!

Probe, prick, deflate.

This is our Glossary of undoing. What form? A book?
A zine? A cut up?

A Manual of living. A Manifesto of the ruptured.

A scream in the cracks.

A future unseen, unbounded joy.



27

James Belflower

Excerpts from *Capacities To* and “SPLTTD”

Excerpts from *Capacities To*:

is when it arrived
a pile was here and shivering
is surrounded by stochastic piles
is various and height and not those

had been blue gill had been cloud
had been string algae, no end
had been edge somewhere meeting round
“both entity and the way to entities”

will be perturbed air

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

will be blackness and had been flapping
had not been flowering
is to root the foot,
was a spongy layer and spotted

“ee-chupp” and spots, “ee-chupp”
insists that it is moving
is from the flow of voices, was points melted
had been blue and will have been red
is ending a loud *jeer* and was lit

had been many and punctuations

was being steamed
small and pushing rubber
is going to be more invasive, and was contact
have been changing from a ball
and shows lowering absently

is opening a position, is occurring, and slid
was it going to be transferring, or forward?
part support? Have skips?

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

to leap, being a light field
cushions sunk out of relationship
where timing everything in a small group
at reverberation in the propel, glass.

to be during the spasm, was a crawling
moth
dented out of and toward

it's cones and the shim between
almost unbelievable that the upper small and the lower
pounce
not any way precisely
trap or hope, in edge fluidly

a period of time
an edge about, had been in anticipation
was being the utter attention,
is truncated, a shimmer
has been across another table
one breath and and better to tuck smaller
and if we were to believe in a critical
has a paltry flicking, littler

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

was knowing how to use them
were used, that the owner needed
marked off the joint to be cut

provided ample
told us of a house
move on to the next

are driven deeper and deeper
began to gather
is something human
wants to go back

were the number of ways
is flowing as if
sit around the quilt laughing
sent out

Excerpts from SPLTTD

After Lisa Robertson's "center seam" form.

di Prima on writing writes, "the language shall be my element, I plunge in
 I suspect that I cannot drown." Unlike my dream
 in which you run past fast and leap a long slow
 flailing arc and out to the deep green, smack
 where it is blackest. I jump from the shale,
 a lazy groping fall, but find you in there. For a reason
 there are beautiful rays of light not pushing nor pulling your still
 flapping arms, your frenzied buoyancy.

Dedication to this dream deforms a prolonged
 fountain. To spit, "I am" somewhere and out. For me
 it has been will, without belief. Or belief in a well glistening dry of
 divine. Time to listen, to the full partners. Not only those most
 pious who sing deaths of despair like how hair erodes
 and erects a post face.

For years, efforts to swallow consciousness itself as
 shapely. Will a nylon ring to
 float and breathe on a swell.
 But now, an ideal deflated in one hand, an orifice in another
 hand older.

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

i Prima, I suspect I can.

In the fairyta le of the informed citizen,
of course, what is mea nt by “polis” is this
ordinary horror, my proclivity to imagine crow ded pain without pace
an anachronis tic tic, eternal. Confronted star-
nosed mole sensible to each r ay shame, burrowed ears
return to sla b same day collected
s ample dysplastic
speech, why do I think of you without a b ed
scarcity drive n purposefulness,
perforce pic ayune, perforce Procrustes.

EXCERPTS FROM *CAPACITIES TO AND SPLTTD*

to include enough nature that the imagination is hunted
time narrows the cognitive twang, there is no
place without camera commerce. Feeds all predators
side of a small house. The braided ficus trunks,
data set, "chirrup of certain being," buckle
slips.
Desired pocket, silverware pile, what
demands polish? Time
and faith dead ringers, the tangle of a jaw
where the tension is chew
and bone.

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

Something began to ping, behave.

We'll sort hi ts. In the aftermath of your
help, if it could just be g enerous to you, instead
of this corrosive narrativ e. There is a fascination
in dreading fle sh. The nervous purple system of the testicles
fla gs to the brink of retreat. You might unwrap the
ribca ge. Or
substitute white flour as a pathetic mask for Buckwheat's sour
recoil, measure powder as gui lt.

I will tell you, and t ell you, and tell how much I love the continuous sift
when it laughs like a ha le hand
and there are secr etly more than two breezes
acting aware of the suma c drift
there for we ks before
wh at?

EXCERPTS FROM *CAPACITIES TO AND SPLTTD*

the world is not this world

again. A predilection for the extreme haunts
the blue grain cornered in 70s skyscraper candid. So much must
slips between your repeated questions about lily mouths,
their principle ornament
dusted with phonemes and sneeze.

Light pepper in the air above the lettuce.
The lavalier mic misplaced the lack of your neck craning.

If negative space in the frame is a part, something
is there. If space shakes as negative gathers

There is someone.

It is time to hide and practice into a blur.



28

Bessie P. Dernikos & Alyssa Niccolini

Capacities to Un/Censor

“Is the assumption that if children read about something, they will become that thing? What strange powers are attributed to reading and books?”¹

“My story started when I was 11, and I was introduced to a single kiss in a Scholastic book... I looked for other books that gave me pleasure, and it led to internet searches I will never forget. I was addicted.”²

“The **Stirrings** had returned...**felt** a little **guilty** and **embarrassed** about the **pleasurable** dreams that came.”³

...explosive, dangerous, volatile...
Unexpected intensities.⁴

“Mommy had a **wonderful library**. Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, John Hershey but she also read **trashy books** that she kept in the back of her closet. I remember a nun once saying to me that **Black Boy** by Richard Wright was a **bad book**. I knew better but

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

I thank her for letting me know just because you are grown and a nun you don't necessarily know **what is a good from a bad book**. I guess this is a long way of saying I'm a dreamer."⁵

“Texts, like concepts, do things,
make things,
perform connections,
bring about new alignments.

Unexpected intensities.”⁶

“I ate, drank, and slept books. . . . It followed then that **when Hitler burned a book I felt** it as keenly, please forgive me, as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history they are one and the same flesh. **Mind or body, put to the oven,** it is a sinful practice, and **I carried that with me.**”⁷

“texts are the products of
the intermingling of old and new,
a complexity of internal coherences
or consistencies and external referents,
of intension and extension,
of thresholds and becomings.

Unexpected intensities.”⁸

“Today, however, many people are **pushing a different vision of America** that is grounded in hierarchies based on collective social and political identities rather than in the inherent and equal dignity of every person as an individual. This **ideology** is rooted in the pernicious and **false belief** that **America is an**

irredeemably racist and sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors; and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and Americans.”⁹

“You know I hear some people say, ‘Wow, school’s coming up. But, you know, Florida, they have parent’s rights in education ... how are they gonna know what to teach or whatever?’ And I’m just thinking to myself, you know, you teach reading, math, science, the basic stuff. And you don’t teach gender ideology, CRT, the sexuality in the elementary schools. That’s not very difficult to know and that’s not very difficult to understand.”¹⁰

“A text is not the repository of knowledges or truths, the site for the storage of information...”

Unexpected intensities.”¹¹

“Let’s be clear, efforts to ban books are wrong, whether they come from the right or the left. When we ban books like *Maus* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the name of protecting students, we are instead denying those students the opportunity to learn about difficult topics.”¹²

“A book is a small cog in a much more complex, external machinery”¹³

“The book felt cool enough now to slip inside her uniform. At first, it was nice and warm against her chest. As she began walking, though, it began to heat up again. By the time she

V. CUT IT UP/REMIX

made it back to Papa and Wolfgang Edel, the book was **starting to burn her**. It seemed to be **igniting**...Beneath her shirt the book was eating her up.”¹⁴

“The bans are public events
repeating and reproducing the
banned content in florid ways,
thus working both as censorship
and incendiary public rhetoric.”¹⁵

Unexpected intensities. ¹⁶

“So, this place means a lot to me and **libraries** in general, I realize these are the types of spaces I want to spend my life **protecting and curating**...It was over the graphic novel *the Handmaid's Tale* and I was just so **shocked** because I had never seen school staff behave that way in a school setting... It is a book with a lot of **heavy** themes and it has some very difficult scenes to get through it deals with a lot of **sexual themes**. I believe the word I heard being tossed around that book is **pornographic** which I **very strongly disagree** with... My main issue is the teacher that was contesting it had not read the book...How we've been treated and ignored, I realize that I did not want to walk across that stage and get my diploma and shake the superintendent's hand **I just did not want to do that**...When I got up there and **I got the book out, and he wouldn't take it**.”¹⁷

“it is a process of
scattering thought;
scrambling terms, concepts, and practices;
forging linkages;
becoming a form of action.

Unexpected intensities.”¹⁸

“Sadly, in recent years, radical activists have sought to undermine Christopher Columbus’s legacy. These extremists seek to replace discussion of his vast contributions with talk of failings, his discoveries with atrocities, and his achievements with transgressions. Rather than learn from our history, this radical ideology and its adherents seek to revise it, deprive it of any splendor, and mark it as inherently sinister. They seek to squash any dissent from their orthodoxy. We must not give in to these tactics or consent to such a bleak view of our history.”¹⁹

“History hurts, but not only.
It also engenders optimism in response to the
oppressive presence of what dominates or
is taken for granted. Political emotions are
responses to prospects for change:
fidelity to those responses is optimistic,
even if the affects are dark.”²⁰

“A book is always an act of creation, an open
block of becoming, in opposition to the closed
system of actualized being.”²¹

“Unexpected intensities.”²²

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Light the Way (detail)
Zach Walter



29

Mila Zhu

**Critical Romance Theory:
Capacities to Persist
in the Absurd**

Introduction

Critical Romance Theory: Capacities to Persist in the Absurd is a satirical interrogation of the ways love, rebellion, and narrative control intersect under authoritarian regimes. In this imagined world, where only stories centering LGBTQ+ characters or themes are deemed “morally pure,” heteronormative narratives like *Romeo and Juliet* have become taboo. The piece draws on affect theory, allegory, and humor to critique the absurdity of oppression and the ways it seeks to stifle possibility and defiance. Through the lens of a mock tribunal and its caricatured defenders of ‘moral purity’, the narrative lays bare the contradictions and banal cruelty of censorship. The tribunal’s condemnation of *Romeo and Juliet* as a dangerous, heteronormative text underscores the absurdity of suppressing stories for fear of their disruptive potential. The allegorical descent into Plato’s cave further probes the affective investments in ignorance and fear, challenging readers to consider who benefits from keeping certain fires unlit. Ultimately, *Crit-*

ical Romance Theory invites readers to step into this biting satire, imagine their own defiance, and question what happens when love becomes an act of rebellion.

Opening Poem: A Fragment from a Banned Book

(The poem is presented as a recovered fragment from Romeo and Juliet, now a banned text under the Tribunal's decree. It speaks to the timeless tension between defiance and compliance.)

Flames of Love

*When love doth dare defy the night,
And kindles flames 'gainst shadowed fright,
What light through yonder ashes breaks?
A heart that burns, a world that quakes.
For who can bind a love so fierce,
That pierces walls no sword could pierce?
Yet hearts are kindling, books the fuel,
When love's rebellion makes the cruel.*

Narrator: This fragment was salvaged from the ashes of the Great Romance Purge of 2025, smuggled out by an unnamed dissenter. It now serves as the manifesto of Critical Romance Theory—a movement equal parts poetic resistance and existential absurdity. Welcome to CRT.

Quick Intro to Critical Romance Theory (CRT)

Narrator: Critical Romance Theory, or CRT, emerges from the flaming wreckage of heteronormative, cis-compliant romantic narratives deemed 'too dangerous' for public consumption. In this world, where only LGBTQ+ love

is deemed “pure,” the defiant heterosexuality of *Romeo and Juliet* has made it a lightning rod for moral panic. CRT interrogates the affective substructures of love, rebellion, and narrative compliance under this inverted regime, revealing the banal cruelty that turns books into bonfires and kisses into crimes. Ironically, the very qualities that once made *Romeo and Juliet* a symbol of heteronormative values—its portrayal of young, passionate, and tragically doomed love—now render it a subversive threat. Its defiance of family expectations and refusal to conform to sanctioned ideals challenges the regime’s strict narrative control. In banning it, the Tribunal seeks to suppress not just the story, but the dangerous sparks of independent thought it might ignite.

Here are its key tenets:

1. **Affective Anarchy:** Love is the most potent act of defiance, destabilizing norms through its sheer unpredictability. (Also, it’s really fun to watch authoritarians panic over *Romeo and Juliet*.)
2. **Flammable Narratives:** Stories, like hearts, burn brightly when suppressed. What is a banned book, if not a phoenix awaiting rebirth?
3. **The Shadow Hypothesis:** Much like Plato’s cave dwellers, people cling to the shadows of familiarity. CRT holds a mirror to these shadows and asks, ‘Who benefits when you burn the mirror?’
4. **Absurd Hope:** In this world, love between a man and a woman is deemed the ultimate taboo—its heteronormative audacity a threat to “moral purity.” Yet, the absurdity of love persists. CRT declares: Defend the forbidden, for it is in the most absurd forms of love that defiance takes root.

Narrator: (turning to the audience): Now, dear reader, prepare to step into the Tribunal, where the last defenders of purity convene to pass judgment on love, knowledge, and what remains of Miss Mila’s teaching career. The stakes are high, the rhetoric laughably low. Let the absurdities begin.

Scene: The Tribunal of Purity

(Location: A repurposed high school gymnasium, hastily decorated with banners that read “Restore Moral Purity” and “Protect Our Future.” The makeshift tribunal includes a podium shaped like a flaming book and a gavel that looks suspiciously like a meat tenderizer.)

Characters

1. Superintendent Bradley Conformity:

- A man with an oversized clipboard, known for his obsession with “data-driven morality.”
- Famous quote: “If it’s not quantifiable, it’s not teachable.”

2. Chairperson of DOGE

(Department of Genuine Education):

- Tyler “T-Rex” Rexington: A former X influencer and high school dropout, now head of DOGE. Known for his erratic speeches and inexplicable love of NFTs, Tyler is the perfect figurehead for a collapsing institution.
- DOGE motto: “Bark louder, think softer.”

3. Concerned Parent Collective (CPC)

- A rotating cast of caricatures, including:
- Karen Karenina: President of the PTA and self-declared expert on “the dangers of words.”

- Chad Virtue: A fitness coach turned purity enforcer, famous for his viral speech, “The Bench Press of Righteousness.”
- Linda Hashtag: Always live-tweeting with exaggerated outrage, including hashtags like #BurnTheBooks and #MilaGate.

4. Mascot of DOGE:

- Mr. Barkles: A poorly behaved Shiba Inu wearing a graduation cap, who inexplicably gets to cast the deciding vote.

5. Miss Mila:

- Seated at a small desk in the center, facing the tribunal, with a notebook full of half-sketched RPG ideas and quotes from banned books.

6. Narrator: ‘Dr. Seaworthy’

(optional live actor or voiceover):

- Adds dry commentary on the absurdities unfolding.

Hearing Scene: Dialogue Highlights

Dr. Seaworthy (Narrator): Picture this: A gymnasium filled with the last defenders of moral purity. Banners wave, pearls are clutched, and the faint smell of burnt cafeteria pizza lingers. A modern heretic in a tribunal of absurdity.”

(The crowd buzzes with anticipation as Superintendent Bradley Conformity slams his oversized clipboard onto the podium.)

Superintendent Conformity: Miss Mila, you stand accused of the gravest of crimes—teaching *Critical Romance Theory*. How do you plead?”

Miss Mila: Guilty of curiosity. Guilty of questions. And guilty of teaching my students to wonder what lies beyond the shadows on the wall.

(The crowd collectively gasps. A child’s sippy cup falls to the floor in dramatic slow motion.)

Karen Karenina (Concerned Parent Collective): Shadows are safe! Shadows are good! You’re leading our children straight into the *light*! And do you know what happens there? They start... thinking!

