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**Reanimating
Kant in the
Present**
pg. 72

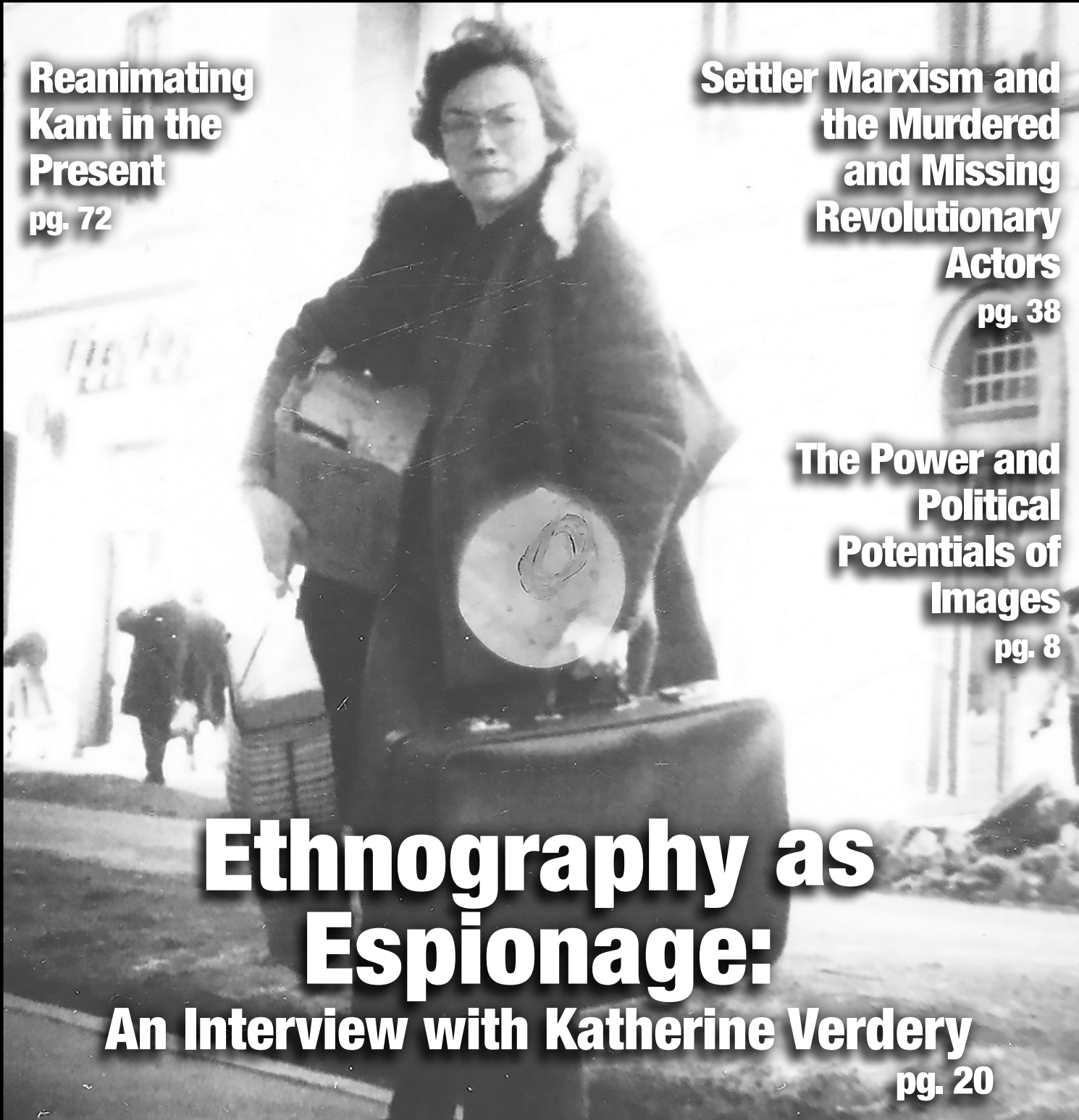
**Settler Marxism and
the Murdered
and Missing
Revolutionary
Actors**
pg. 38

**The Power and
Political
Potentials of
Images**
pg. 8

Ethnography as Espionage:

An Interview with Katherine Verdery

pg. 20



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Front Cover: "VERA" meets a securist.
Surveillance photo, 1988, p. 169.

Contents

EDITORIAL

*Revolution and CUNY:
Remembering the 1969
Fight for Open Admissions*
Bhargav Rani
pg. 3

FEATURES

*The Power and Political
Potentials of Images*
Zehra Husain
pg. 8

*Ethnography as Espionage:
An Interview with
Katherine Verdery*
Nicholas Glastonbury
pg. 14

Neoliberal Fictions
Nandini Ramachandran
pg. 27

DEBATE

*Settler Marxism and the
Murdered and Missing
Revolutionary Actors*
Sean M. Kennedy
pg. 38

**TECHNOLOGY
AND POLITICS**

*Unmasking Musk:
Envisioning HyperCapitalist
Futures*
Hillary Donnell
pg. 44

*Salami Tacticals:
Little Nukes — No Big Deal?*
Clifford D. Conner
pg. 58

CUNY LIFE

*The Campaign for
Full and Fair Funding of
all GC Doctoral Students*
The Adjunct Project
pg. 58

*Fan Fiction as Emotionally
Inclusive, Anti-Ableist Praxis*
Jenn Polish
pg. 64

*In Conversation with
Harry Belafonte*
Christopher M. Morrow
pg. 68

**REANIMATING KANT
IN THE PRESENT**

Some Theses on Stupidity
Milo Ward
pg. 72

*Adam Robert's The Thing
Itself: A Book Review in Four
Antinomies*
Asher Wycoff
pg. 77

Revolution and CUNY: *Remembering the 1969 Fight for Open Admissions*

Bhargav Rani

The past month has seen a spate of retrospectives debating the legacy of the failed revolution of May 1968 in France. Beginning in late March as a cultural and sexual rebellion among university students in Nanterre, the movement spread like wildfire, eventually inspiring hundreds of thousands of students across the country. The following weeks witnessed mass demonstrations, occupations and rallies by students, professors and intellectuals, and there ensued daily brutal confrontations between the police with its riot shields and water cannons and the protestors armed with cobblestones dug up from the streets of Paris. By mid-May, the workers too joined the movement, and sparked a general strike of about ten million people, the largest in European history. The protests of 1968 questioned not only the inequities of capitalist relations of production but also threatened to dismantle the political establishment that sustained it. While the movement eventually crumbled under the weight of its own contradictions, the revolution of May 1968 was not only the first time that a student rebellion stood at the vanguard of a mass workers' revolt — it was also the last serious threat posed to capitalism

in the postwar Western world. For a few exhilarating weeks, the revolution held open the promise of a beautiful world beyond capitalism. This past year, the *Advocate* has facilitated a prolonged conversation on the theme of "Revolution and Sovereignty" in its pages. Beginning with a prefatory editorial on the "problem" of revolution, we have published a range of articles from various members of the Graduate Center community — from stories on the October Revolution on its centenary to the racial politics of the NFL; from the revolutionary force of poetry, theatre, literature, and film to critiques of liberalism and conservatism; from an exploration of the questions of individual sovereignty to the contemporary threats to national sovereignties under U.S. and British imperialism; and, from the politics of urban revolutions to the neoliberalization of schooling and education. Expanding on these conversations, the current issue of the *Advocate* contains articles on the politics of scientific practice and technological progress under capitalism, on "femicide" as the grounds for an intersectional critique of settler Marxism, and on the political potential of images, among others. While the mythic specter of May 1968 casts its long shadow on our political consciousness, this editorial of the final issue addressing the theme seeks to bring

the conversation back to CUNY and commemorate the spirit of the May revolution as it animated the militant student movements in our university around the same time.

This spirit of May 1968 is perhaps best seen in the struggles for open admissions at CUNY in the 1960s. The postwar years witnessed an immense increase in the demand for state-sponsored public higher education, leading to the founding of the State University of New York (SUNY) in 1948 and the consolidation of seven senior and municipal community colleges under the CUNY system in 1961. Over the next decade, CUNY opened nine new college campuses, but this expansion could not meet the escalating demand for higher education among the nearly eight million New York residents. New York also experienced a major demographic shift in the 1950s and the 1960s, with nearly a million African Americans and Puerto Ricans taking residence in the city, replacing white residents, who had moved to nearby suburbs. Despite these demographic pressures and the expansion of the university system, CUNY's meritocratic admissions policies ensured that it remained overwhelmingly white and middle class throughout the 1960s.