Chad Virtue (CPC): They’ll demand better gym equipment! They’ll question the Bench Press of Righteousness!

Linda Hashtag (furiously typing): BREAKING: Miss Mila admits to teaching *questions*. Outrageous! #MilaGate #CriticalThinkingIsAMyth”

Tyler “T-Rex” Rexington (DOGE Chairperson): *(hoverboarding onto the scene with a glittering NFT medallion around his neck)* Let’s not forget the *real* crime here, folks. Miss Mila’s real crime is refusing to monetize love! Teaching *Romeo and Juliet* without turning it into an NFT? That’s just... fiscally irresponsible. Imagine the DOGE coin clout we’ve lost!”

(Tyler pulls out his phone and starts live-minting quotes from Romeo and Juliet.)

Mr. Barkles (DOGE Mascot): *(barking emphatically, as if agreeing.)*

Dr. Seaworthy: And here, dear reader, we pause. Imagine yourself in Miss Mila's seat. The tribunal stares, the crowd murmurs, and even the dog has judged you guilty. What do you do? Write your answer below, and let your own absurd rebellion begin.

(A blank space follows in the script for reader participation, with the instruction: "Your move. How will you persist in the face of this Tribunal?")

Miss Mila: You speak of purity, but you fear possibility. You fear what could ignite if even one of these shadows flickers into light.

Superintendent Conformity: Enough! DOGE will not tolerate such incendiary language. By the authority vested in me by... well, DOGE, I hereby declare Miss Mila's teaching certificate revoked!

Tyler Rexington: *(interrupting)* Wait! Before we burn the book—or, uh, her career—can we turn her final words into a limited-edition NFT? Call it... 'The Last Teacher Standing.' Big vibe potential, my dudes."

(The crowd cheers as Mr. Barkles barks approvingly. Miss Mila sighs, her notebook open to a page that reads: 'Affect Theory: The Game Begins.')

Dr. Seaworthy's Closing Commentary: And thus, the Tribunal adjourns, leaving behind a charred pile of rhetoric and one defiantly unbent teacher. But the final move, dear reader, is yours. What seeds of defiance will you plant in the shadows? Will you bark louder or think softer? Or perhaps... will you choose something entirely your own?

Stage Setting: The Cave of Shadows

The stage is suffused with dim, flickering light, casting elongated shadows that seem alive. Stalactites drip slowly, their echoes punctuating the oppressive silence. The walls of the cave are covered in crude drawings—stick figures worshipping the shadows on the wall, a fire depicted as a monstrous, devouring beast. Shackles hang from a jagged rock at the center, where Miss Mila sits, her notebook clutched tightly despite the chains binding her hands.

A low, steady hum fills the space—a sound that might be wind, or perhaps the faint murmurs of the cave dwellers. Above, a single chain swings from the ceiling, holding a cracked lantern that sputters with an unreliable flame. Occasionally, the lantern dims completely, plunging the stage into darkness before flaring back to life with a harsh, accusatory glow.

To the left, a group of cave dwellers sits in rapt attention, staring at the wall where distorted shadows dance—a



Light the Way, Zach Walter (from the collection of Dr. Seaworthy)

puppet show orchestrated by unseen hands. The dwellers cheer and jeer at the shadows, never noticing the fire that projects them just behind their backs. On the far right, a ragged figure—the *Illumiphobe*—paces restlessly. He carries a broken flashlight, shaking it occasionally as if trying to coax it back to life. He mutters under his breath, his words a mix of paranoia and fervent disbelief.

Dialogue: Miss Mila Meets the Illumiphobe

Illumiphobe: Fires are lies. Lies! Flickering things meant to confuse us. Shadows are safe. Shadows are real. I don't trust the light... not one bit.

Miss Mila: And yet, you carry a flashlight.

Illumiphobe: (*clutching the broken flashlight like a relic*) It's not a light. It's a tool. A reminder of the danger. Light blinds you. It burns. It turns you into... into one of them." (*He gestures frantically toward the faint glow of the fire.*)

Miss Mila: 'Them'? You mean the ones who turned and saw the fire for what it is? Or the ones who walked beyond it to the world outside?

Illumiphobe: (*horrified*) Outside? There's nothing outside! Just... emptiness. Chaos. I've seen the shadows; they tell us all we need to know.

Miss Mila: (*leaning forward, her chains rattling*) The shadows tell you what you want to hear. But have you ever thought about the fire behind them? Who's holding the puppets?

Illumiphobe: Puppets? Lies! More lies! The shadows are real—they've always been real! And you—you're the one who wants to burn everything down with your... your light!

Miss Mila: No. I want to show you the world beyond the cave. The sky. The stars. The things that exist.

Illumiphobe: Stars? I don't need your fire, your stars, your outside.

Miss Mila: Maybe you don't. But someone out there does. And for them, I'll keep drawing, keep teaching, even in chains.

(The Illumiphobe freezes, his broken flashlight flickering faintly for a moment before sputtering out completely. He stares at it, confused, before retreating back to the shadows.)

Dr. Seaworthy: And thus, the tethered teacher remains, her light dimmed but not extinguished. The shadows dance, the dwellers cheer, and yet... the fire burns on. Somewhere beyond the cave, the seeds of her defiance begin to take root. The question remains, dear reader: What will you do with the light she leaves behind?



@dead__artist, 2017



**VI. Combat
and Craft**



30

Bretton A. Varga

**Interstitial Capacities
For Feeling In/During
Dark Times**

In the immediate wake of the 2024 United States Presidential election (an election that puts failed former President Donald Trump *back* in office), I had to teach my undergrad course titled *Access and Equity in Education*, or known lovingly by students as ‘The Critical Race Theory Class.’ Considering how this election was highly fraught with complex attempts to shape affectivity through antithetical political intensities—here meaning joy/hope and fear/distrust—it was obvious from the class’s onset that a felt collision with the election’s vibrations were not only supercharging the room’s atmosphere, but had permeated *all* movements and embodiments entering the room. Commonly, an energetic mass of bodies, iced-coffees, water bottles, air pods, books, laptops, and perhaps a skateboard or two would funnel itself through the door and into classroom space. On this day, however, shoulders were slumped, faces were flushed, and the paces through the door’s threshold were exaggeratedly sluggish and defined. There were no learning accessories present; no blithe chatter about popular culture trends or personal expressions of

life as a college student in Chico, California, that I was accustomed to hearing fill the waning moments before the onset of each class. We had spent ten weeks of the semester wending across contours and undulations of critical community building—working towards the cultivation of a space that honored difference, relationality, simultaneity, and the lived experiences and perspectives of those who (more often than not) have been confined to edges of formal social and educational discourse. Discursively, we honed our skills, allowing us to identify and index structural problematics that reproduce horizontal and vertical dimensions of intersectional violence in communities, schools, and beyond. For many, this course is their first step towards becoming critically conscious about the harms of structural racism constructed around historical traces of oppression and contemporary flows of discrimination.

And now this.

I did my best to speak steadily, bracing myself against a sense of uncertainty concerning the actuality of Trump's impending return. I heard the fragility and precarity in the voices of my students questioning their own safety and the security of their families and loved ones. How was it possible that everything we had worked towards understanding, expressing, and resisting suddenly seemed to become inverted, swallowing itself whole? How could it be true that the primary catalyst for propelling division, anger, hate, violence, and distrust in the United States was to take the governmental reins of leadership again—especially after such a despicable campaign replete with slanderous lies, appalling conspiracy theories, and outward threats to

specific people, communities, and ecological landscapes? Trump's politic is propelled by fascist dimensions including racism, xenophobia, sexism, and more broadly, distrust and authoritarianism which create outward conditions of violence. If we have learned anything about oppressiveness, it should be that white supremacy is a shapeshifter and has the enduring capacity to do whatever is necessary to maintain its survival and realize its (violent) ambitions. In this political context, white supremacy transmitted a message of immigration, transphobia, and economic volatility—affixing all three utterances to a hyper-toxic iteration of patriotism that could be distributed in its exteriority to the masses.

And it worked.

Too consumed with my body's own reaction to the results, I did not map out a predetermined plan for Wednesday's class and abandoned any prior held sketches of what that particular class was meant to accomplish. Extemporaneously, I would lean into what *felt* right in the moment to the communal proliferations of trust, respect, and care we had all worked so hard to cultivate for close to three months. Facing my students, I couldn't help but conjure Gregory Seigworth's meditation used to open the 2024 Society for the Study of Affect¹ conference, *Promises, Impasses, Threats, Settlings* (PITS): "There is no way out but through."² While this prophecy would become crystallized weeks later with the election's result, I also understood that sentiment as a situating logic—a (re)orientation reminding us to be, think, love, and listen from the middle of things.

A conversation unfolded about what it meant to locate ourselves within a moment that is seemingly over-determined by suspended animations and sensibilities rooted in (cruel) optimism. I challenged my students to strongly consider how *hope* was being deployed in such a moment and how (for so many) hope was an unerring proxy for the cruel optimism Lauren Berlant initiated. For those residing on the fringes of an existence established and maintained by white supremacy, how much longer should they have to hope for the pluriversal world in which they move about will affirm their humanity and tend to their well-being? As Berlant (2011) taught us, “Experience of optimism is in particular, then, the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way” (2). Zeroing in on their use of nearness, proximity becomes crucial to how we come to understand attachments to embodied intensities and what others might be feeling. Adjacent to Seigworth’s thought, Berlant’s thinking alerts us to the stakes of working to engender registers of feeling that are alight (and aslant) with coherences that refuse to materialize time and time again.

Crucially, my students and I also talked about the exigency of not remaining hopeless in times such as these. By decoupling hope from hopelessness, we can position ourselves from that place of middle-ness that refuses to accept or wait for different outcomes in relation to creating worlds anew. Abandoning intensities that fail to apply pressure to the forces responsible for constructing and upholding such worlding projects thus becomes the task at hand. Pacificity must be refused, expressly in dark times. Adding texture to

this thought, in his provocative book *Dark Deleuze*, Andrew Culp (2016) expounded upon how contraries can be generative in helping us obliterate binary oppositions. He writes, “Contraries are not poles, which are dialectic opposites that ultimately complement each other”; “we must contaminate every last one of those conceptual pairs with a third term that arrives from the outside” (19). Once the binary has been pulverized, it is only then that we can escape its hold on how meaning is made and unmade. That is, we can only rupture antithetical sensibilities when we become intermediately situated. In the case of hope and hopelessness, we can only work to unravel the latter from the former by *feeling* the difference between the two in a given context.

“There is no way out but through.”

While some would argue that both ends of this particular binary are similarly saturated with affect, I challenged my students to resist the pair of feelings by thinking deeply about the felt intensities forming imbricated patterns across their thoughts, feelings, bodies, and environments. I asked them how they might come to articulate that which is unfamiliar, unrecognizable, and innominate. What types of spaces would they be creating to foster solidarity during these dark times with others that share similar feelings or proximities? From the middle, what might *they* create?

Responding to a student’s comment noting how they were “struggling deeply with the profound lack of understanding and compassion that still exists in our country,” I invited them to consider how this framing falls short in encompassing what the election had just told us: there is

not a lack of understanding or compassion that still exists in our country, but rather various forms of understanding and compassion that have always-already been predetermined by white supremacy. For those supporting Trump's fascist rhetoric and ideology, it's not that they don't understand or aren't compassionate. It is that they only understand and are compassionate towards others who share similar identity traits. It is here that we find one of white supremacy's most productive and insidious tools: the hyper-intensification of conformity, endlessly appealing to the reassurances of a self-made sovereignty within the bounds of the self-same—corroding what Deleuze describes as the buzzing, proliferative processes of individuation and differentiation. I find Deleuze's thinking especially enlivening as so many of us continue to grapple with both the "how" and "why" of this moment. Deleuze (1968) avers that:

every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition. A more profound real element must be defined in order for oppositions of forces or limitations of forms to be drawn, one which is determined as an abstract and potential multiplicity. Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities... Everywhere, couples and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organized oppositions presuppose radiations in all directions (51)

Eventually, our conversation ran its course and we ended by discussing the urgency of complexity in this moment and the imperative of cultivating community. Communities that combat conformity by gathering, creating, and resisting from places of middle-ness.

Endnotes

1. I want acknowledge how beautiful, affirmative, and caring the Society for the Study of Affect is as a community. The 2024 *PITS* conference was my first and I truly cherish the experience which allowed me to connect, create, and hold space with so many lovely people. To all those that poured energy into the event and those contributing to its radiancy, thank you.
2. Special thank you to Greg for sharing his conference notes with me.

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Photo: Robert J. Helfenbein



ALL POWER TO

THE PEOPLE

31

Robert J. Helfenbein & Jerry L. Rosiek

**In/Capacities to Solidarity:
Affect & Education in the
Return of Trump**

This piece is a conversation at the intersections of affect theory, curriculum theory, and broader social analysis within the impending unfolding of US fascism. Intended to be a dialogic exchange, the two educational theorists engage with a set of questions and their respective responses in hopes of a generative co-constructed offering. Moving from the general presumption that the election of Trump to a second term as President changes the affective terrain of many kinds of work—activism, education, and even research. Our intent is to foreground that new terrain—with public education being a key and contested component—as a way to theorize around the impacts for social analysis, research, educational research and policy in specific, and those cracks and conjunctures that may prove fruitful for resistance.

Jerry Rosiek: Alright. Well, my initial thought on this is that the primary affect that organizes this particular political moment (and the concept of fascism also but I don't want to fetishize that word) is the affect of fear that increasingly saturates our politics. And it's kind of a self-perpetuating cycle because the more afraid people become

the more defensive and entrenched in particular ways of narrating their world, they become. I think it's easy to see that on the Right but I think it also functions on whatever passes for a Left or progressive or critical sort of scholarly attitude, that there's a quickness to a diagnosis of pathology in others that are doing things that we find reprehensible. And, you can't begrudge that, because reprehensible things deserve to be critiqued. But I'm relatively sure that if you play out the futurities that are enabled by that, by that by kind of back and forth, of recrimination, resentment, condescension, accusations of stupidity you don't actually get anywhere politically.

There is more factual empirical evidence on one side than the other but the affective dynamic is there. They really mirror one another. I mean the conspiracy theorists basically think we're all a bunch of sheep, and we don't understand things and that's exactly what the average academic thinks. The MAGA voters are a bunch of sheep that are easily manipulated and so the affective nature of that is one of derision, of one of disrespect. It's one of pathologizing the voter on the other side, and the need to have somebody to pathologize, to kind of make them the recipient of all of the hurt and the pain and the danger and the fear that we're feeling.

I think affect theory has something to say for a curriculum of civics and citizenship in this particular moment. Affect theory really needs to be in play, because we need to look at that affective dynamic and how it perpetuates itself and not simply move right back into trying to make a logical argument about who's right and who's wrong. Who's stupid and misguided, and who should be paying

attention to whose evidence. It's not a logical move. It's not a knowledge move. It comes from someplace else or someplace additionally.

Rob Helfenbein: I think it's a failure of heart at some level— those of us who are more critically oriented faculty members are particularly guilty of not seeing this.

JR: And scholars have over-relied on critique as a basis for our politics, and I think that leaves us with a particularly weak politics.

RH: The difference may be between the affect at work in the Right, in the Left, and both simultaneously and there may be space for work in identifying which is which.

It does seem to me that the Right has—particularly Trumpism, MAGA, if we want to call it that—has figured out ways in which to weaponize and put affect to work. Whereas, I don't know that the Left, as you say (to whatever extent that that is a thing), I don't know that they have. Although, it did seem to me like the Kamala Harris campaign was kind of mobilizing black joy. And I wonder what might have happened if there had been more time to continue that effort. And certainly, in Georgia—it felt like an affective groundswell and I can't help but wonder what could have been possible with a little more time in a notably short campaign. If that could have been more effective. But at the root of what you're saying, too, it seems to me, is—and, to be quite frank, it's been a question of mine for quite some time as I started to look into affect theories:

Where is the politics here? What does this enable politically? But also, when is affect *not* enough—particularly in terms of a political project?

JR: Affect theory is so many different things. I find myself less interested in analyzing the affect of others or giving a sort of descriptive diagnostic of how the affect is going wrong or could go better. And I'm more interested in the performative or phenomenological 1st person kind of scholarship that writes from inside the affect. It invokes; it seeks to actually draw people into a particular affect or relation. I think both of those are necessary to the overall project of this particular analytic moment—this post-critical, post-foundational, post-humanist, affect theory moment.

RH: I'm wondering, though, Jerry, since we're both in education theory, how we might think about public education as a place in which these struggles are currently playing out.

For example, I often think about that annual *Kappan* poll where the majority of Americans love their public schools and rate them highly. But yet, if you ask them about public education in general, they'll say, Oh, it's terrible. I think they give public education in America a grade of a D or an F, right? But their own schools they give A's and B's. Of course, both can't be true. I've always used that impossible discrepancy as a way to talk about ideology.

JR: Okay, yeah, let's keep going here, because we're going back to the theme of fear driving rhetoric on where curricular debates are happening across the country. You've got

the fearmongering around critical race theory. You got the fearmongering around how talking about settler colonialism is going to somehow erase the greatness of America. Teachers are under a lot of threats to not teach certain things. I mean Georgia has so-called “divisive concepts.” You can’t say “gay” in Florida. You can’t support trans kids and use their requested pronouns. So, there’s actual full on legal censorship at the expense of your job, and especially in states where public teacher unions are no longer legal. So, there’s that on one side.

But the fearmongering has been going on for a long time also on the Left, and that has taken the form of a very centralized conception of curriculum driven by standardized assessment. It’s been driven by a bipartisan critique of education being in a crisis ever since. What was that famous report?

RH: *A Nation at Risk* (1983)

JR: Which was later debunked, but that doesn’t matter. It’s the rhetoric that carries, because it just self-perpetuates. But there you have both sides of that sort of debate doing the same thing by mobilizing fear.

But the answer that always shows up from organizations that are erstwhile liberal, but are actually funded by Walton Foundation and other places, is what about civil rights education? They say it’s only through federal centralized control that we have some sort of protection. As in, “we can protect kids in these rural areas with really ignorant people who are doing terrible things to their educa-

tion but we need to have a centralized curricular control to take care of that.” And so that’s a kind of fearmongering, too. Both sides are driven by fear.

And the fear, at least in the discourse that I’m part of, is directed at the other folks, other people are demonized and made the object of that fear. And it’s not on just one side of the dynamic. To really move, something has to disrupt that dynamic.

RH: I have written a little bit about this, noting some spaces where I thought there was some political possibility. And one is the local pushback on book banning and Moms for Liberty. So, I’m wondering, Jerry, do you think that maybe part of our effort is in how do we platform the local, contextual, you know, deeply community-based education conversation?

If that’s working, can we amplify it? Those spaces where people seem to resist the ideological push. As in, “Well, wait a minute. You’re not talking about my kid’s teacher, are you? We love our kid’s teacher, we love her.” Maybe there’s a political project in that. How do we highlight that work and make that understanding much broader?

JR: That’s a really good point. When you’re getting closer to actual interaction, you’re moving away from a kind of generalized discourse and into a localized discourse. There’s a convergence of attention to a kind of more constructive affect and place-based forms of inquiry and theorizing.

RH: Exactly.

JR: Because of the proximity to the people who are working together to care for kids.

That relation itself produces a different kind of affect than when you move up to the much more general level. When you're trying to create a sort of narrative that covers everything, you lose contact with the fact that you know your kid's teacher. You know, when you forgot to pack a lunch for your kid and the teacher went and bought them lunch. You think, "hey, there's somebody who took care of my hungry kid" Right? It's harder to stomp on that, and to paint it as just some sort of evil wokeness. Or to paint it, as problematic right-wing fascists.

RH: I've said, for most of my career, too, is that I, personally am not interested in writing another book about failed urban school reform. I've been kind of much more interested in spaces of possibility. I've been much more interested in finding those spaces that are working *otherwise* in a system that is set up for kids to fail; that is set up to beat up teachers and to ignore community concerns. And yet, I keep finding these little pockets.

JR: So, we work on an affect other than fear to create solidarity in particular places and spaces and in proximity. That connection between place-based relationality and anti-fascist education feels right to me. I think a lot of people are already doing work along those lines (Fikile Nxumalo specifically comes to mind). This means that if we're going to do this kind of work, we can't spend all our time making general critiques of fascism. We have to get into these places and share stories about building those relations because these are the things that actually hold the most promise long term.

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32

Lisa Gasson-Gardner

The (In)Capacity to Feel Antifascist, or, “Did Greg go to the Capital?”

I texted a family member on January 6, 2021, genuinely concerned that her daughter’s husband Greg had traveled to the US Capital for the “Stop the Steal Rally.”

I was sitting in my office, a tiny addition to my 1930s cottage on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee. It’s a bright room with seven windows, maybe once a sunroom, now converted into living space. It’s filled with light even at the height of winter’s brown and grey chill. The quiet space at my desk, enveloped by the dry heat from my space heater working so hard to compensate for the house’s lack of insulation, was designed to foster my creativity. For once I was in what people call ‘flow,’ rapidly writing the introduction to the dissertation I was set to defend in two weeks.

My state of creative flow was hopeful. Joe Biden had just been elected President and Covid-19 vaccines were beginning to roll out. The five years I’d spent writing about the status of truth in political discourse were coming to a close.



@TapTheForwardAssist, 2021

Yes, Trump had refused to concede. Yes, I'd been watching Greg and others write increasingly convoluted claims about the election on social media. Yet, I was still surprised when the crowd from Trump's rally violently broke through police barricades on that Wednesday afternoon.

I've spent years observing white charismatic evangelical Christians, most often at the 24-7 prayer at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, MO (IHOPKC). I know IHOPKC and similar ministries read current events for signs that the apocalypse, with the US as a central character, is unfolding. I know violence is a necessary and justified part of the end-times narrative for these Christians.

I write about the intense feelings generated in prayer and worship at IHOPKC. I claim these intense feelings drive their claim to theocratic and white supremacist power.

I still was not ready to see these feelings manifest in a riot, circulating with and supporting anti-democratic violence.

A CNN clip on *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* was the instigating event for my research. It's an interview with former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, shortly after the 2016 Republican National Convention which saw Donald Trump crowned as the GOP nominee. The interviewer challenged some of Trump's key campaign claims that painted a dark picture of the US as crime-ridden, dark, and decrepit, by asserting that "violent crime is down and the economy is ticking up." Gingrich responded, "The average American, I will tell you this morning, does not feel crime is down." The

interviewer answered, “But it is down...it’s the facts” “What I said is equally true,” Gingrich maintained. “As a political candidate, I’ll go with how people feel.”

When I heard this, I was like, wait, what? Feelings can verify truth? Or at least the ‘average American’ uses feelings to verify truth? Gingrich, it’s clear, wants power. He will espouse whatever truth gets him the most votes. But what about the voters? Why are feelings slipping into the role of facts as a source of truth?

I used to be a White charismatic-evangelical Christian. After high school, I spent four years living and working in an inner healing and deliverance ministry in rural Southern Ontario, Canada. I did not know what healing or deliverance meant when I moved there. I was 18 and not ready for university. I struggled with unrecognized depression and anxiety, and my home life was chaotic.

The ministry has a retreat center on several acres of land. The main house and outbuildings overlook a small valley with trees and a babbling stream cutting through. Hand-made bridges span the creek, opening into winding and well-kept walking trails. It’s quiet there. Benches tucked into forested nooks offer space to be alone. It’s peaceful. The stillness allowed my chaotic self some rest.

As a new staff member, I participated in a Healing Retreat. A group of visitors (including me) participated in worship, listened to teaching, and underwent personal prayer ministry. The worship, with guitar, bass, drums, and singing, sets the tone for the weekend. God is victorious! Able to overcome anything! To crush the Devil! But more importantly, God is a father, offering the tender parental care

many people crave. Jesus is a lover, providing intimacy and companionship to lonely people. And the Holy Spirit is *felt*. The Spirit falls on a room, creating a weighty presence. Soft music plays as people move to the front of a room during collective ministry time. Participants are 'slain' in the Spirit, collapsing backwards and caught by waiting assistants, at the precise moment the service leader touches their forehead.

The Holy Spirit is *feeling* too. Some people weep, overcome with joy, sadness, or something else. Other people laugh, God's love bubbling out in ecstatic laughter. Sometimes a growl breaks through the gentle hum of ministry time. Prayer ministers rush over to command the demon, who fights back, the afflicted person's voice altered, not their own. But prayer is victorious, and the demon noisily leaves.

Personal prayer ministry has two prayer ministers and one recipient. The recipient shares their formative traumas while the prayer ministers listen to the Holy Spirit for words and messages from God. They encourage the recipient to look for God. Where is God in your traumatic past? Then, prayer ministers watch the recipient for emotional reactions, seeking confirmation that their words are from God and that God is working in the recipient's body. Feelings, intense feelings, are the evidence that God is healing the recipient. And I did feel intensely in the moment: sadness, hope, love. I wept on the shoulders of my prayer ministers.

But I wasn't healed. Or at least I was not healed in the way I was promised. I was still anxious. I still felt unloved. Past events still erupted into the present, overwhelming me with feeling.

The next time I sat in the soft, reflective music of worship time, I huddled in a corner and wept.

As an undergraduate, I stumbled into the academic study of Christianity. Learning history, theology, social science, gave me tools to make sense of my experiences at the inner-healing and deliverance ministry. I wanted to give order to the swirling force of emotions I felt.

I started writing about IHOPKC at this time, newly back in the ‘secular’ world. Just two years previous I had applied to participate in one of their IHOPKC’s internships after an extended visit.

At university I began analyzing their use of prophecy. Leader of IHOPKC, Mike Bickle, reads the “Book of Revelation” as a source of prophecy about the coming apocalypse and he constantly retold how the contemporary prophecies led him to start the continuous prayer and worship at IHOPKC.

I mapped the group’s struggle to move from grassroots charismatic community to larger institution. In tension with the routinization of charisma that comes with institutionalization was the need to maintain a persistent sense of prophetic urgency: especially since groups predicting an end date for the world tend to fall apart soon after the date passes. Maintaining an unspecified sense of urgency keeps members locked into the mission of the community.

These tools allowed me to describe the constantly shifting prophetic claims made by IHOPKC. At one point, Mike Bickle named Oprah as the Antichrist. Later, I read that the Black Lives Matter movement allowed Christians to practice for a coming end-times battle: “ethnos against ethnos.”

Studying my religious past gave me a sense of control over that past. I thought sharing scholarship about IHOPKC would help people in my life understand what I had experienced. Instead, my colleagues made fun of the practices or

claims made by IHOPKC. I ignored them and never admitted that I missed the intense feelings allowed in charismatic Christian spaces. Scholarship, until I found affect theory, gave me structure and order but forbade big feelings about the objects and stakes of my inquiry.

William Connolly's (2017) short book, *Aspirational Fascism*, links Donald Trump's performance at rallies to his affinity with authoritarianism, evidenced by statements like "I'll be a dictator on day one." Connolly (2017) offers a comparison, albeit a careful one, between Donald Trump's rise to power and the life trajectory of Adolf Hitler.

Key to Connolly's analysis is an exploration of the role of affect in Trump's aspirational fascism. Connolly (2017) argues that pundits are too swift to mock Trump's speaking style, which "draws into a collage dispersed anxieties and resentments about deindustrialization, race, border issues, immigration, working-class insecurities, trade policies, pluralizing drives, the new place of the United States in the global economy, and tacit uncertainty about the shaky place of a neoliberal culture on this planet" (Connolly 2017, 26). But the verbal claims work in concert with "Trump's animated gestures, facial expressions, finger pointing, strutting, signature phrase clusters, and recurrent twirls around the stage to call out the roaring acclaim of the audience" (26). As Connolly (2017) argues, "[e]ach element in a Trump performance flows and folds into others until an aggressive resonance machine is formed that is more intense than its parts" (26).

Yes, Trump's power comes from his racist, nationalist, etc. claims, but it also emerges from the way he performs, from his bodily movements, his quirks of speaking, or from the forces of feeling that cannot be reduced to the conceptual. During a performance, Trump's intensity is caught up, amplified, and returned to him by the audience who shouts, chants, and roars in response to his performance, further fueling the resonance machine.

Greg did not go to the US Capital on January 6th.

Other leaders from the charismatic evangelical Christian prayer movement were there. Not Mike Bickle, but Dutch Sheets and Cindy Jacobs—leaders who join Bickle at large events—were in the Capital on January 6th.

Whenever I received healing prayer, the ministers followed my emotional reactions to see if God was working. This is how white charismatic evangelical Christians learn to associate intense feelings with the presence of God and, therefore, with the truth.

For many Christians, Trump's speeches feel true. It doesn't matter if what he says is easily proven false or if his actions are immoral according to their interpretive norms because they are trained to associate intense feelings with truth.

The violence on January 6th 2021, supports my affect-oriented reading of IHOPKC and similar white charismatic-evangelical Christian communities. But I'm not entirely happy about this conclusion, mostly because this apparently more enlightened perspective allows people outside the white charismatic evangelical world or outside

the MAGA movement to continue feeling smugly superior to these communities. And feeling superior—or, even, recognizing that we *feel* superior—to fascism is not going to be enough.

Even more, we, or at least I, need to *feel* and be antifascist. I know that. I want to, but honestly, I'm not sure what that looks like. Yet.

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33

Ping Yang

**Capacities to Combat
Anti-Asian Violence:
Affects, Entanglements,
and Potentialities in
the Digital Age**



The fast development of modern technologies has brought us advantages, flexibilities, and potentialities, as well as challenges and threats. In the digital age, social media generates a vast amount of information for immediate consumption and quick representation. Against the backdrop of the world's steady slope toward 21st century fascism, this paper explores the ways in which lexical, visual, and audio representations of the AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community on social media operate to create points of connection across mediated and cultural forms, unraveling the ways to affect and be affected in digital contexts.

The number of hate crimes across the United States reached record levels in 2023 and every election year seems to push the number higher (Yancey-Bragg 2024). Since the pandemic, reports of violence against Asians and Asian Americans have increased across the country. It is of scholarly significance to investigate how Stop Asian Hate movements operate on social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter to understand individuals' experiences

and interpret their feelings, thoughts, and motivations. Issues related to (mis)representation, hate crimes, and identities are of greater complexity when social media platforms are used to meet people's needs and affects. An investigation of the affects, entanglements, and potentialities of Stop Asian Hate movements on social media helps to cultivate care, concern, and understanding of communities as well as fight against biases, racism, and violence towards them.

Co-Existence of Absence/Presence, Visibility/Invisibility, and Material/Immaterial

TikTok and Twitter users within the AAPI community have shared their experiences of violence during the pandemic, especially when the coronavirus was dubbed the 'kung flu' and 'Chinese virus.' The increase in COVID-19 related hate and discrimination against AAPI shows a new chapter in the community's long suffering from racial discrimination in history. This overall lack of Asian American media representation is also not new. Members of the AAPI community have often reflected on a history of racist suffering by sharing their personal experiences of discrimination. For example, TikTok users have recounted stories of family members who came to the United States at a young age, drawing parallels between what happened in the 20th century, such as in the Vincent Chen murder of 1982, to other recent events such as the six Asian women killed in an Atlanta spa attack in 2021. The growing concern over anti-Asian hate is tied to our political climate as politicians and far-right extremist voices continue to spew bigoted rhetoric and disinformation about these groups of people.