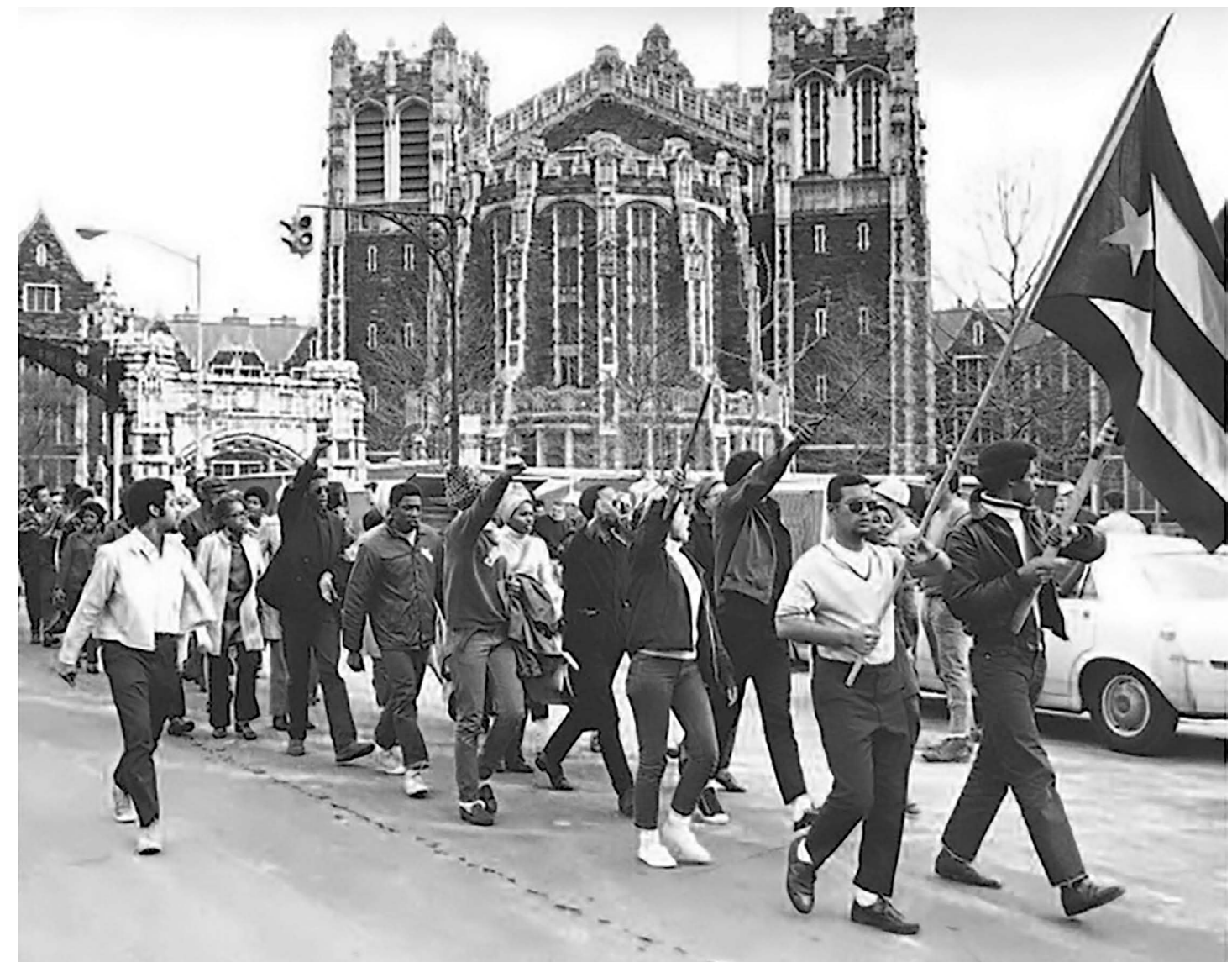
The persistent pressure of activist groups, students and par-

ents in New York eventually led to the founding of "Community College No. 7" (later named Medgar Evers College) in 1966-67 to serve poor and working-class communities of color in Brooklyn. At the same time, the CUNY Board of Higher Education came under pressure to adopt an "open admissions" policy, which would ensure that every New York city high school graduate was offered a seat in a CUNY college. The board finally approved the policy in 1966, forced to concede to the demands of increasingly insurgent New York residents and partly motivated by fear of a social revolution that would extract more radical forms of change in the university. The policy was not intended to take effect till 1975, offering some respite to the power brokers of the university. The administration was also compelled to introduce innovative pedagogical strategies and remedial teaching programs for underprepared students entering from broken public schools, most notably SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge), but their outreach was limited to a relatively small number of students in the 1960s. The inadequacy of the administration's measures to meet the growing demand for higher education, coupled with widespread social and political unrest, ultimately boiled over into a major confrontation in

1969.

In the wake of a decade of historic struggles, from the Civil Rights movement to the protests against the Vietnam War, more than 200 black and Puerto Rican students padlocked the gates of the City College of New York in April 1969 and renamed it the "University of Harlem." The protesters at CCNY were soon joined by other students of color as well as white allies, leading to mass rallies, demonstrations and occupations in Brooklyn College, Queens College, and Borough of Manhattan Community College. Their demands included an increased intake of Black and Puerto Rican students in CUNY colleges, a strengthening of remedial programs like SEEK, and the creation of new special programs geared towards preparing the new students of color for a college education. These student occupations and strikes were the culmination of months of negotiations and confrontations between the students and the administration. As CUNY descended into a state of siege, the New York City police was called in to suppress the student uprisings and retake the university buildings, and the various campuses remained militarized with their presence for several weeks after.

At Brooklyn College, student activists under the banner of



Black and Latino students and community members proudly march on City College demanding Open Admissions and Black, Women's, and Asian Studies Departments 1969 – source: <http://documentsofresistance.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/demonstration.png>

Black League of African-American Collegians (BLAC) organized with other student groups like Puerto Rican Alliance and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to pressure the administration to

acquiesce to their demands. In early May, these students, along with 40 white allies, occupied the President's office to present their demands, whereupon the police was called to confront them. Stu-

dents occupied various university buildings, spray-painted "power" and "revolution" across some of its walls, started small fires across campus, and declared, "We're not taking any more from the presi-



PSC demonstration at Chambers St. Near City Hall during the financial crisis of 1975, CUNY Digital History Archive, accessed July 16, 2018, <http://cdha.cuny.edu/items/show/5642>

dent!” As tensions escalated and police presence increased on campus, the administration issued a ban on “congregating in or near buildings, creating loud or excessive noise, or employing, inciting, or encouraging force or violence.” But the rallies and occupations continued. SDS led a mass demonstration of over a hundred stu-

dents to the dean’s office, where the students broke the dean’s door and inscribed their demands on the office walls.

On 12 May, in the largest incident of police repression against the student protestors during that period of ferment, 17 Black and Puerto Rican students from Brooklyn College were arrested,

violently manhandled, and their homes raided. All the arrested students, including two more who were soon indicted by the court, were charged with arson and rioting. The students were kept on Riker’s Island for four days, with their bail set at \$15,000 each till the courts ordered that the bail be reduced. A day after the ar-

rests, around 200 students rallied at Brooklyn college in support of the arrested students and to help collect bail. Students and faculty went on strike the following day to demand that the defendants be released from prison immediately and all charges against them dropped, that police presence on campus be removed, and that student demands for an open admissions policy, among others, be accepted immediately. The defendants were ultimately released by the courts on the grounds that there wasn’t enough evidence, but the unrest that spread across campus, and CUNY, with their arrest tipped the scales, making it difficult for the administration to ignore the students’ demands any longer. At the urging of the President, the Board was finally forced to implement the open admissions policy in the fall term of 1970.

The open admissions policy radically changed the demographics of the university. Enrollment for first-time students jumped from 19,959 in 1969 to 38,256 in 1972; Black students increased from 16,529 to 44,031; Puerto Ricans from 4,723 to 13,563, and even the number of enrolled white students increased from 106,523 in 1968 to 125,804 in 1972. In all, by 1975, CUNY had

created a racially and ethnically diverse pool of 253,000 matriculating undergraduates (a 55 percent increase in total enrollment since 1969), all of whom attended tuition-free if they were enrolled full-time. However, with the financial crisis of 1976 – the same year that the number of non-white students enrolled exceeded white students for the first time – which crippled New York city with a debt it could not market, tuition was imposed at CUNY for the first time. While the open admissions policy marked a decisive move towards a democratic and egalitarian education system, the subsequent introduction of tuition fundamentally eroded its emancipatory potential because it precluded a vast number of non-white students from lower economic backgrounds from going to college. By the end of the 1970s, there was a decline of over 62,000 students in enrollment, with a 50 percent decline in the number of black and Latino students in the entering class of 1980. Since then, CUNY students have had to incessantly fight to salvage and uphold the victories of the militant student struggles of the 1960s—victories that have been eviscerated by the gradual neoliberalization of the university these past four decades.

As we think back on the legacy of the revolution of May 1968, it behooves us to remember that “revolution” has animated the struggles and aspirations of the students at CUNY in more immediate ways than we can imagine in the current political climate. It becomes all the more important to pay heed to this radical history of CUNY at the Graduate Center, for our college remains the whitest of all CUNY colleges. Against an average enrollment of 23.7 percent white students across the university, 65.9 percent of the entering class of fall 2017 at the GC were white. Furthermore, as a result of the GC’s discriminatory two-tier funding policy, underfunded students find it particularly difficult to pursue their research when they are compelled to juggle multiple adjunct and research jobs to sustain themselves, as recorded in the testimonies collated by the Adjunct Project for this issue of the *Advocate*. As we continue to grapple with the recurring crises of the neoliberal university – from the increasing costs of tuition to the exploitation of adjunct labor – it is important to remember the last time that CUNY students said, “We’re not taking any more from the President!”

The Power and Political Potentials of Images

Zehra Husain

A political movement has been stirring in Pakistan. 26-year-old Manzoor Pashteen from South Waziristan, also called ‘Pakistani Che,’ leads the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), which translates into English as the Pashtun Protection Movement. PTM held a political rally on 13 May in the country’s commercial hub, Karachi, with thousands of people in attendance. It took Pashteen almost a day and a half to reach the rally from Islamabad. He was first barred from boarding his flight from Islamabad to Karachi. He then tried his luck at the Lahore airport, where he was detained by security officials, only to be released once his flight had taken off. Driving his way to Karachi, he was stopped twice for questioning. When Pashteen finally reached the site of a dimly lit rally (government authorities had not given PTM organizers permission to light the entire venue) in the Pashtun-dominated outskirts of Karachi, he said to an emphatic crowd: “It took me 40 hours to get here, even if it took 40 years I would have still made it.”

Bodies stopped from moving in space — bodies deemed so troublesome that state institutions manage their mobility by putting obstacles in their way — is one of the defining facets of racism. PTM stands against this institutional racism and routine harassment of tribespeople from what used to be known as Pakistan’s semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Until this May, FATA was under the

jurisdiction of the draconian Federal Crimes Regulation (FCR) law, which was introduced during British colonial rule. It has recently been merged with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province — a historic move on part of the soon to be departed present government.

The roots of state violence and harassment run deep in FATA’s history. In the 1920s and 30s, FATA was bombed by the British because the tribespeople rebelled against the colonizers. The militias that rose against the British were first empowered in the late 1800s to protect the borderlands from the threat of the Russian invasion. During the Cold War, militias in FATA were trained by US and Pakistani forces to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. After 9/11 the tables turned yet again, and five military operations have since taken place in FATA. The latest of these was the Zarb-e-Azb, which displaced about 5 million tribespeople from the region, and the people of FATA have been the victims of U.S.’s unmanned drone wars for the last thirteen years. One of PTM’s demands was the mainstreaming of FATA into Pakistani politics, since people of the region have traditionally been seen as only half-citizens of the country and denied representation. More importantly, however, they ask for the recovery of ‘missing people’ who have been picked up by the state under suspicion of colluding with militant organizations. The PTM asks for repatriations and the formation of a truth and reconciliation commission.

But what sparked the PTM? The movement itself started after the extra-judicial killing of a 27-year-old



Waziri man called Naqeebullah Mehsud, who was shot in a staged encounter by Karachi’s notorious police chief Rao Iftikhar. Fake encounters are commonplace in Karachi. They have employed to disproportionately target tribespeople from FATA and north of Pakistan, often migrants from working-class neighborhoods in the outskirts of the city fleeing military operations. Naqeeb was one of many who came to

Karachi to find employment and support their families.

Authorities stated that Naqeeb was a member of the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, a claim that has been denied by his family members. Mehsud and Waziri peoples from FATA routinely experience harassment and ethnic bias, because their last names are often taken to index terror links, and

Credit: Facebook

Naqeebullah Mehsud was an easy target for the police. Naqeeb's murder caused an outcry on social media, where the news of the fake encounter circulated alongside Naqeeb's images. Naqeeb's photographs showed him in his full glory: sporting a sharp hair-do and wayfarers, holding a fancy smartphone. Some people insisted upon his innocence by saying that he was an aspiring model. Others said he was looking into establishing a business in Karachi in order to provide for his family. The circulation of Naqeeb's images both on social media as well as in the mainstream media showed the kind of person that would could only be seen as the opposite of a terrorist.

Photographs are troubling objects. On the one hand, visual signs have historically been the most effective means of typifying people, especially criminals, by means of physiognomy and phenotype. On the other hand, photographs, especially portraits, grant dignity to their subjects. Allan Sekula famously defines this paradox of photography as its "repressive" and "honorific" function, respectively. In the case of Naqeeb's murder, the police force had no visual signs to typify him as a criminal. His alleged terror links were based on his last name, the fact that he was a native of Makin, once a heartland of Taliban, and that he travelled between South Waziristan and Karachi. In the absence of visible signs, non-visual markers of lineage were used to typify him as a terrorist, eventually leading to his violent murder. It is no wonder then that this void was filled by the hyper-visibility of Naqeeb's images. "The photographs of a sharply dressed handsome aspiring young model," wrote Pashteen in an op-ed for an English daily, became "a testament to his innocence".

PTM crystallized as a concerted action partly because of the affective investments evoked by Naqeeb's images. Moreover, the outcry against police chief Rao Iftikhar was so strong that he was stripped off his title and a case was lodged against him in the anti-terror courts. The potency of images, however, is not in any way limited to PTM. Over the years, there have been

protests against military institutions in Pakistan for the disappearances of activists from Balochistan, Pakistan's southwestern province, which has been demanding independence for two decades. In 2013, families of the missing Baloch embarked on a long



Credit: Facebook

march from Quetta to Islamabad, carrying ID photographs of their missing relatives and demanding a fair inquiry into the matter.

As material objects, ID photographs perform cer-

tain kinds of political work. As Elizabeth Edwards has noted, ID photographs are used ubiquitously in photo montages and albums. However, they are often remediated into serving different social and political uses: from memorializing the death of a loved one at

funerals to carrying enlarged ID photographs to protest the disappearance of activists. Karen Strassler argues that as objects, ID photographs are unique in that they are ensnared within the gaze of the state.

In their first instance, they form the system of documentation that renders bureaucracy and bureaucratic subjects legible. However, when repurposed in the form of enlarged portraits in political protests, these ID photographs are given a dual meaning. In their remediated forms, these images are haunted by the absence of individuals who were once given recognition by the state as its legal subjects and citizens. Now the images are used for making claims on the state to recover these missing peoples who have been illegally rendered neither dead nor alive.

Naqeeb's images did similar kinds of political work: making claims on the state against its violent and corrupt policing of Waziris and Pashtuns. However, they were more potent as standing evidence to Naqeeb's innocence, because they were a genre of images different from ID photographs. There was an excess of signs in Naqeeb's images that humanized him – in ways that one could say mimed class mobility for an economic migrant rather than just being a testament to his citizenship. Sitting on a Yamaha motorcycle against the rugged landscape of mountains, wearing a teal shalwar kameez, the brown in his hair accentuated by photo re-edits, Naqeeb performs a masculinity that is the opposite of what urban Pakistanis confer to people from the 'religiously orthodox' tribal areas. Being photographed with commodities evokes a sense of class mobility in literal terms, but these aspirations get entangled with a religiosity acceptable and appealing to urban Pakistanis. In the image where he is photographed praying next to a motorcycle against a hilly landscape, he performs the trope of a good Muslim: someone who is grateful for their wealth. In other words, this photograph suggests that being religious and being upwardly mobile go hand in hand. One can then read these images as evidence to claims of his innocence raised by his relatives, who assert that he wanted to open a clothing business or that he was an aspiring model.

Most of Naqeeb's images are inscribed with the name 'Veer'. In fact, his Facebook page, where he



posted most of these photographs was called 'Apna Veer' (Our own Veer). This was Naqeeb's alias. Some also say it was his nickname. Naming is one of the devices through which identity is performed. Veer appears in the background of the photograph in the mountains. In the second image, it is written on the arm rest of a visibly torn car seat. The image is imposed on a background

Credit: Facebook

that stands in sharp contrast to the tattered seat. A large waxing moon-like object stands in the background of a bright blue sky, emitting cloudy white light which touches the white of Naqeeb's clothes. This image evokes mobility in an almost supernatural way. Seen together, the use of the name Veer and the utility of this backdrop construct an endless medley of identities for Naqeeb.

Veer transforms Naqeeb's identity to a masculinity that is different from one attributed to tribespeople. The use of supernatural backgrounds transports him into an otherworldly place: a fantasy in comparison to the working-class neighborhood in Karachi and the war-ridden tribal areas. The image is almost comical in the hyper dreamscape it evokes. And yet the tattered chair on which Naqeeb is



seated points to something very real: the poor conditions of photographic studios and their dilapidated props, which economic migrants, and other working-class peoples use in order to escape the drudgery of everyday life.

Walter Benjamin characterizes "commodities-on-display" for their representational value and not merely for the use or exchange value in the market; they enthrall crowds even when the objects involved are far from their reach. In her analysis of material culture of modernity, Karen Strassler builds on Benjamin's formulation, adding that the use of these commodities – radios,

Credit: Facebook

cars, Vespas, airplanes – in studio portraiture transported the representational value of these objects into the home by capturing them in photographs. The use of cell phones, gold watches, motorcycles and wayfarer sunglasses in Naqeeb's images also have representational value. They visualize a certain kind of subject – one that aspires class mobility and is also religious – that is the opposite of the racialized tribal subject. These commodities do keep crowds enthralled, but in ways that are political. In line with Benjamin's insights about the democratizing effects of technology's ability to infinitely reproduce images,

Naqeeb's photographs heighten the prospects of popular engagement. Circulating on multiple media platforms, these images meet urban Pakistanis half-way: on the screens of their phones via social media and news websites. It is then that these images can be remediated to argue upon his innocence, and spark an entire political protest in the form of PTM which questions the nature and value of freedom in Pakistan. Naqeeb's murder is therefore a photographic event demonstrating the power and political potentials of images.

Ethnography as Espionage: *An Interview with Katherine Verdery*

Nicholas Glastonbury

In my first year at the Graduate Center, I had the luck and good instinct to enroll in Katherine Verdery's course "Anthropological Approaches to Property." Having already heard talk of Dr. Verdery's reputation and prowess, I decided on that very first day to try to make an impression on her. After class, I rushed up to introduce myself and to tell her about how well-suited my research interests were to hers. "Interesting," she said uninterestedly, and left the classroom. In many ways, the rest of my time at CUNY Graduate Center has been an effort to undo the embarrassment of that moment, and I have taken four classes with her as a result.

To say that Katherine Verdery looms large in the anthropology of socialism and eastern Europe would be an understatement.