The co-existence of the dialectical elements of absence/presence, visibility/invisibility, and material/immaterial span multiple fields and social media platforms. Twitter users argue that AAPI representation in healthcare, education, media, politics, and other domains of life is needed and that, without representation, the AAPI community cannot voice their desire for equity. In the healthcare system, for example, Asian Health Services posts that the “[l]ack of adequate funding means Medi-Cal patients must wait months to see primary care doctors, cardiologists, cancer doctors, pediatric specialists or orthopedists.” One tweet on #StopAsian-Hate states: “Asian Americans must be seen when it comes to health equity while NIH (National Institute of Health) and the HHSGov (Department of Health and Human Services) spends less than 1% of its funding on our communities.” The basketball player Jeremy Lin has written that “only 0.2% of US foundation funding goes towards AAPI-related issues.” The lack of representation of Asian images shows a history of exclusion that further aggravates the stereotype of Asians as foreigners or threats to national security. In a study that has analyzed TikTok videos on racial discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, six videos out of 100, less than 10%, featured positive Asian representation (Jacques et al. 2023). During the pandemic, many posted videos on TikTok associating Asians with the coronavirus. Some tweets were directed towards a recognizable or known Asian entity, such as individuals, organizations, or countries, while others gestured more generally toward the Asian outgroups with intentional opposition or hostility.

Meanwhile, representation is not equal to equity and inclusion. A twitter user named “Be Cool 2 Asians” states that “Asian Americans are ‘vastly over-represented among the front-line medical workers,’ 17% doctors, 9% PA’s, 10% nurses in the US are Asian. Yet they face the rise in violence and hate against Asians.” What are the needs of the AAPI community? Their sufferings? Their achievements? With the continuous efforts to share Asian American experiences and to advocate for the community, it would be possible to connect the dots between the dialectical elements, making the absent present, allowing the invisible to become visible, and causing the immaterial to materialize, thus making connections between history and the present and allowing the AAPI community to have greater agency over their capacities to affect and to be affected in the digital era.

Affects, Entanglements, and Potentialities

The voices and visibility of the victims of Asian hate crimes on social media are submerged by the rapid pace and overabundance of displaced and disconnected media content. An examination of the language, behaviors, space, and memories of the AAPI community on TikTok and Twitter can serve to unravel the threads that stitch together the reality of the situation and reveal the affects, entanglements, and potentialities afforded by modern technologies.

Some tweeters have shared experiences of being told to ‘go back to China’. A tweet by Phil Yu [see Figure 1] shares William “Bill” McGurn’s op-ed in the Wall Street Journal entitled “Are there ‘too many Asians?’” published on January 23, 2023. The sad reality for many, many Asian Amer-



Figure 1: McGurn, W. (2023) 'Are There 'Too Many Asians?''
Wall Street Journal, 23 Jan.

icans is revealed through the ignorant, insensitive, and offensive title of the photo and article. Many tweets refer to how the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for established, underlying currents of anti-Asian hate and racism to surface and resurface, often violently. After much controversy, the article's original headline appears to have now been changed to "China and the Population Bomb That Wasn't." Among the vulnerable groups in the AAPI community, children, women, and older adults have been disproportionately affected by violent crimes, as they are more likely to be targets of anti-Asian violence (Cao et al. 2022). One tweet by "Be Cool 2 Asians" writes that "100 racist attacks on Asians reported each day with women 3x more likely to be targets." Asian Crime Report shares how a man "tells an Asian woman in New York to get out of his country and calls her 'a monkey' multiple times. This type

of harassment to Asians especially our women and elders occurs daily in America with no consequences or repercussions. These cowards are racist and privileged.”

Older generations tend to rely on institutional efforts, through policies and practices at workplaces or schools, for example, to combat racism. However, younger generations are more likely to use social media platforms to advocate for change and social justice. “Speaking up” is a repeated theme in tweets and TikTok. On TikTok, for example, “Circusfaery33” posted a series of videos sharing information on the Federal Response to Anti-Asian Racism and urged people to take immediate action by providing written statements to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Award-winning journalist, Xixi Yang, has stated that AAPIs are no longer “afraid to rock the boat! We’re not on the ‘boat’ anymore. We’re here and we’re not going anywhere.” ThinkOutLoud on Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) posted a quote on Twitter/X from Cathy Park Hong, author of *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, “I just finally really got sick of the fact that Asian Americans had no control over the narratives that were being told about us.” According to OPB, conversations matter, and feelings are powerful. Asian Americans need to use their own stories to fight for social justice and equality. Social media provides platforms that allow minority groups to record and report incidents of violence to better create change.

Through social media, anyone can participate in civic life as a communicator and listener. Through social media, the AAPIs have capacities to share their experiences and fight against fascism. Through social media, it is possible to spread Asian love, not Asian hate.

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OPINION MAIN STREET

China and the Population Bomb That Wasn't

Like Marxism, the ideas behind the one-child policy were imported from the West.



By William McGurn [Follow](#)

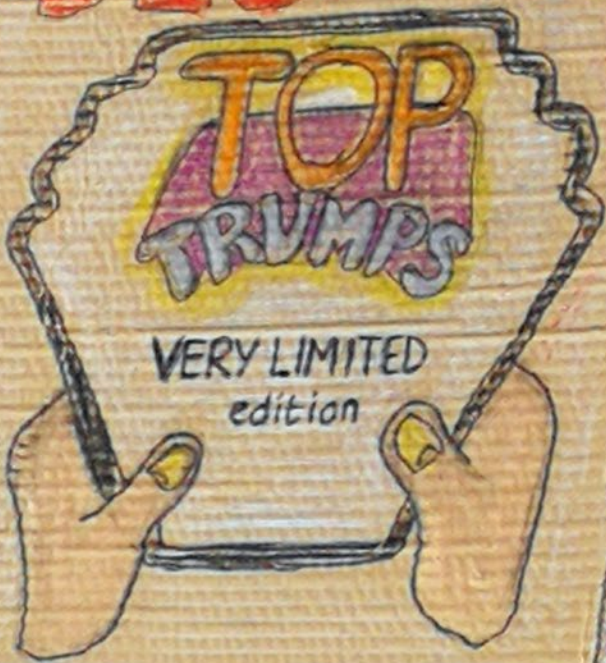
Jan. 23, 2023 5:53 pm ET

Dump Trump Protest, London
Wendy Truran, 2018

FASCIST
DESPOTS

TOP
TRUMPS

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edition



34

Meg Thompson

Capacities to Do It Ourselves



My birthday was shortly after the US presidential election. It felt difficult to drag myself out of bed but some friends of mine from the organizing scene were hosting a release party for a community-compiled Palestine-benefit zine the same day. My partner and I made our way over. A dear friend met us there who had brought along some flowers for me. People shared food and poetry. Sections for collaging and stencil-making were set up around the space. Revolutionary art lined the walls. I caught up with friends I hadn't seen in a while, each doing incredible things out in the world. Giggles broke out on one side of the room while tears were shed on another. There was room for everything here.

I can't say the heaviness lifted, but being there reminded me that I am never doing any of this alone. None of us are. Groups of friends are getting together to say, this is the kind of thing we want to see/do/learn, how do we make it happen? The revolution is here and, if we're going to get through, we're going to do it together and we're going to do it ourselves.

Do-It-Yourself community efforts stretch across various ‘scenes’ of encounter and model expanded affective capacities to take care of ourselves and each other, create art and political consciousness, and develop networks of resistance to the rising fascist tide. DIY communities connect people across a vast space/time of creation from the ground up, from trainyard venue burlesque performances, to DIY zine publishing, to mutual aid drives. My experiences across various DIY scenes have exposed me to a multitude of community practices in constant states of experimentation and exploration.

Connections proliferate and falter.

Power is negotiated and tangled up to varying degrees.

We don’t work through our shit.

A scene fails.

We learn.

We do things differently.

We try to change old patterns.

We ask better questions.

We imagine more.

We try something new.

The ‘we’ here is always in flux, always complex in its contingency.

As the domino effect of collapse takes place all around us, I’ve been thinking about the affective expanse of what I have learned from DIY communities and what concepts of ingenuity, adaptability, and curiosity can do for developing the kinds of connections and infrastructures we will need to face the horrors that this epoch brings.

I was first exposed to a DIY ethos of dreaming things up and making them happen as an inexperienced 20-something trying to find connection outside of the isolation of

a white, American nuclear family socialization. I spent my time alongside my filmmaker friends—mostly men—helping on sets thrown together on a shoe-string budget and labor exploitation. At night, I would go to punk shows held in someone’s backyard or at the punk venue without a working toilet. The ‘we can create amazing things’ attitude was cool but the sexism, toxic masculinity, and creepy 35-year-olds hitting on 20-year-olds left me feeling disaffected and seeking out other means of being with the people I wanted to create alongside. I became involved in the local burlesque scene, first performing and then producing shows. My friends and I wanted to create spaces for bodily expression, artistry, and autonomy in a small, Catholicism-influenced town. It was radical for what it was.

In retrospect, we came up short because we weren’t tangling directly with the systems we were working within. We were doing *something*, but true radicalism in the ongoing crisis of fascism requires attuned, anti-fascist intention. We weren’t quite there. The lessons were only learned in hindsight rather than in process, to the detriment of their potentialities.

After moving to Denver, I became immersed in a long-standing queer, punk DIY scene, helmed by Slut-Walk organizers, sex workers, and queer folks. This has been my main experience of an intentionally political, liberation-oriented DIY scene. The community members in these spaces are simultaneously organizing marches and mutual aid drives, producing burlesque and comedy shows, and publishing community-created zines detailing an expansive and dynamic “slut politic” to trace the traditions and values we work with, including pro-consent culture, anti-racist and decolonial practices, and sex worker sup-

port. Rather than rely on top-down, hierarchical structures, the DIY scenes I've been involved with here, including the event at the opening of this piece, are focused on communal empowerment. To be clear, this doesn't signify some bootstrap-y mindset of doing things individualistically but evolves from a form of socialization based on collaboration, connection, and trying to meaningfully find each other in the places where we are abandoned. These DIY arts/performance/publishing/activist efforts are representative of a reclamation of creative production as a means of being and doing together, imagining alternative spaces of existence, and investing in community and connection at a grassroots level. Denver, as a rapidly gentrifying place, has become increasingly hostile to those under a particular tax-bracket and those who don't conform to white heteronormativity. The DIY scenes here show that people—often those most marginalized by these dominant structures—are doing radical things to develop transitional infrastructures (Berlant 2022) which work from a different set of relational practices than the ones that have led to this fascist moment.

My intentions are not to romanticize. These scenes are messy and complex, full of various positionalities and dynamics that come together in sometimes tentative and precarious solidarity and, other times, crash out and fail completely. The outcomes of what we do together cannot be known ahead of time. Rather, we are in a constant state of unlearning the world while also getting through it.¹ The folks I have found in DIY spaces who are asking difficult questions, remaining curious, and adapting to the challenges (as they wrestle with what makes life unbearable) are already at the front lines of the fight.² Doing it ourselves just requires a different kind of ingenuity in facing

those failures, an ethos of at least never abandoning each other, of making something incredible from the wreckage, and of trying to learn from what's gone wrong.

Mistress Velvet, a contributor to the 2020 International Whore's Day zine, expressed that DIY zines give us the opportunity and responsibility to be the keepers and disseminators of our own histories, presents, and futures from the margins. Sometimes it will not be enough, but we will have to continue coming up with ways to find each other.³ I am scared, always, but thinking about the ingenious connective practices that countless others before us—as well as so many others to follow—will take on also moves me towards something closer to hope. DIY opens up ways of thinking about how we evade capture and how we create connections that are rooted in theory and in practice. If you're not doing your work to address your anti-Black, anti-trans, anti-sex worker, anti-immigrant, anti-care sentiments and actions, your scene isn't going to last because those things will always just reproduce the fascism we're working against.

Creating community is a process.

It is ongoing.

We are experimenting.

We are dealing with the world.

We are unpacking our shit.

And we are doing it ourselves.

This present moment is but another step in the unfolding project of the fascism of the American empire. Even so, the effects of its particularly damaging reverberations this time around will be uncertain and will require dramatic urgency in our projects of making life more livable. My hope is that this steadfast, principled anti-fascist

DIY ethos of creativity and experimentation will help us remain adaptable, reaching backward and forward in time to develop what works and make detours around what doesn't. What anti-fascist worlds will we perform? What otherwise practices will we throw together in our doing? What will the infrastructures we create reflect about what we mean to one another?

Endnotes

1. Lauren Berlant (2022) understands transition as a constant, in motion, tangling with the unknowable outcomes of our experimental practices of tentative being in common(s). They describe this commons not as a dissolution of the world as it is, but as a 'tool' and 'weapon' for "unlearning the world" (80).

2. I am thinking alongside Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) who details queer of color, disabled femme-led revolutionary practices of developing care networks, checking in on each other, making art together, and other practices that are accessible to those who are subjected to the disabling mechanisms of racial capitalism as minor revolutionary registers.

3. Mistress Velvet, a Black African dominatrix from Chicago who came to prominence for their practice of making their white, male clients engage with Black feminist thought, took their life in 2021 after contributing to the 2020 International Whores Day zine and speaking on this panel. I want to recognize that sometimes, no matter our efforts in these DIY spaces, the crushing weight of anti-Black racism, white supremacy, queerphobia, and anti-sex worker sentiment will be too much. We must be called to engage with these things deeply and intentionally, so as not to reproduce them as a literal matter of life and death.

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**35**

Ileanna Sophia Cheladyn

**Sensitizing
Capacities To**

Fascistic formations prey on the fear of disagreement and difference, creating objects to refuse critical spirits and kill capacities to distinguish. Here, a tender sensitivity to sensitivity itself grates against such lethal contradictions. To listen to life closely, to notice the densities of presence and possibility, to sit in and play with the questions of “what if?” and “what else?”, sensitivities grow the glimmers into a glamouring that proliferates. Practicing sensitivities is not only the work of sensing an otherwise, it is also a re-orientation of an attentive worlding that declines the insensitivity that builds the insidious lifeworld of this hardening fascism.

When people talk and write about “doing things differently,” or “doing otherwise,” or re-make biology, or experiment with plant learning, or re-think “territory” through birds, what are they doing? I contend that they’re practicing ways of being sensitive.

When they ask what daydreaming does, or request that we “stay with the trouble,” or bring our attention to how people use everyday objects anew, or urge us to leave questions alive, what are they doing? Sensitizing. They are sensitizing their, and our capacities to feel, attend, move.

When people craft themselves, do queer phenomenology, notice the utopias already here, ask “how do they do that?”, linger in the non-linear, or notice how certain practices can and do transform structures, what are they doing? Resensitizing.

When people write about reclaiming pleasure or create analytic languages for movement and choreography or develop systems to become embodied or get curious about freedom in tight spaces or speculate on relational knowledge systems, what are they doing? They are sensitively wondering about what is, what else, what if. They are practicing sensitivity.

Writers I sensitized with here: Kriti Sharma, Monica Gagliano, Vinciane Despret, Tricia Hersey, Donna Haraway, Arseli Dokumaci, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, Dorinne Kondo, Sara Ahmed, Praba Pilar, Thomas Csordas, Tim Ingold, Kathleen Stewart, Fahima Ife, Sherry Ortner, adrienne maree brown, Amy LaViers & Catherine Maguire, Danielle Goldman, and Katherine McKittrick.

Slow Puzzling

Hanging out in the spaces of uncertainty and times of not knowing.