While a student in her 2017 course on the Ethnography of Eastern Europe (the fourth of four courses I took with her), my classmates and I colloquially referred to the course as Verdery 101. The course offered a comprehensive examination of the many unexpected vicissitudes of socialism's collapse, from property restitution and commodity production to religious practice and embodiment. Socialism was not merely a political economic structure, but a cosmology unto itself, inexorably shaping all kinds of social relations and everyday experiences. In this regard, socialism is best understood through ethnography and related anthropological methods, an approach that has underpinned Dr. Verdery's entire academic career.

In 1973, Katherine Verdery was a graduate student embarking on her inaugural ethnographic fieldwork in rural Romania. Her first book, *Transylvanian Villagers*, draws on this fieldwork, analyzing the transformations of one particular village in the peripheries of European capitalism as imperial and national borders are drawn and redrawn, always with an eye to how local peasants identify with and relate to these histories. Over the next forty years, during her storied career as an anthropologist, Verdery made numerous return visits, tracking not only the demise of socialism and the infamous regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu but also the ramifications of culture, politics, and economy in a postsocialist world. In *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* she answers her titular questions by theorizing socialism and capitalism as temporalizing market structures. In *The Vanishing Hectare*, she describes the complicated, fraught process of privatizing Romania's collectivized farms, asserting ultimately that property is person-forming. And in *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* — my personal favorite — she makes the provocative claim that dead bodies animate the study of politics. Her other work touches upon national sentiment and ideology, ethnic identity, gender, and cultural politics.

From the very beginning of her fieldwork, Verdery was extensively surveilled by the Romanian secret police. In the 2000s, at the encouragement of a Ro-



manian friend, she visited to the Secret Police archives to see whether they had anything on her. What emerged was a document totaling more than 2,700 pages, far longer than any other scholar who conducted research under the communist regime in Romania. This mammoth document became the ba-

sis of her book *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*, and most recently in May 2018, *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*.

Since joining CUNY Graduate Center in 2005, Dr. Verdery has become a fixture of the department. To

me, Verdery's work seems well-suited to the culture of GC anthropology because it offers a model of anthropology that is politically engaged without being self-aggrandizing. Her approach probes the textures of everyday life for the many crucial contradictions that get passed over in macroscale analyses. In her work as well as her teaching, she uses scholarship produced by Eastern European scholars who continue to teach and write from Eastern Europe, a commitment to the ways in which the lived realities of postsocialism are understood by those who live it. Her approach to pedagogy in the classes I've taken with her, in which she managed to involve every single student in the room, has helped shape my own teaching philosophy and classroom pedagogy. Verdery quips in *My Life as a Spy* about her distance and cool-headedness toward her students, but the generosity of her thinking is unparalleled.

Given recent allegations that philosopher Julia Kristeva was a spy for the Bulgarian secret police, *My Life as a Spy* is a timely contribution that helps appraise the legacy of Cold War espionage, to think about the connections between spying and knowledge production, and perhaps most importantly, to interrogate the very epistemic category of espionage itself. *My Life as a Spy* is also a moving tribute to all those enduring relationships that, in spite of the duress of life under the secret police regime, made Verdery's ethnographic fieldwork and her career possible in the first place.

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Nicholas Glastonbury: What made you write this book after you had already published *Secrets and Truths*, which was also about your secret police file?

Katherine Verdery: I wanted to do a completely different kind of book. I wanted to do something that was much more personal, that could be used by students interested in field research or non-specialists who would be curious about what life was like behind the Iron Curtain and so on. *Secrets and Truths* was really not intended for anything other than the usual academic audience. I was asked to give a set of lec-

tures in honor of somebody and I couldn't say no, but I couldn't give my memoir as a way of honoring that person. It was kind of awkward, but that's why I have two different books.

NG: You also discuss the imminent reception of the Romanian translation of *My Life as a Spy* as a big question mark. Near the end of the book, someone suggests to you that you should have a different ending in the Romanian edition. Do you think that's going to happen?

KV: The ending is the same. But I did manage to say that I was condemning the secret police organization for what it did to people, so that ought to mollify some of them.

NG: You describe how your first encounters with the file conjured up these doppelgangers that you couldn't get rid of, they were haunting you and taunting you, in part because your secret police file in total more pages than your entire career's worth of written work...

KV: I might have caught up by now!

NG: Congratulations on that, then! But can you talk about why you find it so hard to dispel these doppelgangers?

KV: Well, it's easier to dispel them if I stop reading the file. But if I read it, there are just so many versions of me that different officers from different cities in different times put forth, and they all are convinced I'm a spy. But, as I say in the book, what they understand by spying is different, and

they all have different problems that they're interested in. So my attempt to get at what my friend Gillian Feeley-Harnik has referred to as a "culturally specific notion of spying" involved encountering my doppelgangers all the time. And this feeling of, my God, this person, they say it's me but it just doesn't feel like me. It was a very unsettling feeling all the way through, the way they questioned my motives, and so on.

NG: It's interesting that the version of you that they're conjuring in the file doesn't feel like you because that also seemed to be the relationship you in the present have to yourself in the 1970s and 1980s. You write about her in the third person and you say that you don't like her very much. And you draw parallels between "Kathy," as you refer to her, and "Vera" and all the other pseudonyms you're given. How did you decide to write about her in the third person?

KV: It was partly because she is also a doppelganger. She was the person who was getting described most of the time, and so that had the effect of alienating me from her because, especially at the beginning, I found I couldn't identify with the person that was emerging from their view of me. But then, I also feel that I am a very different person now from who I was then. I'd actually considered writing the entire book in the third person, but I decided that it worked better for

me to use the first person for the author of today and set Kathy off at a distance.

NG: That makes sense. In relation to this question of authorship, I'm thinking of things we read in your theory course, the postmodern stuff...

KV: Reflexivity...

NG: Reflexivity, and also ethnography as text, and the many concatenations of texts you have in this book. There are so many different forms of authorship taking place: being authored into the file by all of these different informers and officers; authoring this version of yourself in the past; your past fieldnotes, which you quote extensively from; letters you wrote; and then, on top of all that, you writing from the perspective of the present, trying to make sense of all of this. There's something very postmodern about that.

KV: I hope it's clear that I don't think of this as a postmodern text in the early sense of it, but without some of the work done at that time I wouldn't have even thought of doing this. As someone who's been critical of postmodernism and postmodern anthropology for a long time, I nonetheless felt somewhat empowered by it for these purposes. And, as you see, I have a blurb from somebody who would never have been on the back of any of my other books, Ruth Behar. And she was an appropriate person to ask for that.

NG: I found your description of fieldwork and how frustrating it is really compelling. That's not something that we ever really learn about, it's such a rarefied time.

KV: That's why I did it.

NG: Are there specific lessons that you want people like me and other anthropology students imminently going to the field to take from the book?

KV: I think the first is that, fieldwork is really quite difficult and you shouldn't be too hard on yourself if you're finding it difficult to do. It started getting more fun once I had done it for a while, when I had a cushion of information and could manipulate it in conversations with people. But it's just a difficult way of trying to gain knowledge about something, and you have to be constantly asking yourself: Am I getting in the way? How am I getting in the way? I thought the book might be useful as a kind of manual for students, precisely because as you say there isn't a lot of field training that talks about this. But I also think that, especially in the present, when so many governments are suspicious of their own people and are likely to be engaged in some kind of surveillance of them—it's not just the communists who did this—we should expect the possibility that the people we work with are going to be facing this kind of treatment. And if you took that completely seriously, you



Surveillance photo of "VERA" in her hotel room, 1985." p. 161

wouldn't do fieldwork at all. But rather, the point is to be as cautious as you can. My favorite thing in this entire file is when they describe how I've conducted myself with respect to some friends of mine, and they say, "this shows the care she takes with her relations with Romanians." Which, yes! Encouraging people to think about the possible effects that they might not have imagined is another goal.

NG: To that end, do you think that naiveté is an asset in the field? Because you say that Kathy couldn't have done her research except by being this bumbling, clumsy, naive person.

KV: I think naiveté helps, because it gives you a reason for asking people so many questions, because you genuinely don't know. Otherwise, you have experiences like what I describe when I'm asking people what can they tell me about one or another historical figure and they say, you shouldn't be asking me that, you should be asking the schoolteacher. So, our capacity for naiveté enables us to perform a role of knowledge seeker that is in fact genuine, but gives us a way of getting past the feeling of "why is he or she asking me this kind of stuff?"

NG: This is the sort of struggle that some of us are facing now, trying to write grant proposals and fellowship applications, and you have to seem as if you

already know exactly what it is you're looking for. I just know I'm just going to show up and throw my hands in the air.

KV: "Help!"

NG: [laughs]

KV: Well, we do have many different selves that we have to put on in this process, because indeed writing a grant proposal, you have to sound as if you've already done it. But then when you get there you present yourself—and for the most part it's a true self-presentation—as not knowing anything. So, it's tricky.

NG: When was the first time you knew with certainty that you were being surveilled, that it wasn't just some sneaking suspicion but that you knew without a doubt that you were being surveilled?

KV: Gosh, it was a long time ago. This might not have been the first time I knew I was being surveilled, but it's the first thing I can remember. I had a friend who was a chauffeur, a driver, for intra-European travel with trucks. He used to give me rides sometimes, and one time he said he was going into town and asked if I wanted to go. I said sure. He was driving this huge trailer on which he usually carried cranes around, so it's pretty big. And he dropped me off at the dollar store because I wanted to buy some coffee for people. And then, when he came back for me, we started driving back to town and he said, you



Surveillance photo of "VERA" loaded down with sacks, 1985." p. 20

might want to know that there's a guy behind us that I suspect is following us. And so he proceeded to drive this enormous truck at breakneck speed through various back alleys to try to shake the tail. [laughs] I'm assuming he was telling me what he knew, it wasn't that I knew it, but that he told me. It was a wonderful scene.

NG: Sounds like a scene from a movie, trying to go incognito in this massive truck.

KV: Right. [laughs]

NG: Why did you think that your integrity, your faith in transparency, your honesty, would exonerate you from suspicion?

KV: Because I had all kinds of very ethnocentric presuppositions that I wasn't really aware of. I just couldn't believe that they wouldn't read the evidence and say, "Okay, she's on the up-and-up." It didn't occur to me that their whole way of reading was completely different. I figured if I told the truth, they would understand that that was the truth. It never occurred to me that they might say, "Methinks the lady doth protest too much!" [laughs] So it was just a part of my basic immaturity and testimony to the fact that fieldwork training was very deficient in my early training. And I didn't know how to think about what I was doing.

NG: Transparency really takes a beating in this book.

KV: Another blow for trans-

parency!

NG: I was also struck by how the secret police is simultaneously so exacting in its surveillance and then also so bumbling. They misspell your name in every possible way imaginable, and they also completely miss so many things and make so many mistakes. For example, you mention that they didn't know you had received your PhD twelve years after you actually had. Can you talk about how these two tendencies coalesce into the way that surveillance operates as a form of statecraft?

KV: Interesting. They certainly were exacting in their surveillance. They were following me around and they were listening to telephone conversations and all of this kind of stuff, yes indeed. But partly, it's that each branch of the service that does each of these things—the people who transcribe the eavesdropping, the people who actually follow you, the people who are checking your correspondence and making sure you're not writing anything out or getting anything in that's bad—are all different people. The only person that has a prayer of actually putting all this together is the so-called case officer, who reads all the reports, but they had a lot of targets and they probably couldn't keep them all straight. It was one guy trying to absorb all this stuff and then use it to good effect.

But the other point that I make towards the end, where I have the story of the tomcat and the mouse...

NG: The target function, yeah....

KV: which is the most important thing about being under surveillance, is that they have to maintain this activity in order to confirm that they're carrying out their duty to the security of the state. To some extent, it's less important what they find than that they are constantly looking.

NG: That makes me think of your point that American anthropologists coming to Romania are affording the *Securitate* the opportunity to expand their reach in rural parts of the country. You say that as their target, you're a tool for them to expand their surveillance. It's a bit like the critique that Talal Asad takes up in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, talking about the notion that anthropologists are the "handmaidens of colonialism." He posits this binary that most ways of thinking about anthropology adhere to, in which anthropologists are seen either as handmaidens to colonialism or as champions of the downtrodden. He says we need a critique that is not one or the other, but is more nuanced, somewhere in the middle. But do you feel like you were a handmaiden to the Secret

Police?

KV: I don't know exactly how many the *Securitate* drew into the net to work on me. I counted it up at one point and I got seventy, but there could have been other people. But I do think that they were happy to have us Americans to get more contact with the villages. There were a lot of Americans in Romania in those years, the 1970s and early 1980s, because it was the easiest country to do fieldwork until the early eighties. So yeah, in that sense, we were the handmaidens of the secret police, as far as giving them access to more potential informants was concerned.

NG: Where do you think that leaves you?

KV: Very disturbed. [laughs] I didn't know it at the time, but... very disturbed. And the only thing that can counter that is thinking in terms of how people who knew me got a better sense of America and life in America. They were always asking me all these questions like, are there drugs all over the place, this that and the other, to combat the propaganda they were getting there. And I would say, people use drugs, not everybody. I wasn't necessarily the most patriotic American respondent, but they learned something. And I had several people whom I got to be pretty close to who would tell me things that

they wouldn't have told a Romanian, because they knew that I represented a neutral, safe person. One example of this is this couple, Ralf and Anna, whom I write about, who told me that they were planning to defect, and even their son didn't know that. There are ways in which we foreigners can also become a special kind of trusted person because of our position in society. And that's a positive gain. It maybe doesn't justify the whole enterprise, but it ameliorates it.

NG: It reminds me of a point you make in the book, when you talk about the "ambivalent position of the anthropologist: although not outsiders, we are not insiders either. Our work occurs in the space of difference that defines us as both part of and not part of the places we study" (262). This book is so fascinating in particular because you see concretely in your file, with remarkable precision, how the social fabric of the places where you do fieldwork is reconstituted and renegotiated because of your presence.

KV: Some time ago some person at the archive decided to make this documentary about me. We went out to the village and she interviewed a bunch of people and this guy was one of them. And she said something like, "you know, what difference



Katherine Verdery, 2018; all images used with permission from Duke University Press and Professor Verdery.

did it make that she was here?” And he said, “It was fantastic that she was here because she gave a wonderful example of what it’s like to work hard and conscientiously.” People around here tended to be a little bit lackadaisical and here was somebody who gave them a different image of work and the life of the scholar. I thought that was cool, I liked that.

NG: Can you tell me a little more about this documentary?

KV: The point of it was to fulfill some of the educational purposes of the archive. Part of its mandate is to give people access to their files, but also part of its mandate is to teach younger generations about the evil that was the secret police. And that’s their business. I participated because they said they wanted to have something they could use in their educational programs. We went out to the village and visited people, and then we went to the city of Cluj and visited a couple more people. The guy who did the filming is a very well-known Romanian filmmaker. And then there was a woman from the archive who was interviewing me. But she was always off-camera, and so she was always just a voice. At one point I said to her, “Get into the frame!” And she got very upset because she didn’t want to be. I said, “You’re just like the

Secret Police!” She got so furious! [laughs] But it just struck me that there was something very odd about this, how she wanted to remain invisible, just like some other people we knew!

[laughter]

KV: As for what’s happened with the film, I haven’t a clue. She told me that I should circulate it with the book, because it’s translated, it has subtitles. But I didn’t press that on Duke or the people doing the Romanian version. Because I asked my friend who’s translating the book into Romanian what she thought about this, and she said it would add significant cost to the total enterprise because we wouldn’t be able to charge the extra amount to the price of the book and still have it be saleable. So she said she really didn’t want to do it. My friend at the archive was very convinced that people were going to find this useful.

NG: In the book, you talk a lot about the archivists at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives. They make appearances every so often, you refer to them as colleagues, sometimes you ask them advice, and sometimes they’d offer advice unsolicited. What is their role in relation to the files themselves?

KV: There’s the archivist of the secret police who sits in the secret

police offices and goes through the files periodically and takes out stuff that’s old, or rebinds it, or takes stuff out that’s incriminating to somebody else. That person is known in the secret police organograms as the archivist. But then, I actually worked in a library, that was where I spent a lot of my time, that was its own kind of archive. I was reading stuff, I’d ask them to bring me the papers of so-and-so that the library happens to hold. And so I was reading it as an archive as well as a library. Those people were just scholars like anybody. They could be informers, but certainly not all of them were. I hope. [laughs]

NG: [laughs]

KV: Who knows.

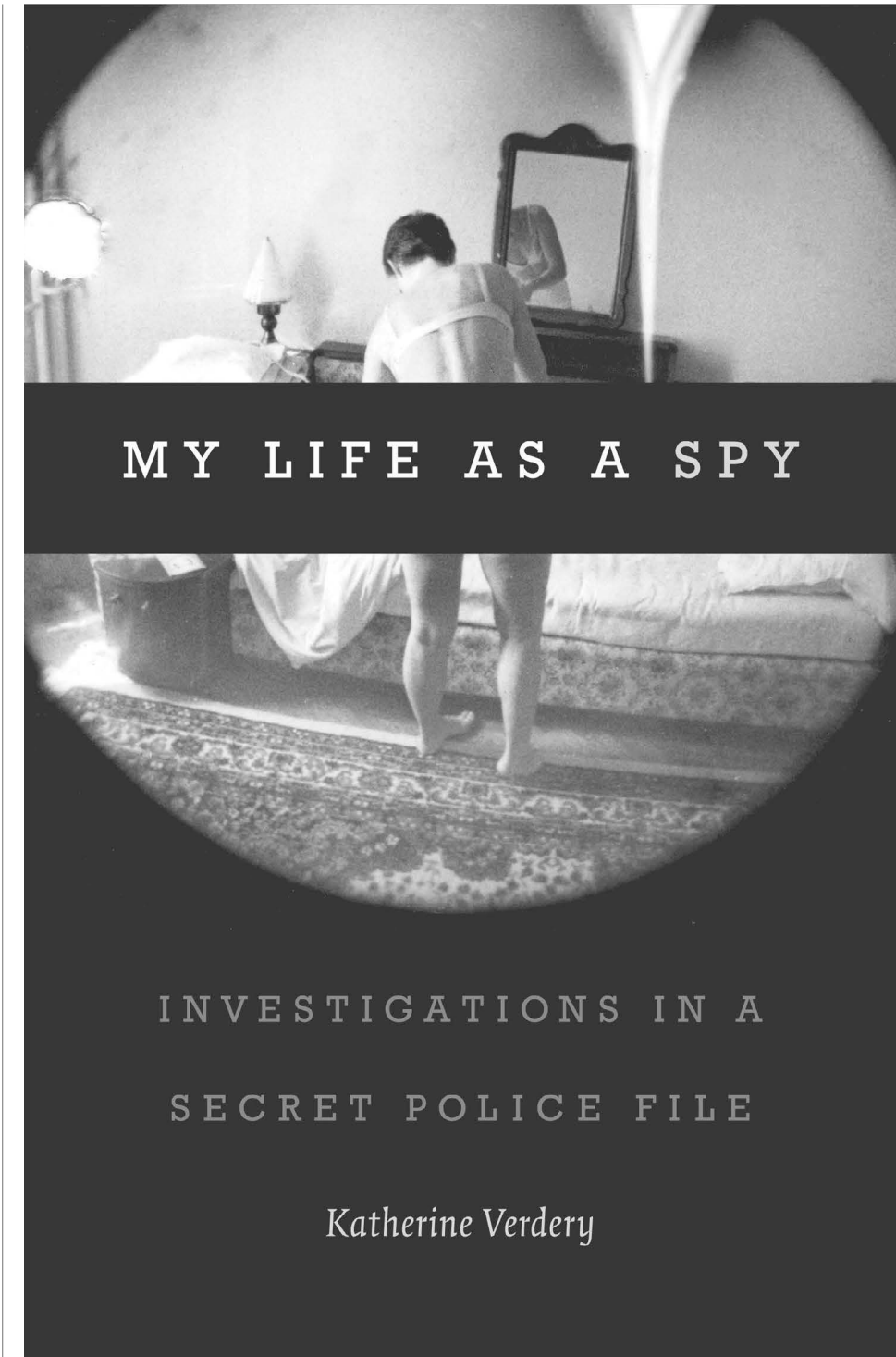
NG: You suggest such networks still exist in the Romanian Intelligence Service and were inherited from the Securitate. When you went back to do the fieldwork around your file and for this book, do you think that you encountered anyone who presently works for the Romanian Intelligence Service?