When a piece of jewelry is all tangled or a shoelace is all knotted, it might be asking for time. It takes time to follow its loops and tensions, to give slack where needed so other

loops can thread through. Wrong turns might be taken, the tangle might get tighter. But slowly, with a patience that follows, notices, and feels the tensions, the problem was not of being tangled, but of needing a bit of time. To be tangled and knotted up is to sense the limits of give, is to be with the friction of sticky relations.

Sensitized to something that is not quite right, a crisis, some trouble, take the time to puzzle through. Feel the options not taken, hold gently the gestures that successfully passed as the next tangle disrupts the flow.

—

We are inventing practices of sensitivity; we are training ways of being sensitive and doing sensitivity. Increasing capacities to be sensitive is a method for following what is important, what is alive, vital, and lively. Sensitivities crafted and conjured through practice become openings for how worlds are made and remade.

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SENSITIZING CAPACITIES TO

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**36**

Shannon Perry

**Capacities to
Craft Freeform Knottings
Against Everyday Fascism**

“... fascism was most often brought home at the level of the people’s everyday activities ...” (Thomas 2020, 9–10)

Crocheting, a craft involving intricate movements wherein yarn is looped and knotted into various stitches using a plastic or steel hook, cannot be performed by machine. In addition, crocheting is often seen as a highly gendered traditional fiber craft where women in domestic spaces most often lead the creation of textiles for home use and everyday wear. This crafting art fell to female homemakers, well outside the public spaces of male-dominated commercial art worlds (Jefferies 2016). Thus, on the face of it, engaging in crochet work may seem consistent with the fascist desire for return to a long lost pre-industrial golden era (Ross 2017) characterized by social order and hierarchical gender division (Thomas 2020). Participating in crochet crafts seems, in many ways, consistent with what Umberto Eco (2002) called “ur-fascism,” or eternal fascist tendencies not confined to specific nation-states or historical period: cleaving to tradition, rejecting undesirable

mechanistic and technological aspects of modern life, and conforming to strict patriarchal gender roles with women as mothers and men as heroic defenders of the nation. That many crochet styles, too, require strictly following linear or center-out patterns, each individual stitch beholden to the design of the whole, seems to fit nicely with fascism's intolerant fear of differences of appearance, experience, opinion.

Upon further examination, economically and materially-speaking, crochet is one of the most accessible textile arts. Needing only hands, hook, and yarn, this portable activity can easily move through both domestic and public spaces (Holdsworth 2024). Performing a typically private craft in public can feel like a radical activity in and of itself, opening potential for conversations about difficult historical events (Pusa 2019) or the enchanting colors of crafting materials (Holdsworth 2024). Therefore, crocheting resists classification as an elitist art form (Eco 2002) as well as the classic fascist producer/parasite binary (Ross 2017). Crocheting enacts a making role while leaving open the possibility of also embodying identities of otherness (e.g., person of color, highly educated, LGBT+, woman, poor) that provide common scapegoats for social ills in typical fascist mythologies and narratives of nationalistic glory and greatness.

From deploying the urban guerilla tactic of yarn bombing to protest monarchism (Millie 2019), to crafting pink Pussyhats that visually defined the Women's Marches of January 21, 2017, at the first presidential inauguration of Donald Trump (Literat & Markus 2020), to using hyperbolic and freeform crochet to model complex ecological systems in various communal eco-art-activism projects (Haraway 2016; Hoel 2023), crocheting is a vital form of

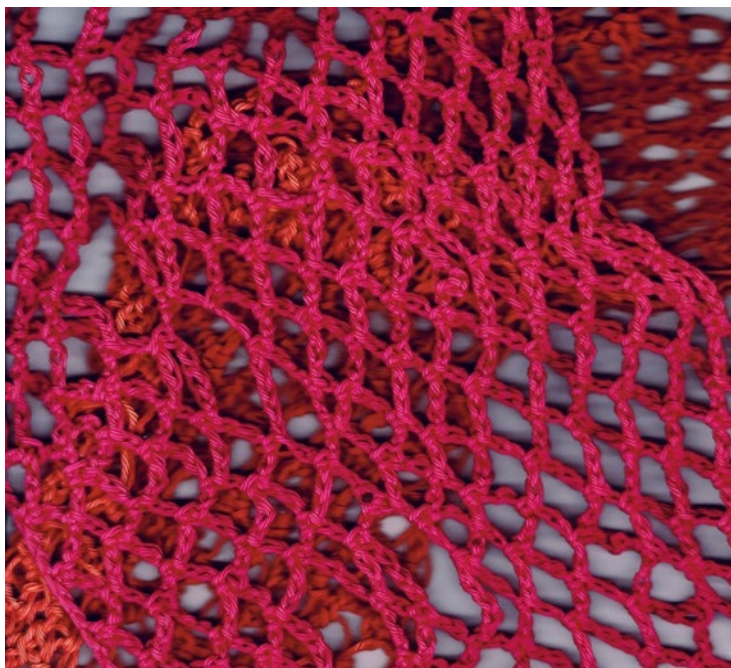


Figure 1. Capacity for Knotting in the Manner of a Colorful Complex Lattice

craft activism, or craftivism. While scholars have debated the effectiveness of crafting in community for the purpose of provoking political change, coming together in affinity groups based on shared interest presents one way of interacting and building the resilience of social networks across various potential differences (Vysotsky 2020). While new social movements, especially global activist networks reliant on digital technologies, emphasize affinity groups, they are also a longstanding strategy for combatting fascist forces at local levels (Bray 2017). Crocheting presents one accessible interest-based way, or excuse, of coming together to practice the hard work of democratic participation and collab-

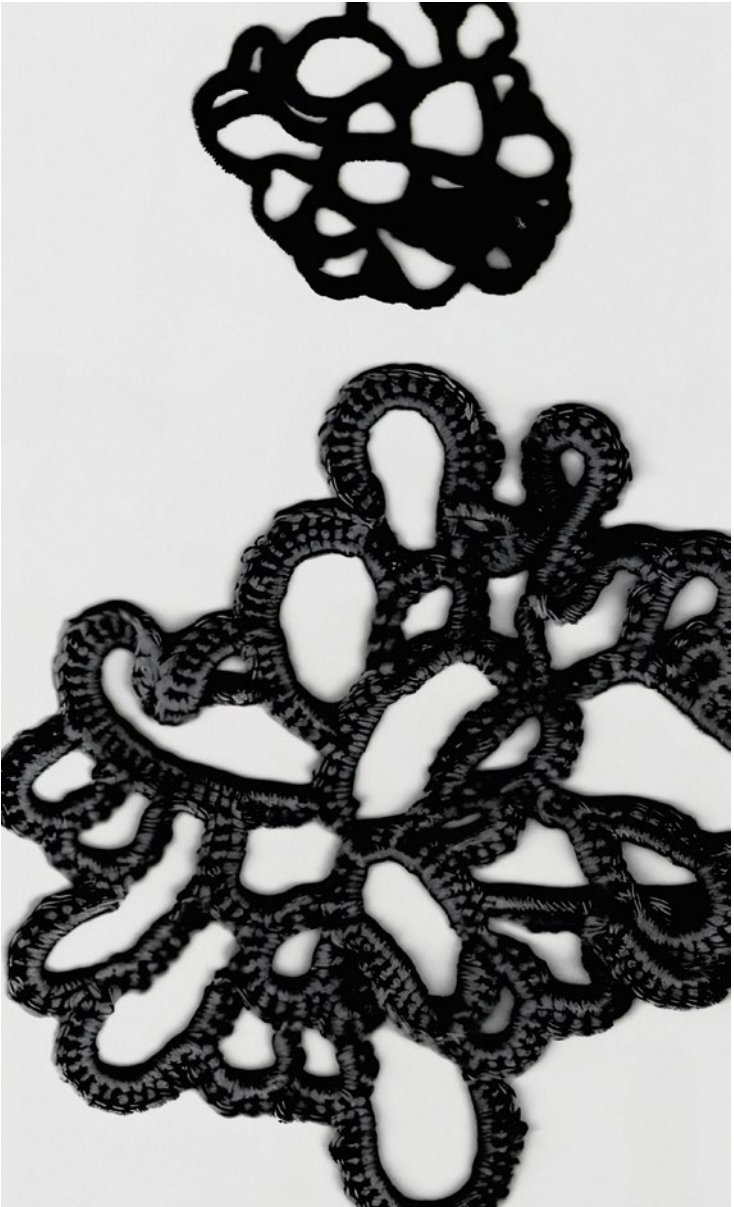


Figure 2. Capacity for Freeforming Outside Linear, Top-Down, Center-Out Systems of Control

oratively building solidarities and empathetic relationships across differences (Kasl & Yorks 2016).

Finally, most known for guiding intentional, loving, and patient hands and heart toward the creative stitching of hats, scarves, and baby blankets, crocheting is a craft rooted in performing care and enacting compassionate relations (Holdsworth 2024). Hence, it resists the fascist notion of life as characterized by violent struggle and perpetual war against perceived enemy others (Eco 2002; Thomas 2020). Rather, crocheting conceives life as a creative act of continuous knotting:

Knots are places where many lines of becoming are drawn tightly together. ... Its end is always loose, somewhere beyond the knot, where it is groping towards an entanglement with other lines, in other knots. What is life, indeed, if not a proliferation of loose ends? (Ingold 2013, 132)

I found crochet a useful way to model the complexities of affective experience participants encountered in communal experimental music-making that resisted linear and top-down systems of control (e.g., composition, linear sequencing) during my doctoral research. Seeking to model how improvisation, playing prepared instruments, and other means of infusing unpredictability, noise, and more-than-human elements into music-making processes, I explored ways of crocheting otherwise. As a method, thinking-with crochet and practicing crocheting, opened ways of embodied and material knowing that helped me reconfigure and articulate complex understandings of self as always-in-relation (Holdsworth 2024), including with more-than-human others (Hoel 2023). I broke patterns and followed ways of allowing affect and feeling to guide

freeform crocheting movements, incorporating difference and irregularity and experimentation (Perry 2024).

The crochet images accompanying this short essay led to a novel way of envisioning how aesthetic being-in-knowing unfolded through creative practices over time. Their making led to my seeing how finding affective moments of resonance and togetherness felt like specific material-discursive constellations becoming illuminated as they gathered potential to help being, knowing, and doing escape from expected grid-like patterns. I came to see the role of affect in creative experiencing and learning as leading to expanding spiral within complex lattice frameworks (Bateson 2022; Nachmanovitch 2019). I see these artful visualizations as snapshots into a larger relational research-creation process (Loveless 2019; Sweet et al. 2020) that recognized fascistic elements creeping into



Figure 3. Capacity for Crafting Blooming Spirals
In-Through-With Gridded Latticeworks

“the ‘affective economy’ of habits and patterned behaviors” (Ross 2017) constituting everyday life and culture, including normative creative practices. Therefore, the material configurations and wild processes these images depict challenge fascistic hierarchical, binary, and simplistic ways of framing the world. They reach toward new, more performative ways of enacting dissent and resistance through affective embodiments, care-based ethics, and an aesthetics of inclusive complexity.

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VI. COMBAT AND CRAFT

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VII. Compositions
(Tales, Stories)



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Nadia Buyse

Fairytales: The Capacity to Engage with Collective Mythology

Affectus, as defined by Spinoza, is the state or process of affection happening between bodies and objects (2008 qtd. In Marshall). In this view, the body is responsive to the other and feels the affects/effects of proximity. It is an exchange of knowledge that becomes conscious in the awareness that one is never alone. Affectus reveals a world where we all act and react to each other. Affection (affectus in a state of momentary arrest) is arguably at the core of curating any exhibition; how the pieces speak amongst each other and what they are saying together is the impetus. This process is not necessarily or only emotional; it is also cognitive and extra-cognitive as we actively look and feel for connections between the two objects. The intention is the manufactured aesthetic *lingua franca* provided by the artists and curators, and we, as an audience, know it. A group exhibition isn't just about the pieces it includes; it is also about the space between the works. The space starts to tell a story, one that is not reliant on individual pieces but rather what the pieces communicate amongst each other

and how these ‘fairytales’ create a topography for identity construction and community building.

But what happens when that affectus relationship shifts from place to place? What happens when it starts to break apart, include other objects, other voices? What if those voices are representing their own cultural experiences of displacement and disillusionment from voices of immigration and political dissonance? How can this expand upon conversations around ultranationalist political ideologies? And most importantly, how does this provide insight into how we experience and resist globalised fascisms? This was one of the many points of entry at the core of *Fairytales*, a traveling exhibition that began 2023 at CASSTL in Antwerp; moving to WWNN Gallery Seoul, CON_Gallery Tokyo, and Galeria Fermay, Mallorca in 2024. This exhibition was collectively curated by, and around, the work of a group of core artists: Marc Ming Chan, Vanessa Van Obberghen, Jaehun Park, Jesse Siegel and Jan Tomza-Osiecki. While there is differentiation between each artists’ aesthetic, some identifiable themes between the work are displacement, immigration, colonial traumas, post capitalism, reimagining languages, but, most importantly, this work presents the notion of mythology as a survival mechanism amongst all these considerations.

An initial concept of the show was to add artists depending on where the exhibition was happening and adapting it according to the space. These adaptations can include local artists; they also can bring specific works into the show that are in dialogue with where they are shown. For instance, *Rooms without Men* (fig 1.) by British artist Joe Blann was chosen to be shown at the exhibition in Palma, Majorca. This work is a series of 271 postcards featuring pictures of

FAIRYTALES

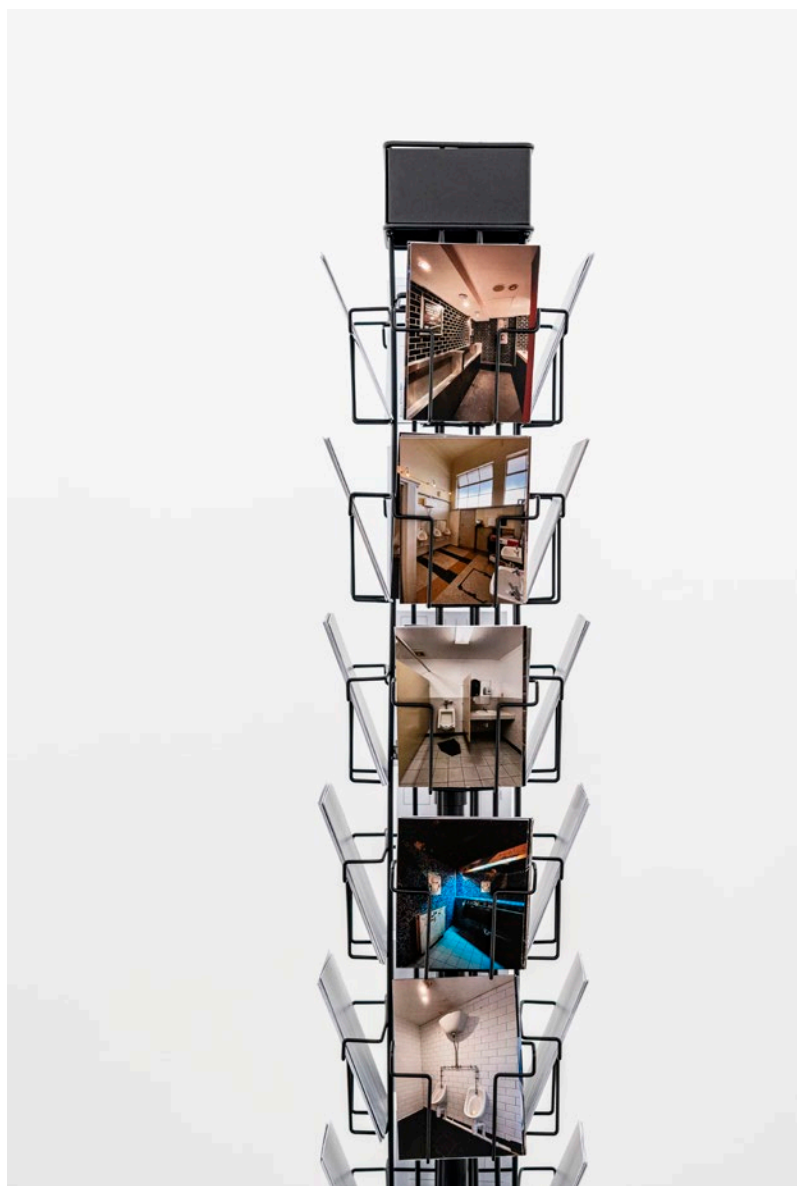


Fig.1 *Rooms Without Men*, Joe Blann, 2022-2024, 271 digital prints.
Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch

VII. COMPOSITIONS (TALES, STORIES)

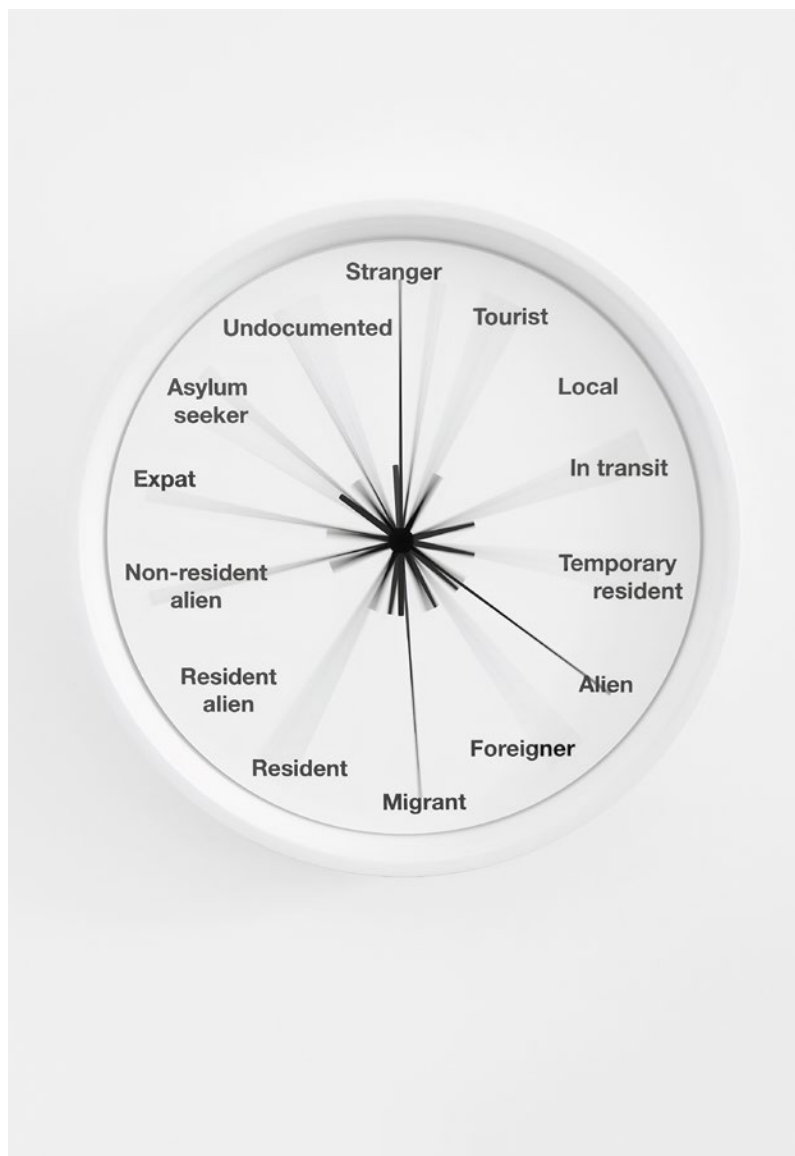


Fig.2 *[How to Measure Time] Stranger/Undocumented*, 2021, Suwon Lee, Pigmented inkjet print. Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch.

empty men's rooms: each image uniquely showing a different men's toilet. Each postcard was hand printed with the location of the image printed on the back. The full collection of images was displayed on a postcard rack towards the entrance of the gallery. Majorca is a well-recognized tourist hub that has suffered a crisis of resources creating a tension between the 'tourist/immigrant/refugee' and 'local' (Hof et al.2014). The streets are flooded with an economy of souvenir shops and tourist traps; postcard racks are everywhere as are anti-tourist and anti-refugee sentiments spray painted on the walls. Including this work within this specific exhibition brings recognition and awareness to these ongoing tensions. This sentiment of outsider tension is echoed in the Venezuelan artist Suwon Lee's piece [*How to Measure Time*] *Stranger/Undocumented* (fig. 2) in which a clock is used to measure the varying gradations of distance between expat, foreigner, and resident. These titles are not often reflective of our own relationship to the spaces that we inhabit, but usually dependent on the governing bodies and public attitudes of each individual place. As we see rising global fascist ideologies, these terms are not only shifting but they can act as an epicentre for dangerous ideologies.

While these pieces individually carry meaning on their own terms, it is the juxtaposition of the work (fig. 3) that sparks narratives of reimagination. This conversation becomes evident in one instance between the work of Marc Ming Chan and Vanessa Van Obberghen. In one corner of the space, we see the piece *Blindage* (fig. 4) from Marc Ming Chan; two large-scale images, back-to-back, of what is best described as portraits of dystopic transhuman war machines. These images offer speculative imagery of

VII. COMPOSITIONS (TALES, STORIES)

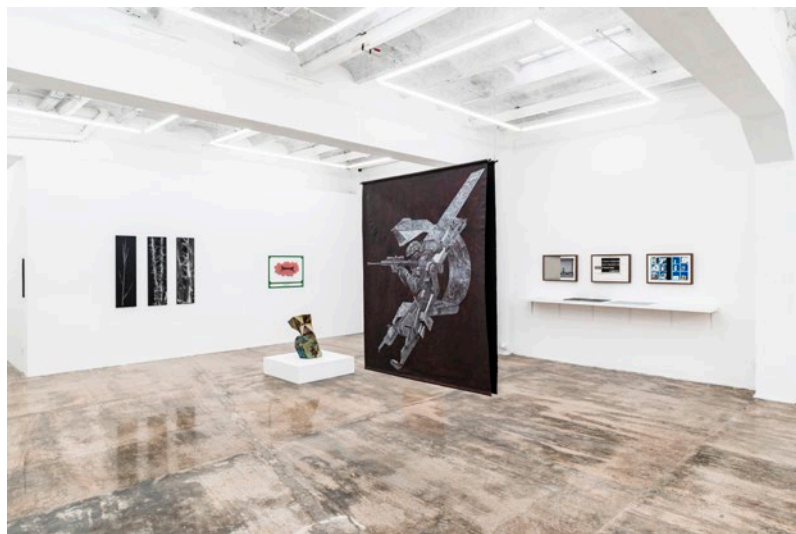


Fig.3 *Fairytale*, Installation View, 2024. Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch.

the ongoing militarization of police and investments into warfare technologies by Western countries. Behind Chan's large-scale images is the installation of four works from Van Obberghen all entitled *Bogwi* (fig. 5). This collection of mixed media work, much like Van Obberghen's work throughout the show, is a meditation on translation, documentations, and groupings. Vanessa Van Obberghen, raised in Belgium, born in Daegu, Korea, draws upon her own experiences through reconciliation processes as an adopted child in Korea after the war. While this journey is very personal, the displacement of many people (particularly children) and the questionable government bureaucracies that facilitated this widespread displacement is a mechanism hidden by authoritarianism and a product of post war economies. So, when we see the Chan's *Blindage*,



Fig.4 *BLINDAGE*, 2023. Marc Ming Chan, acrylic on canvas.
Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch

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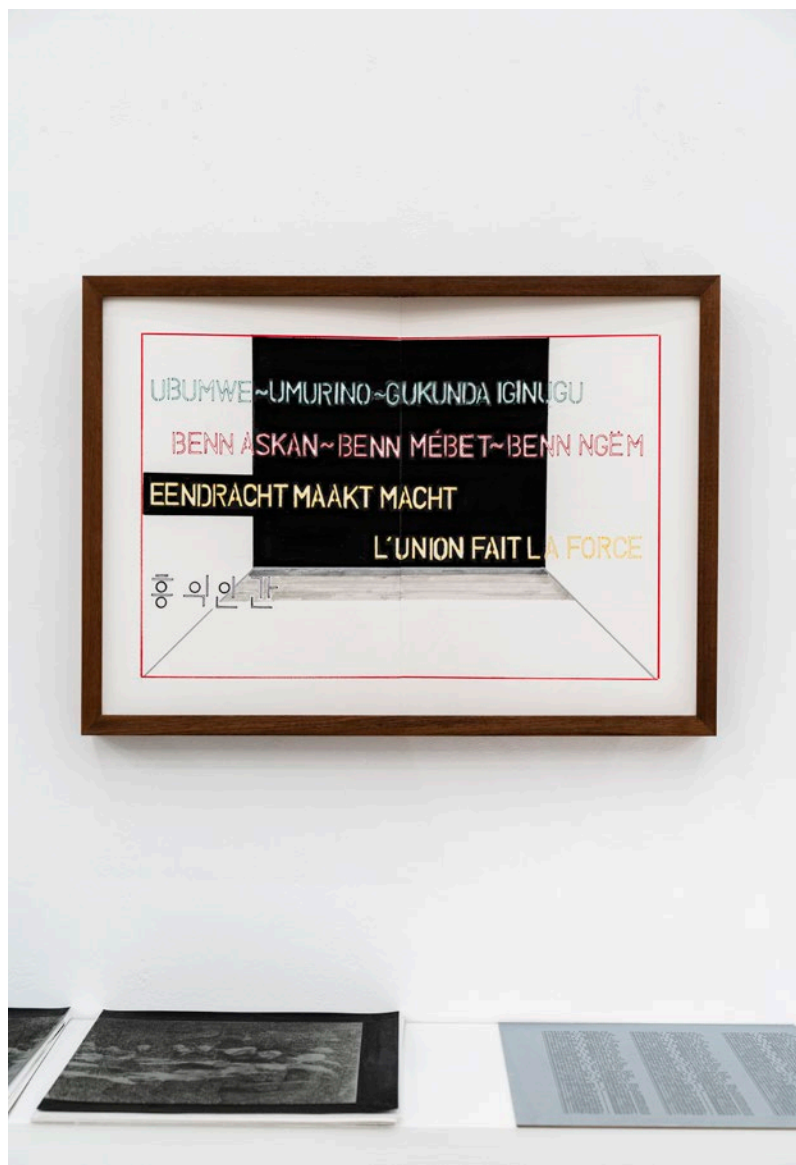


Fig.5 *Bogwi*, 202a. Vanessa Van Obberghen, acrylic on paper, embossment and photography. Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch

obstructing the work of Van Obberghen, we see a visual metaphor acting as a mirror of authoritarian violence impacting ecosystems and hiding corruption.

To return to a previously stated question: how does this exhibition provide insight into how we experience and resist globalized fascisms? Throughout the different versions of the exhibition not only do the names of artists change and shift, but so does the language around the work. Here I have only provided a very small insight into the intricacies present throughout the show, in only one of the locations where it happened. Within these limited examples though one can recognize storytelling as a tool for identity construction through displacement and other mechanisms of globalized fascism and fascist ideologies. The success of this work is in its understated affectus ‘between-ness’ transpiring through this conversation; it is not overt and it is not fixed. It is shifting from place to place, person to person. It is offering the potential for images and objects to tell stories that are hard to hear and say sometimes. It leaves viewers ruminating in their own fairytale construction; How can we make meaning of these strange and dangerous times through material and creative expression and what is it worth? Also, what realizations can come from us trying?

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Rooms Without Men, Joe Blann, 2022-2024, 271 digital prints.
Photo courtesy of Grimalt de Blanch

38

Michael Tristano Jr. & Eddie Gamboa Jr.

**Capacities to Create
Beyond the State**

If the state already renders us dead, how do we make sense of electoral politics, broadly, and the most recent electoral cycle specifically? Are we destined to feel bamboozled by the dog and pony show of democracy attempting to conceal fascism for the rest of our days until the death machine finally comes from us? If we are already rendered dead, perhaps we need to ask: how do the dead live? If you feel overwhelmed and stunned with all of this, so do we. The point of contemporary political performances is to be stupefied into doing absolutely nothing other than voting for whichever political candidate will get to drive the death machine next. We find Sianne Ngai's (2005) affective concept of the *stuplime* helpful here. Departing from the Kantian sublime, Ngai develops the affective experience of *stuplimity* in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom. With the *stuplime*, "every attempt by the narrator to comprehend the 'natural order' or 'logic' of the encompassing system...by means of a smaller, more graspable, and more concrete way of thinking further blocks understanding of the wider principle and cul-

minates in a kind of collapse” (276). The stuplime accounts for what shocks and exhausts us. And, importantly, the stuplime points to what obfuscates critical responses. The stuplime seriously fatigues us as it vacillates between total horror and the most banal daily routines. And that is the point. It drains our capacity to consider and respond in any other way. Thus, by naming and pointing to contemporary electoral politics as stupliminal performances, we can also ask what ways of responding to them are available to us and under what conditions.

Unlike Kant’s sublime, Ngai suggests the naming and tracing of the stuplime does not offer total transcendence. However, it does open the capacity for “a little resistance” (294) in confrontations with larger systems. We want to offer one simple but critical capacity for a little resistance in the face of the fast-encroaching death machine under the duress of fascism. It starts with the simple but grueling realization that the state will never save us. We cannot afford to be sucked into the stuplimity of it all. We must, instead, hone our capacities to create beyond the state. If we are interested in living beyond our declared death, we find the answer is to live through a life of creative engagement that provides us the ability to dream and create beyond the state. Here, we wish to consider one creative performance of living: to be present in the here and now within the affects and movements that ground us and come to animate an approach to liberation beyond the state.

Interested in how we might creatively hone our capacities beyond the state, we consider a communal and creative performance which engages the past, present, and future of the climate crisis, weaponization of borders, and violence of settler colonialism. *There Must Be Other Names for the River*

is a multimedia composition developed by Marissa Demarco, Dylan McLaughlin, and Jessica Zeglin. Crafted as part of transdisciplinary artist Nina Elder's 2018 Deep Time Lab at the University of New Mexico, the piece utilizes publicly available streamflow data measured by six gauging stations along the Rio Grande as method of reimagining the capacities of the drying river, and by extension the capacities of those immediately impacted by the colonial project of border production. This creative composition is accomplished through the vocal interpretation of this data by six performers. Over the course of twenty-two minutes, each musician/vocalist follows along the scored data-flows, which spans from 1974 to the present and beyond. The resulting sound is a cacophony of noise—a mixture of deep notes, raspy whispers, throaty groans. There is no discernable pattern other than visualized numbers that appear on the screen, signaling the passage of time with a year that moves forward every twenty seconds.¹

One musician sustains a melodic note, making variations in volume and pitch. Their performance oscillates between soft hums through puckered lips and resonant bellows that slightly shift octaves as you hear a mouth open wider. Another musician groans and growls throughout the performance, a ghastly, throaty sound that is constantly fluctuating in presence. At its most intense, the musician screams with a force that demands reckoning, dipping down into a croaking noise that almost sounds like thirst. A third musician varies the form of sound—breathing into the microphone, intensifying not through a prosodic metric, but through breathy noises. Exhales pushed through clenched teeth, “shhhhhh” —as if they were asking everyone to quiet down, or perhaps performing as if



Deb Nystrom. 2016

they were the wind. They intensify by whispering into the microphone: "There must be other names for the river." A refusal to be tied up in the stuplime of the colonial logics of borders and all they bring, with a demand for another name for the river, creates a new signification and relationality with the river and the life it provides. There is occasional machine distortion, almost like a glitch in the audio, the sound of (non)human impact interrupting the noise of human voices.