KV: I wasn’t aware of it but it’s quite possible. I heard a paper by a guy who’s from one of the Eastern European countries and he was at a conference that I was also at in 2009, twenty years after the collapse of the regimes. This paper was about how the secret police of his home country were

alive and well in the present day. He was arguing that the whole business class in his country were either former secret police people or else connected with them. And I called him up some time after the conference because I wanted to cite the paper, and I said, “Have you published that paper?” He said, “Um, no, because I was contacted by someone that I suspect was part of the secret police of my country and advised not to continue with this line of inquiry.” In order to write or talk about him, I have to make up a pseudonym for him and I can’t say what country he’s from. It never stops. [laughs]

NG: That’s wild! So, changing tack: you organize your memoir around the contents of the secret police file rather than necessarily around your life and fieldwork. The events of your fieldwork are a big part of the memoir, but it’s very much structured around the file and what the file says about you. Why did you structure it according to the file itself?

KV: Originally, I had the chapter on the 1970s and the chapter on the 1980s, and then just one chapter with some of the stuff that’s at the end. And I decided that it was better for me to divide it up and have this “Ruminations” thing at the very end, in which I try to step back and make sense of the whole thing. But I couldn’t figure out another way to write it that wouldn’t



have taxed the reader too much. When I was reading the file myself, it was really very confusing. They would have a whole slew of documents that were just correspondence that they translated from English. A whole pile of the documents were stories of following me on many different dates. The file was not organized chronologically, so I thought it would be interesting to violate its premises by organizing my book chronologically. Because I thought it would be too hard to make a story out of it for readers not familiar with this kind of text. It took me a long time to figure out how to write this book, and I'm sure there's decisions I could have made differently.

NG: I think violating the premise of the file is itself interesting as a way of reclaiming it, not letting them continue to have control over the terms of your life or your presence in Romania.

KV: Right, exactly.

NG: You write that surveillance is “often just a form of socializing” (92). Can you explain what you mean by that?

KV: Some of the people that were filing reports on me would be talking with the police about the coffee that we'd had, or they would have invited me to dinner and we would spend the whole evening drinking or eating, and that would turn into the basis for an informer's report. So that's what I meant. There's a blurry boundary between when they're being the secret service's tool and when they're being my friend. It's not exactly easy to sort that out. And it's different from the high-tech surveillance of our age in this country now, which is entirely done without face-to-face work.

NG: That also reminds me of the central premise of a big part of the book which is that ethnography itself is a kind of espionage.

KV: Over and over again in my file, I encountered their worry that I was collecting “socio-political information” that I would publish, creating an unpleasant image of Romania abroad. And they were *really* concerned with Romania's image abroad. When I saw these repeated references to my collect-

ing “socio-political information,” I said to myself, you know, they really aren't wrong about this. The line between ethnography and espionage was getting thinner and thinner as I thought about it. Because I wasn't in there to create a nice public image of Romania. That's what they wanted me to do. They wanted me to write a book saying, “This is the most wonderful country with the most wonderful people, and great scenery, and a wonderful, enviable past.” And that's not what I was there for.

NG: Maybe we can end by talking about the connections you make between your surveillance by the secret police and the proliferation of new forms of surveillance in the contemporary era. What kinds of insights do you think this book offers for understanding surveillance as it works today?

KV: I deleted, or tried to delete, my Facebook account when I started really reading this file. Because your Facebook account is the most remarkable instrument of surveillance ever developed, and it's voluntarily participated in by virtually everyone. But the two forms, the form I experienced and the form that's going on now, are quite different because the form I experienced was based directly on social relationships. They're creating relationships with their informers who had relationships with me. It was what I would call labor-intensive; whereas the stuff going on in the US is mainly capital- or technology-intensive. Although Facebook does manipulate personal relationships, it doesn't involve manipulating them in quite the same way. It makes you want to be an island.

Katherine Verdery is Julien J. Studley Faculty Scholar and Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her new book, *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*, is out now from Duke University Press.

Señora Puerta

Neoliberal Fictions

Nandini Ramachandran

Defining neoliberalism is one of the most vexing conundrums facing the contemporary academy. Most accounts trace neoliberalism — whether specified as ideology or governmentality; process or epoch — to a structural breakdown of post-war capitalism in the North Atlantic world during the 1970s that led to the untethering of capital from nation-states. This entailed shifts in both domestic and international policy making, a recalibration of the scales of production, and an exploration into new forms of sovereignty and subjectivity.

Scholars have emphasized different aspects of this historical conjuncture. David Harvey argues that neoliberalism is a process of accelerating “creative destruction,” a constant deferral of the immanent crises of capitalism through flexible accumulation and a renewed assault on labor power. While neoliberalism consistently fails at revitalizing accumulation, Harvey notes, it has been incredibly successful at entrenching inequality and restoring class power, undoing the achievements of both union organizing and decolonizing movements. Building on Harvey's insights about the “scalar fix” as a strategic recalibration of the geographies and chronotopes of production, Neil Brenner theorizes neoliberalism as an accumulation strategy that de-

Credit: Sophia Rolph – source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/574068283725114647/>



depends on an irresolvable tension between fixity and motion. If the postwar era was characterized by the entrenchment of the nation-state as a nested federation, Brenner explains, the neoliberal era disarticulated the nation on two levels: a ceding of regulatory authority to the world market, on the one hand, and “glocal” cities (such as New York) on the other.

Legal scholars and anthropologists have approached the deterritorialization/ reterritorialization dialectic that Brenner and Harvey identify by framing neoliberalism as a question of how these uneven geographies are managed and sustained through changes in global and local governance. Such scholarship often provides a useful view of neoliberalism from beyond the North Atlantic world. Elizabeth Dunn, for instance, traces the “mobile sovereignty” of humanitarian aid, arguing that it is often mobilized to discipline states, empowering their reach in certain arenas (such as surveillance) even as it encroaches on their legitimacy by providing the pastoral care that once legitimated state power. This enables what she calls “pastoral hunting,” in which states must persistently locate internal enemies and threats that they can defeat in order to justify their existence.

Aihwa Ong, in a similar vein, follows the legal scholar Stephen

Gill in arguing that the political efficacy of neoliberalism depends on identifying “sovereign exceptions” to a rule of law that is conceived on an abstract plane of human interchangeability and the formal equality of nation-states, even as it is enacted upon (and through) a material plane of intensifying differentiation. Such ethnographic interventions are an exploration into the institutional arrangements of neoliberal capital, the processes that result in “the nested hierarchical structures of organizations which can link the local and the particular with the achievement of abstract labor on the world stage.”

Ong and Dunn analyze neoliberalism as an innovation within liberalism as a mode of bureaucratic reason. They highlight what Stuart Hall once called the “managerial marketization” imposed by neoliberal governance, in which speculation replaces planning as the preferred modality for arriving at desired institutional outcomes. “Triangulation was its life-blood, its leading tendency” Stuart Hall notes in the context of New Labour politics in England, but the observation applies just as well to the humanitarian aid projects that Elizabeth Dunn studied in Georgia and their well-intentioned “ad hocery,” which relied on quick fixes, approximations, and temporary solutions rather than the plodding

intelligence usually associated with the exercise of bureaucratic agency. Baked into such “ad hocery” models are justifications that invoke immediacy and insecurity, and the steady encroachment of such crisis discourse into daily life produces and stabilizes epistemological practices that value quantitative facts (as the “objective” basis for expert prediction) rather than qualitative context (as the “subjective” experience for a holistic solution).

Frederic Jameson has often reminded us that speculation and standardization are dialectically related; speculative thought thrives by reproducing generic frameworks. Jameson argues that speculative thought provides “solutions without problems,” by which he means that the narrative forms of generic fiction allow us to reframe problems posed by political or social theory by combining the disparate “moments” of an otherwise invisible or incommensurable totality. A space opera, for instance, reconciles the “divergent streams” of social temporality—lived experience and historical time—by allowing readers to witness generational time *as* lived experience. Jameson’s recognition of the “constitutive antinomies” of utopian thought—its ability to suspend paradox rather than resolve it; to restore what Wittgenstein once called the “civic status of a

contradiction”—distinguishes his approach from that of Raymond Williams, who suggests that “heuristic” and “systematic” utopias are distinct strategies of extrapolation. (David Harvey makes a similar, if orthogonal, distinction between “utopias of form” and “utopias of process.”) Jameson argues that the power of speculative thought is precisely that it overhauls categories of thought through the imposition of narrative discipline *upon received reality*. Any extrapolation is thus, to make a crude distinction, a feature of plot rather than thought. Speculation, for Jameson, enables us to re-evaluate causes, not effects, such that utopia provides a narrative technology that allows us to isolate what Walter Benjamin might call fresh monads.

Jameson turns his attention to dynamic recalibration of the territorial organization of capitalism in the essay “An American Utopia,” which includes a suggestive interlude about the relationship between speculation and standardization. Increasingly, he writes, the global has become so inaccessible and yet so fundamental to lived experience that it is effectively “unimaginable,” while the local has been so particularized that it is “unthinkable.” This intensifying polarization between the universal and the unique has dissolved their

Hegelian synthesis, the individual, and the resulting phenomenological gap is increasingly bridged by “*sheer standardization*,” the production of entities of equal value that no longer have anything distinctive or particular about them, but which also do not count as unique in the sense of singularities. They are thus the grotesque shadows of universalities that no longer function to organize anything, but which are equally inaccessible to reason or sense alike: both tasteless and unthinkable at once.”

Jameson goes on to argue that this “new standardization” is a diagnostic shorthand for postmodernity, and that “it is strikingly confirmed by the evolution of politics itself, whose extraordinary verities throughout history seem today to have been themselves reduced and standardized on a well-nigh global scale.” Global politics today (insofar as such a spatiotemporal totality can be grasped) is, for Jameson, marked by this animosity to historicity, replacing its “extraordinary verities” with a source of standardized, all-purpose truth: the world market. This suggests to him a renewed dialectic of homogeneous space and instantaneous time, in which space annihilates time by freezing it. Jameson thus theorizes the speculative standards characteristic of postmodernity as geared to

the production not of the future as such, but of the very next instant. His intervention, however, isn’t about the empirical reality of neoliberalism as much as of its dystopian dream: this is the market standard it seeks to impose, even as the project of generating it introduces inadvertent particulars and hostile singularities.

A lot of scholarship links this turn to speculative standards to the increasing influence of finance capital in the global economy. In *Capitalizing on Crisis*, Greta Krippner traces the roots of the financialization of the US economy to the political unwillingness of successive governments to continue allocating increasingly scarce resources. In the early decades of the postwar period, she explains, the state controlled the supply of credit to the economy by imposing interest-rate ceilings on commercial banks. As inflation became an endemic problem within a contracting economy, US policymakers started to control the price of credit rather than the supply of credit, assuming that the market would allocate scarce credit more efficiently than the state could. Instead, however, demand expanded even as credit grew more expensive, and foreign capital flooded the US market once the dollar standard was abandoned. Policy decisions meant to more effectively regulate the distribution of

limited credit thus produced an economic environment of apparently limitless credit, deferring the underlying crisis by three decades. This extensive reliance on expanding credit to fuel the economy allowed, Krippner argues, for financialization, in which it is securitization (the reification of risk) rather than commodification (the reification of labor power) that generates profits.

A focus on financialization provides an inadequate account of neoliberalism as a process characterized by polarized economic geographies; as Marx noted, interest-bearing capital depends upon industrial and extractive capital to produce value, if in increasingly attenuated ways. Krippner's account also indicates, however, a decisive ideological entrenchment: that the free market, defined by free competition, could more efficiently regulate the economy than the state, and that this presumed efficiency conferred an automatic legitimacy upon it. This depends, in turn, on the conception of an economy as a bounded sphere of independent action. One incisive historical account of the economy as an epistemological object (and the attendant invention of the science of economics) is Susan Buck-Morss' "Envisioning Capital," which considers how it was that the allocation and measurement of scarce resources became *the* question for economics, even as the material horizon

of the civilization so produced was theoretically limitless.

Buck-Morss notes that the liberal democratic tradition rests on a collective forged through depersonalized exchange, and that Adam Smith, like Marx after him, recognized that the motive engine of capitalism was the disciplining of desire. As Marx pointed out, production is the governing moment within the totality of the economy because it (re)produces the need that commodities claim to satisfy. Unlike Marx, Smith failed to recognize that the logical circuit between production and consumption doesn't reflect an equally seamless historical circuit; in the real world, producers and consumers were and continue to be very differently situated people.

While there is no theoretical "outside" to Smith's political economy, there was an absolute outside — the state — and it was only by tethering the "civilization" produced by the market to territorial nations that Smith could make a normative claim for the virtue of an invisible hand that steadily multiplies commodities.

The economy's assumed imperviousness to interference is central to Smith's argument. The economy *should not* be externally regulated because it *cannot* be externally regulated: it resists capture because everyone is dynamically implicated, and this is what, in Smith's tautological rea-

soning, ensures that the invisible hand will weave a multiplicity of interested selves into a cohesive society. Neoclassical economists would perform a similar sleight of hand a century later, when they presumed a "growth model" for the economy instead of theorizing one.

For Smith, the autonomy of the economy is a defensive position meant to contest the totalizing gaze of the sovereign state; the virtue of the market is that it provides an alternate ground for ascertaining and potentially challenging the legitimacy of state action. As Foucault charts in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, later iterations of economic thought have retained their faith in the invisible hand even as the complexity and reach of the economy expanded dramatically. The sociologists Bockman and Eyal develop this insight, suggesting that the entrenchment of neoliberal dogma in the postwar world was the product of a longstanding conversation between American libertarians and Soviet market socialists— a conversation that was mediated by a translation strategy adapted from Hayek and the Austrian school. Bockman and Eyal trace the "hybrid and dialogic origins of neoliberalism," to this transnational discourse, which was mobilized by both sets of participants in their respective contexts: to fight for deregulation in the US and to reform Soviet socialism.

For Hayek, as for his American acolytes, socialist planned economies presented a privileged exception to free market capitalism that could be harnessed to criticize Western welfare states. Bockman and Eyal explain that in Hayek's analysis, "the advantage of markets lay in the fact they provided dispersed, accurate, real-time information, coupled with precisely calculated incentives, in a way that allowed economic actors to 'coordinate' their decisions and actions." Planning was abhorrent to this free flow of information, distorting market signals and mechanisms. Hayek thus reiterated Adam Smith's emphasis on the *invisibility* of the market as a normative precept, arguing that effective coordination was impossible to plan from a position external to the market. Hayek didn't believe, however, that this invisible hand was natural; it had to be constructed, maintained, and facilitated. Despite this constructivism, he was, like Smith, faced with the dilemma of explaining precisely *how* this coordination occurs, and Soviet socialism offered him an excellent counterfactual to support his polemical claims: central planning, he argued, resulted in widespread and large-scale "market distortions" that were also introduced, in subtler ways, by Keynesian state interventions. Hayek proved his absent norm, thus, by referring to an existing exception.



Charlotte Bracegirdle, New York 1932 - Acrylic on print - 11 x 15cm

The birth of neoliberalism as a political and economic epoch is most easily analyzed by highlighting two related metonymic substitutions: the market for the economy, and efficiency for justice. If the onset of liberalism as a political philosophy is characterized by an insistence on the *cultivation* of the economy as a natural, just, and autonomous sphere of exchange, neoliberalism is marked by its emphasis on the necessary *endurance* of the competitive market as a site of eternal truths.

The curious temporal structure of endurance—a thing that was and must continue to be, simultaneously completed and continuous—suggests an inherited, unchanging object that must be preserved within a nurturing environment through assiduous effort and active intervention. The overwhelming activity of endurance in the face of imminent threats and constant crisis supports, paradoxically, the “politics of the next instant” that Frederic Jameson notes is characteristic of contemporary society. The indisputable truth of the free market is the unyielding precipitate of a vast and fluid array of historical and social relations, and its reality-effects are, in this sense, opposed to both positivist teleology (in which transformed relations produce new and necessary objects) and subjunctive speculation (in which new objects yield fresh relations).

Neoliberal thought naturalizes and eternalizes market competition, even as it dramatically transforms social life and political processes to strain towards the unrealizable goal of a unified space of speculative variation with no damaging or mitigating “externalities.” This is a transition that Foucault captures when he argues that what distinguishes neoliberalism from liberalism as political rationality is that “the state must govern *for* the market rather than *because* of the market [and] the problem thus becomes... what will be the effect on the art of the government of this general principle that the market is what ultimately must be produced in government?”

Wendy James traces the implications of Foucault’s insight about this “generalization of enterprise” in *Undoing the Demos*, where she discusses the institutional changes and transformations in subjectivity demanded by the pervasiveness of market rationality and the rise of finance capital. James argues that Foucault inadequately theorizes the shrinking space for politics in the neoliberal era—the evacuation of *homo politicus* by *homo oeconomicus*—and criticizes his “indifference to democracy and to capital.” For Foucault, she explains, the subjectivity implicit within *both* neoliberalism and liberalism is *homo oeconomicus*, the man of interest—the schizophrenic economic subject, simultaneously a disciplined producer and an insatiable consumer, that Buck-Morss identifies in Adam Smith’s philosophy.