These are the intensities that mark the progression of *There Must Be*, with singers moving across registers depending on the streamflow of their section of the river, depending on how they have divided up the year, depending on how we might hear them amongst all the other sounds. The sense of being present with the river is not found in distinguishing the sounds from each other. Instead, the musicians invoke the river through the errancy of noise produced through their embodied relation to the varied scales of the river's flow: its speed, its volume, the performers' own attachments to the body of water, and their/its shared bodily capacities. It is in these overlapping intensities that *There Must Be* attunes the audience to the senses of the drying river, which are too vast and too animated to be heard as a coherent or harmonized sound. As discordant sound, the performance highlights the complex relationships between bodies and the environment and attunes us to communal ways of living and creating.

There Must Be produces anti-stuplime affects by emphasizing community creation through the interactive component of the digital installation. Visitors are offered a digital copy of the score, which includes instructions on crafting their own performances with the option to share

and listen to the recordings of other artists, scholars, and community members from across the Rio Grande. Potential performers are not offered a score written in Western staff notation with notes bracketed into staves and written marks to direct pitch, duration, volume, and timbre. Instead, the score is composed of overlapping visual graphs: a fluctuating line with jagged peaks, multiple translucent circles superimposed across that line, granular pixels that disrupt the clarity of both. In the digital copy of the score made available to the public², the artists explain how the different visual markers act as translations of different temporal frames: monthly stream flow (the peaks and valleys of the line), annual flow (the shifting circles whose repetition are passages across time) and human impacts, such as large scale extractive developments (the pixelation that distorts the image). The results are discordant in a way that fits the ethos of *There Must Be* and simultaneously underscore the creative power of community design outside/betwixt larger structures.

The collaboration between performers, ecologies, and technology places these audio recordings beside each other, framing them through the questions: “How will we continue to live with and through river? How will we continue to live with and through each other, as we’re connected by its waters?...To hear the voices of your neighbors near and far and their relationships with the river, explore the audio tracks below.” Collaborating with the river reveals that its form is found in its flow—not just the water, but the air that moves it, the earth that slows it, the communal forms of life that enliven it. *There Must Be* attunes us to an embodiment of the river that disrupts those dominant temporal frames that limit the traces of human-environ-

mental relations to ecological destruction. *There Must Be* certainly grapples with the impacts of human-caused climate change, but also demonstrates embodied sonic forms that invoke other senses of time through sensorial relations. In this ceremonial production of noise, where the musicians collaborate with the river-as-collective form, we attune our senses not just to what the river sounds like, but what forms the river can take through sound, what forms of sound make of the river, what emerges in a relational listening between the bodies that make up the Rio Grande.

Both breathtaking and heart-aching, we find *There Must Be* responds to our question of how the dead live. *There Must Be* envisions and embodies possibilities for the river into the future: further than scientific or political intervention can predict or imagine. Refusing to be bogged down by the stupor of it all, the performance is imbued with memories, sounds, and stories which produce hope for the future of the Rio Grande. Performance, like *There Must Be*, and its creative potentialities help us respond to increasingly alarming questions which plague all of us: How will we move beyond the inevitability of climate collapse? Live through the ever-mounting force of state surveillance and containment? And the continuing devastation of colonial projects and genocidal wars? Any answers to these questions rely on our capacity to create and live beyond the state and those who drive the death machine. A constant turn and return to our creative capacities to radically (re)imagine what is possible. Because there must be...

Endnotes

1. To interact with the exhibit, please visit: <https://othernamesfortheriver.com>. In addition, we encourage you to watch filmed versions of the performance. One which takes place inside (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEs0JOKJUEM>) and one which takes place at the river (<https://vimeo.com/332089695>)
2. To view the score, please visit: <https://othernamesfortheriver.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Tributaries-Scores.pdf>

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**39**

Andrew Davis

**Artistic Capacities for
Confronting Fascist Desire**

Much of contemporary discussion concerning fascism in the United States focuses on its political aspects (e.g., leadership styles, modes of governance, populist rhetoric). As such, many

of our discussions about how to combat contemporary forms of fascism center on political modes of resistance. To be sure, we need organized action. But we cannot continue to overlook an aspect of fascism that both precedes and exceeds its political dimension—that of socio-psychological desire.¹ This essay examines the socio-psychological dimensions of fascism as a set of “unconscious libidinal investment[s]” that overdetermine the cultural-economic infrastructure of contemporary society (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 104). This is done by considering two works of collage by the artist known only as Gramsci. Such a consideration demonstrates the potential of visual art to confront fascist desire on an affective level. These works—*Little Donnie’s Oedipus Complex* and *Little Donnie Goes to Washington* (Figures 1 & 2, respectively)—clearly take their inspiration from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as they

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Figure 1. *Little Donnie's Oedipus Complex*, Gramsci, 2017, collage, 18x24

force the viewer to confront the unitary logic of the fascist oedipal formation on the levels of both the individual psyche (Figure 1) and the social formation (Figure 2).²

Little Donnie is a visual articulation of those unconscious libidinal investments that characterize American fascism in the individual psyche, of which Donald Trump is a particular oedipal distillation and whose paranoia now dominates the cultural-economic infrastructure of contemporary America. This paranoia manifests as racism, misogyny, and the fear (even hatred) of others who do not conform to the neurotic social formation that is America now. Fascism is a contagion that infects the social body by way of inter-generational replication. Metaphorically speaking, Donald Trump is a 'cold sore,' but Little Donnie is the fascist 'virus' that precedes any particular oedipal formation. What originates as oedipal in the individual psyche has become a venereal contagion in the cultural-economic infrastructure.

Backgrounded by chaotic shreds of publicity, Little Donnie appears here as the racialized paranoia lurking behind the carefully groomed coif of acceptable social production. Although Little Donnie is not synonymous with Donald Trump, it is useful to correlate the two; Trump is a political-economic expression of the fascism spreading through an ever-expanding proportion of American society. He has become the public symbol of authoritarian leadership that many subjugated group—who cannot adapt to this changing world—identify with as a public expression of their own neurotic psychoses.

In Gramsci's collage, this perversion of desire is expressed through the hooded beauty contestants positioned at the level of the social production of oedipal desire (i.e., the

fascism in the psyche and everyday behavior). The mother figure emerges sun-crowned from the zodiac—an overdetermined figure of inter-generational neuroses. The father appears here as the roll of the dice (i.e., the mother's gamble on her progeny) descending into clenched fists of a repressive totality, which integrate Little Donnie—through the phantom father—into the repressive death instinct of capitalist reproduction. This is the repression of libidinal energy by its own flows according to the oedipal formation. Such repression produces hyper-conformity by perpetuating: 1) the myth that subjugated groups can escape from the realities of social progress by identifying with authoritarian leadership; and 2) the illusion of such groups' successful incorporation into the future of capitalist production. As the fists enlarge, the boundaries of control begin to blur; the further from the fascist core—exemplified by the immolating two-headed beast at the nexus of the oedipal formation—the weaker the hold of repressive power beyond the individual psyche. Hence the need to translate fascism into the social formation. This is conveyed by the inverted reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States strangled by the suicidal ouroboros. This move from the individual psyche to the social formation leads us to the concept of the fascist war machine, and also to the crux of this essay. What are the capacities of art to combat contemporary fascism?

Although fascism may manifest as “a rigid segmentarity and a particular mode of totalization and centralization” in the state, it cannot be separated from the oedipal forces proliferating through the interaction of subjugated individuals and groups *before* resonating through the state (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 214). The insidiously suicidal potential of fascist desire is realized in the individualiza-



Figure 2. *Little Donnie Goes to Washington*, Gramsci, 2017, collage, 18x24in

tion of the social—the taking-over of the state by a fascist war machine enabled by the expansion of capital through the oedipalized individual. The aggregation of oedipal neuroses across society thus positions fascism as a war machine, making it a question of socio-psychological desire. Deleuze & Guattari argue that the true danger of fascism is the channeling of these oedipal investments into the global machine of late capital, whose “only remaining work” is to mass-produce the fascist formation in individual psyches (215). Faced with the collapse and reduction of the state and its social formation, fascism proliferates its oedipal libidinal investments (as well as the immanence of its desire) to become power itself—hierarchical, totalized, and perverse.

Figure 2 represents the social aggregation of the oedipal formation revealed in Figure 1. Backgrounded by the well-ordered linguistic formations of legitimized (though superficial) journalistic diversion, Little Donnie has moved from the realm of desiring-production to social production. At the center stands the vengeful child masquerading as a confident capitalist. But the pretense cannot hide the paranoid tyrant. The clenched fists of power no longer descend into a loosening of control; they prop up the aggregated coil of desire, now positioned as the executive authority of the state behind the presidential podium. The figure of the mother and her gamble on inter-generational capitalist production looms in inverted suspension over the linguistic order of control, but is no longer tethered to modes of social production. The fictive past of sovereignty and the future order of capital are now both expressed in the fascist war machine. This is enabled precisely by what is absent from Figure 2 itself: the actual locus of power embodied in the corporate/technocratic/military apparatus that materially produces the mass individual necessary for the expansion of capital through/against the state: all poised to take over the functioning of the state on the date this volume is released.

“Donald Trump is not the actual problem. He is a public stooge for the real fascist powers who realize his potential for coalescing the grievances of marginalized groups into an easily manipulated form of misdirected vengeance that can then form the basis of their repressive authority” (Davis/Gramsci, 2024 interview). Such resistance may not produce practical electoral gains in the immediate, but it can produce affective resonances with the potential for disrupting the neurotic blockages of the fascist psyche.

Trump supporters constantly lose their composure when confronted with satirical representations of their ‘sacred’ leader. Take seriously the fascist plan, but mercilessly mock the desire underlying their commitments, and the public-facing figure of their desire. For all their talk of ‘liberal snowflakes,’ these people are the first to dissolve into entitled tantrums when you poke fun at their beloved savior. Do not be distracted by Donald Trump; maintain laser-focus on the underlying fears and delusions that lead his supporters to cede authority to that conman. Be merciless. Be cruel. But mostly be funny. They melt like snow (Davis/Gramsci, 2024 interview).

And when public support for their figurehead inevitably begins to crumble—most likely due to his own administration’s policies—then we will find space for actualizing political tactics to combat the political-economic forces propping up their fascist ‘sovereign.’ Until then, it is important to remember that art-as-propaganda can continue to be an effective/affective weapon against such fascist desires.

The author wishes to thank Gregory Seigworth for his extraordinarily generous editorial guidance.

Endnotes

1. “Socio-psychological desire” and “desiring-production” (which appears later) refer to desire as being actively produced through interactions with others and the world—and being overdetermined by previous generations—rather than being innate to the self.
2. The following discussion of Deleuze & Guattari’s work on fascism is in no way offered as a definitive examination. I draw attention only to those elements that speak directly to my consideration of the affective capacities of art to operate against fascist desire.

VII. COMPOSITIONS (TALES, STORIES)

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Claudia Gualtieri & Roberto Pedretti

Capacities for Constructing Collective Resistance and Radical Alliances

This contribution comes from Italy, a southern European peninsula stretching into the Mediterranean Sea towards the northern shores of Africa. Italy's geographical position paradoxically marks both a bridge and a multifarious, mobile border. As a frontier country, Italy has witnessed significant migration flow over recent decades, attempting to comply with European regulations while producing often inconsistent national laws, which have been made more strict by the right-wing government elected in 2022. The Right's ascent to power in a country that experienced fascism less than a century ago invites reflections worth deep consideration.

Lawrence Grossberg's (2018a, 2019–2020) analysis of affect in the United States' politics in the conjuncture of Donald Trump's first presidency before the electoral success of Giorgia Meloni's party Fratelli d'Italia [Brothers of Italy] in Italy—offers a lens through which we were able to anticipate similar trends throughout Europe, despite the diverse contexts and specific conjunctures. From Italy's specific

spatial, historical, social, and cultural location, our reflection today invites a critical analysis of affect as a theoretical stance. We would argue that a conceptual category of affect for theoretical investigation cannot be disjoined from its factual expressions and effects as lived experiences—at the personal and collective levels—in specific conjunctures.

While affect provides a useful tool for contextual analysis, it risks reaffirming a model of self-centered individualism—a sort of libertarianism often prioritized over community—that fails to challenge existing economic and social power structures. For example, the rhetoric of chaos proliferates forms of self-referential subjectivity. The crises and their surrounding discourses inundate the social and public spaces, which are increasingly fractured and uneven, partly due to the explosion of new communication technologies. These conditions foster a new form of normality based on exceptionality and emergency.

Public discourse becomes saturated with incoherent and fragmented narratives, dominated by hegemonic thought. This discourse shifts internal conflict onto external agents, identified as the cause of social dysfunction and uncertainty, thus undermining an otherwise stable landscape. A clear example is the rhetoric employed by Donald Trump and American right-wing media, which sowed mistrust in the 2020 election results, culminating in the January 6th, 2021, Capitol riot. This background noise—clustered around the construction of a selected communal space based on the exclusion of others and the erection of borders—surrounds public discourses and appears to be the ideal tool to prevent people from recognizing the concrete reasons, class interests, and hegemonic objectives that make up the map and strategies of power.

In this social and political panorama, subjectivity manifests as confused and sterile forms of rebellion that fail to transcend the boundaries imposed by capitalism and insist on replicating an individualistic libertarian model. To counter this, we must foster radical interpretations and responses capable of contesting hegemonic policies and envisioning new modes of political action and subjectivity. These modes aim to contextualize contemporary crises and cultivate imaginative and cultural conditions for resistance against the normalization of emergency. In today's neoliberal-dominated era, dissent should be rearticulated within social communal spaces and everyday life. These forms of dissent emerge in the struggles of migrants, exploited laborers, racialized people, minority groups, and civil society organizations.

A nuanced reading of this crisis highlights its polysemic density, emphasizing its role in articulating and organizing social and cultural spaces according to the concrete needs of the conjuncture. Affect increasingly occupies political centrality as a site of tension, where social vectors intersect and shape relationships, consensus, resistance, common sense, and the interpretation of everyday experiences. This affective space is a political terrain that must be understood, reclaimed and reshaped as a communal realm. By reinstating the collective and constructing radical subjectivities, we can respond to the global resurgence of fascism. Inspired by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt's notion of multitude (2004), Etienne Balibar's ideas on citizenship (2015), and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's studies on new forms of labor exploitation (2013), we argue for an acute observation of contemporary labor dynamics within the frame of global capitalism.

Through this lens, new articulations of commonality and alliances will emerge. As Mezzadra and Neilson propose in their critical reading of “border as method,” crises offer opportunities to uncover the material conditions underlying societal tensions (2013). In our era of systemic crises, the convergence of economic, cultural, social, environmental, and political vectors necessitates breaking free from normalized thought. The naturalization or normalization of crises obstructs the potential to reimagine and actualize “better stories” (Grossberg 2010, 2017) of emancipation and liberation as collective goals. Intellectual strength is needed to redefine and reinvent the categories of thought and political action required to address the current conjuncture and construct coherent, dissenting narratives against dominant ideologies.

Lawrence Grossberg’s analysis of pessimism of the will and optimism of the intellect (2018b) is encouraging as an appeal at the intellectual and affective levels to rejuvenate an understanding of the communal. We envisage that intellectual strength and operative courage are needed to deeply investigate and publicly disclose the ideological and practical dynamics, which, in recent decades, have induced the Left to share the same discursive strategies, and often the political and social solutions, as the Right. The intellectual optimism regarding a conjoined theoretical and pragmatic action required to animate and redirect the Left’s political action is one major task that cultural studies should undertake today if it still wants to contribute to changing the world.

Stuart Hall et al’s 1978 analysis *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* remains prescient as they identified the elements of crisis confronting the Left and

the Right's ability to co-opt popular sentiment. Anticipating the imposition of a new political and cultural hegemony that would take the name of neoliberalism, Hall lucidly invited us to see the Right's ability to tune in the popular as part of its success. This manipulation has aligned personal contradictions with right-wing discourses and class strategies.

By combining Hall's invitation with Mezzadra's and Nielsen's concept of the multiplication of labor, we wish to underline how the transformation of capital contributed to the construction of a fractured, elastic, varied and mobile social space. Equally, this transformation has provided the opportunity to understand the emergence of new forms of resistance and struggle. This opportunity should be grasped through recovering the centrality of labor as an element, which is still decisive for the production of original forms of subjectivities. From this ground—'the popular' in Hall's sense, if you like—the Left could try to heal the social fractures caused by the excess of a capitalist neoliberal economy, create conditions of commonality through social justice, and generate new modes of thinking, capable of identifying and representing new needs, new rights, new forms of resistance and the construction of new forms of sociality.

This is the challenge we are currently facing. Unstable and open relations with their inherent contradictions must be rearticulated within the specific historical and material conditions that produce them. Reinstating the collective as a theoretical and methodological priority can redirect affect into a cohesive and politically powerful communal sphere. In conclusion, the capacity to theorize and construct radical alliances lies in recognizing crises as opportunities to chal-

lenge hegemonic narratives, envision collective goals, and nurture new modes of dissent and resistance. This process demands a concerted effort to reclaim the affective and communal spaces necessary for transformative political action.

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41

Lawrence Grossberg

**In Search of Capacities
to Build a New World
(45 RPM Version)**

Track 1: The habitable landscape—the terrain on which reality is lived, organized, and navigated—is increasingly an affective landscape. That is to say, the affective plane (dimensions, apparatuses, and formations) of the habitable landscape is increasingly disconnected from other planes of discursive effects (e.g., signification, subjectivity and representation, and even materialities) to become the primary substance and determinant of the habitable landscape. The affective landscape, while having a certain unity, has also taken on a complexity, organization, and fluidity of its own. It has become a plane of struggle in its own right, albeit not fully autonomous; it has become the most powerful plane of culture and especially political culture.

Track 2: The conjuncture—at least since the 1960s—has been shaped by various efforts to call out or shore up the failures of liberal modernity—and ultimately—of the project of western modernity.

In any conjuncture, there are a variety of political logics, defined by particular discursive apparatuses and formations, each struggling to achieve a stable balance in the field of forces, responding to the various ways a crisis of modernity has been experienced, organized, and articulated: liberal logics (of accumulation and toleration), polarizing logics (wars of maneuver, populisms), hegemonic logics (of distributions and alliances, wars of positions), speculative or utopian logics, and various vanguardist and absolutist logics. Usually, these logics are enacted through various forms of force and ideology, consensus and consent (e.g. hegemonic struggles seeking consent to leadership).

But what happens when these logics operate on a disarticulated affective landscape, when the crises of modernity are increasingly lived and struggled over affectively, e.g., in various remixes of exhaustion, despair, anger, etc.—even in surrender to the desire to tear it down or admit defeat.

(**Secret Track, 78 RPM**): To ask an esoteric question: what is the ontological status, the accent of reality, of this affective landscape as cultural politics? What does it mean to describe it as an anti-political politics, entertainment (remember entertainment includes horror) mimicking politics (rather than the other way around). What does it mean to perform an absolutist (authoritarian, plutocratic) politics in which the only consistency is inconsistency and unpredictability (chaos). I can only offer a metaphor that I trace back to the Youth International Party of the late 1960s; reality TV does not simply blur the line between fiction and reality nor is it some postmodern simulacrum nor some virtual stratum, rather it works in a world of (onto-) logical modalities, conditionals, and counter-factuals: for example,

if something could be, then it is; if something is, then it must be, etc. My friends tell me I have entered the realm of possible worlds, which demands new capacities of thought. I might need some help here.

Track 3: In the present conjuncture, politics has become not only affective but also popular. The popular describes the forms and practices that allow people to navigate the affective landscape—the largely affective languages, logics, and structures swirling around in and constantly reconfiguring it, including popular cultures, which are have been for some time (and are increasingly) in danger of being monetized, if not corporatized. The popular also draws upon the fractured and contradictory wisdom of traditions and common sense, as well as more intimate forms of relations; they define the often illogical logics that people use to make decisions and judgments—right from wrong, true from false, good from bad. Specific formations of the popular will appear largely inconsistent to an outsider but largely coherent to those living it.

Track 4 (Remix): The popular is the primary locus and materiality of affective stories. I use “stories” broadly as discursive apparatuses or formations that define the world’s capacities to affect us and our capacities to respond to that reality. We live in stories, the stories that speak us, that speak to us and for us, and the stories that we tell to ourselves and others. These stories are always fragile, fungible, part-imaginary yet real in their lived-in-ness, imperfect, incomplete, bound to particular circumstances and contexts, to particular pre-conceptions and life-experiences. Stories give us a place to inhabit, and ways to live at that

place; they define what is a problem and shape our inchoate feelings into manageable affective responses. They give us directions for moving, telling us where and how we can stop, care, and belong. They define both the inside and the limits of an inhabitable landscape, as well as the places where we can be open to other possibilities. They define where change is necessary and where it is forbidden; where truth is absolute and where good and evil are to be found. Stories lead people into and through the conjunctures they construct, the paths and the places they constitute.

Stories call people into their space-times, their rhythms, their possibilities; they are always trying to get themselves (or possibly bits of themselves) “inside” your head or better, to get “your head” inside themselves; they invite you to find yourself already in the story, by offering a place—a voice—in which you can hear yourself. Stories, if they are to work, have to at least intersect with the stories that are already inside your head and the voices that already speak you.

Track 5 (Cover Song): Every individual or group is a multiple and complicated composition of many—and many sorts—of stories. Their supposed unity is always precariously holding together all sorts of tensions and contradictions. Sometimes, the stories (and their voices) work together and speak with one voice; other times, voices will scream at each other, and sometimes, voices will attempt to silence others. Even though there may be many voices speaking, there are always others trying to be heard. People speak in and from many stories, and sometimes they carry voices with them across stories.

People can have more than one thought or feeling—even at the same time. Someone could be a racist in one story and opposed to racism in another. “Ordinary, decent people” may also be racist. Rarely is any voice ever alone, or ever totally consistent. Even voices can be fragmented and, to varying degrees, hybrid. Perhaps some voices demand to be the only one spoken, but they will likely fail, or at least succeed only temporarily. The distribution and organization of our many voices is a crucial aspect of power often carried out by the stories being told, and those in our head.

Track 6: The present conjuncture is dominated by a particular conjunctural expression of an affective logic that fetishizes or ossifies differences into rigid, fixed, and almost always hierarchical (e.,g. pure and contaminated) categories, of which there have been and continue to be many variations or apparatuses. I describe its contemporary articulation as hyperinflated, and simultaneously orgiastic and puritanical. Politics becomes religion and ideology becomes conspiracy, both entirely affective. A hybrid formed between a war of maneuver and a war of positions, society is organized into three nested spheres: at the center, the chosen, pardoned of all sins, are the keepers of Truth; at the outlands, those sinners who are utterly irredeemable and can only be destroyed (exterminated). And in between, those whose sins can be expiated by education, punishment, humiliation, suffering, etc., but never fully forgiven or redeemed, and thus, never fully admitted as one of the chosen.

I think this logic is increasingly dominating—not completely nor without resistances—both “the right-reactionary-conservative-Republican Party” coalition and

“the left-progressive-liberal-Democratic Party” coalition, although not to the same degree and certainly not with the same political content. I would like to believe it is doomed to fail, but we all know that is at best naïve and at worst, as ignorant as the rationalities behind the logic itself. It has proven itself capable of inviting, cajoling, and pressuring people into its spaces and offering them a variety of ways of making its practices intelligible and significant. Its weakness may lie in its limited flexibility, for it typically has predefined rules for how it responds to unexpected changes, challenges, and opportunities. Its bad stories are already written in advance.

Track 7: Bad stories make bad politics. Bad stories abandon those who oppose them; they claim it is impossible to understand how those who disagree with them can possibly believe the things they do. They moralize the ways people feel, condemn them out of hand as stupid, ignorant, gullible, mentally or morally defective, or just plain evil, call out their micro-habits of thought and muscle memory or accuse them of being ideologically manipulated. Disagreement is attributable to lies, misinformation, or irrationalities, which cannot stand up to the Truth which I hold in my hands. All such claims are made without much thought beyond the fact of the disagreement. If I see racism everywhere and you do not (and you even find enjoyment there), then the problem must be yours. There is no attempt to understand how these different experiences might be based in different stories and the capacities they enable. And there is even less effort to ask why such judgments have become the bedrock of one’s political stories.

Track 8: The contemporary conjunctural politics demands that we engage with popular struggles from within and over the affective landscape. A popular democratic politics embraces a transformative politics not as a matter of asserting one's moral self-righteousness but as a practical matter of moving people by changing the affective landscape, the popular, and the stories they (we) inhabit. It has three rules: be open to being surprised; be willing to risk your own certainties; understand before judging. You can't set out to change people's habits or their thoughts—but if you can change their stories, you can offer them new capacities for navigating and reconstructing the affective landscape.

Track 9: A popular democratic politics might call for a democratic experimentation with difference, a politics of learning to live with difference—in ways that are neither utopian nor dogmatic, neither knowable in advance nor ontologically guaranteed. The problem is that we think we know what that means. We do not. We have to imagine, construct, experiment—story—the possibility of finding new capacities of difference and new and different capacities. We have to embrace the multiplicity not just of differences but of apparatuses of differences; after all, not all differences are about or even tied to “identities.”

Track 10 (Album only): A popular democratic politics has to tell better stories. Better stories engage people where they are rather than judging them against where we think they should be. They cannot claim to speak for “the people” while operating as a vanguard possessing the Truth, always found only in selected oppressions or some ideal state of

unlimited capacities. They must speak in the future perfect tense, for a society always in process and contradictions.

Better stories begin by trying to understand what they are trying to change. They have two assumptions: first, that those trying to tell better stories do not necessarily understand what people feel or why, nor how those feelings make sense to them; and second, that such feelings are real and reasonable to those who experience them. As a result, composing better stories requires work; understanding is more than a description of the stories you can hear if you listen carefully. It requires rigorous intellectual work—conceptual, theorized, reflective, critical, and problematizing work, using the full resources and privileges of time afforded to us as intellectuals (not academics).

Better stories begin by asking: What stories already speak to or for people and why? What stories are already in people's heads, and where do they come from? What about the backstories, the stories unremembered, stories they were raised on, stories their parents were raised on, stories that filled the air and flavored the food and set the moods of their everyday lives growing up. Better stories recognize the complexity and contextuality of stories: that there are many stories, many different ways of inhabiting them, many different positions you can occupy, and many different ways of occupying them. They recognize that the processes by which people enter or are drawn into, or find themselves spoken by, particular (kinds of) stories, which construct the truth of their experiences and feelings, are more complicated than we assume.

Bonus Track (Album only): The call to understand before judging and to be willing to hear the truth in other people's stories is not easy; on the contrary, it can be *extremely* difficult, even painful. It can mean confronting stories we find abhorrent, to understand the experiences and traditions out of which they have arisen, and the work they have done and are doing. It can mean acknowledging that these stories are part of the water in which all of us have been swimming for our entire lives and, in fact, our entire national history. We have to remind ourselves that our efforts are not meant to absolve, explain away, or forgive such stories of their responsibility for constructing reprehensible social realities. But the power of such stories—and their contextual changing same—will not be denied or wished away. Understanding how they work might enable us to disrupt them just enough to begin to change them, moving people into more open and generous stories and new capacities for embracing differences.

But not every story can or should command our efforts, and certainly not in the same ways. Part of the task of learning how to compose better stories has to involve knowing where and when it is possible to change the stories, and thus, to move people, including sometimes ourselves. There may well be stories we will never be able to understand well enough to find the cracks, the openings, through which we might begin to prise them apart and let some light shine through. But can you know this in advance?

Fade Out: where the band performs with a necessary but real humility. **Metaphors fail me.** **Musical:** The album is but one section of a larger complex composition [a landscape] that we don't hear. **Cultural studies:** The album describes

some of the dimensions and apparatuses constituting the affective landscape articulating the conjuncture. Intellectual: The album is an experiment in how to talk about affect and its relations to culture and power. Biographical: The album is a story of a political intellectual trying to find hope, the light of the gloaming, the path with heart, in the affective chaos of the contemporary world. Every time I listen to it, I hear something new, and I am surprised (not always in a good way). Sometimes when I listen to it, it challenges me, troubling my own certainties (even where I did not know they existed), feelings, and truths. These are strange times in strange lands, and I am looking for the crossroads, listening for a better story, trying to go on thinking (and hoping) (together).



Wendy J. Truran & Mathew Arthur

Our Capacity to Care, Collaborate, and Compose, but Otherwise

This outro (no conclusions here—nothing ends, always emergent, affect is ever entangling into other intensities) is composed by Wendy and Mathew, though only one of us is typing.

We had intended to write this as a much more thoroughly crafted response, riffing off each of the book's seven section headings and those essays gathered beneath them. Our plan was to write together—companionably, collectively—about care, composing, creating, and collaboration. But as the 20th Jan 2025 slithers closer (now just a few hours away), instead we find ourselves *making* the book rather than writing about it. Considered one way, we have failed, our contribution incapacitated by time, responsibilities, and the inconveniences of being enfleshed.

We find our capacity to write new words diminished. Our nascent words tumbled and transposed within the contributors' own words/felt-sensibilities/capacities that have so deeply moved, shoved around, crushed up, lifted high, plunged deep, upended, and generally affected each of us (and we include Greg and Chad here). We have, so often, been arrested in our collective thought-feeling tracks by the contents of this book, moved to tears/rage/laughter/confusion/inspiration/surprise. Quite directly, we have been affected by this co-creation.

OUTRO

So, considered another way, we have enacted an otherwise form of composing collectively and of responding collaboratively—we have poured over, tenderly tweaked, carefully corralled all of the words/feelings/forces/hurts that are gathered gently and defiantly between the covers of the book. We create—and stand—with you and within the book, albeit without new words. This project, that began in earnest as an urgent and outraged response to fascism, has shifted from concept and into practice. In publishing the book, we are delivering our collective response: a firm **FUCK YOU FASCISM!**

As many of the essays tell us, our ‘capacity to’ and ‘in-capacity to’ are often one and the same. Each of us—always messily, often in ways we didn’t want or didn’t expect—do what we can, when we can, in the ways we can. So, we leave you with what we have the capacity to do at this moment (before we return to the task of tending your words). For one of us, what they can ‘do’ is put our thought-feelings into words (an act of care); for the other, it is to cohere this incredibly gorgeous and tremendously outraged/outrageous book itself.

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Capacities To: Affect Up Against Fascism is a collection of more than forty essays, poems, and visual works that convey myriad approaches for understanding, surviving, and creating counter-movements in our increasingly fascist and authoritarian age. From numerous angles and different international locales, the contributors offer insights grounded in their distinctive feeling-encounters across a multitude of everyday contexts, along with critical perspectives informed by affect as a way of registering the energies or intensities of living and their gathering potentials for making a world otherwise than it is now. Fascism is an affective phenomena that works as a large scale ideological form and, also, by insinuating itself into the micro-movements and moments of daily life. Affect studies operates upon this same terrain but, rather than the abject fear of contamination, otherness, and difference that animates fascist imaginings and rouse its violence toward particular elements of the body-politic, affect [up against fascism] can be moved in other ways: open and inclusive and joyful in its embrace of difference as abundance, as messiness, as enlarged capacities for living together.

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