As Foucault explains in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, however, Adam Smith’s *homo oeconomicus* was significantly updated by American neoliberals from the Chicago School, who recognized that a founding flaw within classical economics was its evasion of the labor question. They argued that labor ought to be considered, in itself, as a form of capital, in which people could “invest” by educating themselves and marrying appropriate partners. Foucault marks this transition: “The characteristic feature of the classic conception of *homo oeconomicus* is the partner of exchange and the theory of utility based on a problematic of needs. In neoliberalism... *homo oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself.” This line of argument is ironically reminiscent of Marx’s observation that a worker belongs not to himself, nor even to a singular capitalist, but to the capitalist class, “and it is his business to dispose of himself, that is, to find a purchaser within this capitalist class.”

The difference, of course, is that a worker sells his labor power—an abstraction that corresponds to no standard—while the entrepreneur sells his differentiated ability, a particularity measured almost exclu-

sively by comparison to market standards. Wendy Brown argues, further, that while Foucault *notes* the shifting face of *homo oeconomicus*, he fails to register the political and social consequences implicit in this conception of people as self-investing human capital, partly because of his relative lack of interest in the lived reality of neoliberalism. Foucault emphasizes changes in the “art of government” once the state is assumed to produce for the market, but what sort of market is being produced?

The lectures in *The Birth of Biopolitics* examine closely a certain origin story for neoliberalism, tracking thinkers from Smith through Hayek through Friedman, but they have nothing to say about how market standards and market fictions and market subjects reproduce themselves as part of an ongoing collective project. *The Birth of Biopolitics*, I mean to say, offers us no insights about how (or even why) the market *endures*.

The problem of endurance is especially acute in financial markets, where money and words are brought together in circuits of accelerating velocity, and all transactions between these expressive currencies accrue both risks and profits. One of the features of our current juncture is an ongoing metonymic substitution of stock markets for markets as such, and that process of extraction demands an extensive and unequal collaboration between market participants and market victims as well as between market fictions and market standards. Markets have to be performed to retain their ontological status, and the implications of that performativity have engaged a growing field of scholars. Michel Callon argues that economic discourse frames (and partly invents) the phenomenon it claims to describe by activating institutional networks and promoting what he calls “calculative agency.” This “formatting” of economic activity enacts, in other words, the boundary between politics and economics as distinct spheres of action, even as it dissolves the internal and constative coherence of the economy.

Judith Butler cautions us against Callon’s “hermeneutic reading of performativity,” arguing that Callon assumes an automatic correspondence between theory and object. Theory can *tend* to establish a phenomenon, she writes, but it can just as easily fail, and this possibility of “misfire” must be built into any analysis that deploys a performative approach. Theories, she writes, are always brokering failure—such failure “is what is what necessitates its reiterative temporality”—and she concludes her essay by arguing that political theory and economic theory both operate through a certain disavowal of one another, while the real challenge is to undo the conditions that allow for the “sovereign agency” of either by thinking them together.

Caitlin Zaloom, meanwhile, develops (and partly challenges) Callon’s insights ethnographically, describing the monk-like discipline that financial traders cultivate in order to speculate *in* the market rather than *about* the market. Speculators, Zaloom writes, are encouraged to swiftly react to the market but never to examine it (or “out-think” it), which requires an almost theological submission to the transcendental market. In Zaloom’s account, markets appear to work through revelation rather than interpretation, and traders must create a “boundary around the space of the market [so as] to hone and execute purified economic logics when they are dealing.” One technique they deploy in this quest to create the hallowed space of the market is temporal discontinuity; in order to sufficiently immerse themselves in the market, “traders must block out external influences, including the memory of success or failure” and thus, she explains, the best speculative practice resists narrative. It is this strict adherence to the boundaries of the market and its delimitation from ordinary “emotional” life, coupled with an assurance about the generalized applicability and ineffable power of the reality so produced, that standardizes such speculation into science, not the arcane calculus of derivative-pricing.

Zaloom's ethnography suggests that Callon's thesis— that markets are the ontological residue of vast and fragmentary regulatory discourses— is only partially true. Markets might be produced by information, but they remain, for precisely that reason, impenetrable to knowledge, at least for those actors who are most engaged with them. Further, if financial markets resist both interpretation and narrative— if they have finally become, as Smith and Hayek both so ardently desired, invisible— how are they to be made visible again?

This essay has suggested that neoliberalism is a successful utopia in the Jamesonian sense — it suspends its polarities — and it has, like any fully realized utopia, powerfully dystopian dreams and effects. But it remains unclear how the stratified fictions of neoliberalism are to be dismantled, or even questioned, which is perhaps why the cultural production of more provisional utopias has declined so sharply since the 1970s. Contemporary popular culture manufactures messiahs rather than utopias, having seemingly ceded structural transformation to an inevitable capitalism and imagining only superhuman transformations of agency. How does one, then, narratively capture the neoliberal oscillation between (theoretical)



Chien-Chi Chang -USA. New York City. 1998. A newly arrived immigrant eats noodles on a fire escape – <http://pro.magnumphotos.com/Asset/-2S5RYDWJKXG6.html>

fragmentation and (dystopian) salvation?

All utopias are unstable, and one fundamental instability within neoliberal discourse is its emphasis on endurance— the sense of an ending both impending and impossible— and the concomitant call to simultaneously navigate both immediacy and duration. This collapsed temporal horizon is most obvious in the politics of the next instant, in which it is the future, rather than the past, that is conceived through homogenous time and standardized space. This instability is sharply crystallized in the dilemma of how financial markets can be narratively represented. The question thus becomes: what kinds of literary forms can critically represent *their* reality, especially once standardization has harnessed and partly disabled speculation?

The literary scholar Leigh Claire La Berge frames this quandary through a discussion of what she calls “the financial form.” Building on Jameson’s famous essay about postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, she argues that his focus on fragmentation and the collapse of narrative is only half the story, because it ignores capital’s persistent hegemony over lived reality and its ability to consistently refuse alternate imaginaries. Instead, she argues, we must inves-

tigate the relationship *between* the aesthetic modes of postmodernism and realism, and the ways in which the burden of representing contemporary capitalism is distributed between them. Realism anchors the lived reality of neoliberal finance, while postmodernism abstracts and refracts its effects. Together, she explains, they present the financial form as a cohesive and yet incoherent totality.

“The logic of finance” she explains “is sutured between a description (which is repetitive) and a transaction (which is additive). A thing, or person, has to be described and a time period delimited based on that description. It is between these two operations that a time/space matrix of finance forms.” This intimate encounter between representation and accumulation in the “logic of finance”



Fredric Jameson – source: https://www.pinterest.com/offsite/?token=960-375&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.combinedacademic.co.uk%2Fjameson-on-jameson&pin=504614333220851510&client_tracking_params=CwABAAAADDc5OTE5MTEyNjAzMwA

is why La Berge theorizes the financial form as “an organization in which the field of representation is simultaneously indexical and value-producing—the indexing itself is a form of evaluation.” If one of the dystopian dreams of neoliberal financialization is to commodify all representation, as La Berge argues, its recursive circuits can be traced critically by engaging moments when texts display an awareness of their own material conditions of possibility. She calls this form of criticism “capitalist realism” in an earlier essay, arguing that it interrogates “the ways in which the ‘reality’ of production is incorporated into and interacts with the modes of representation... the capitalist realist mode interrupts and disorganizes itself, through its incorporation of other genres and through its desire to show the processes of its own commodification.”

La Berge’s call for a reinvigorated realism provides the ground upon which Jameson’s utopian “universal army” can be imagined. I don’t intend to engage Jameson’s (somewhat dubious) utopian projections in detail; I only want to note that his call for the universal army is born out of the recognition that what we need today are utopias premised not on revolutionary ruptures but rather on revolutionary endurance—we need visions not of how utopias are made, but of how they may be sustained. Jameson uses his vision of the universal army to stage an assault on the iron law of efficiency, arguing that we have to displace efficiency from a foundational value into a strategic one, and thereby overhaul the crippling complex of ideologies that bolster neoliberal technocracy: progress, growth, expertise. Yet Jameson warns us against a reactionary loathing for modernity that renounces “everything for which today we have a grateful and complicit enthusiasm” as well as the bland functionalism and uniformity suggested by his advocacy of the universal army. His “cultural revolution” against efficiency also demands the cultivation of a deep reflexivity—“an im-

placable... even intolerable negativity to be trained against... the positivist and empiricist world they inevitably construct.” “Capitalist realism” instantiates a similar critical stance.

La Berge’s example for exemplary “capitalist realist” text is the television show *The Wire*, which spent its first four seasons “realistically” depicting the failures of neoliberal social institutions and then turned its critical lens upon *itself* in the final season by introducing the sensational plot of an invented serial killer. The structural violence of the first four seasons is realistic, La Berge notes, because it is committed in the service of accumulation. It is taken as obvious, by the show and by its audience, that people are motivated to accumulate money, even when their pursuit of it results in murder. Violence committed in the pursuit of gratification must be explained its own right, through criminal psychology rather than institutional critique, and with reference to specific murderers rather than the structural contexts that made their violence possible.

As La Berge puts it, “psychology disavows economy; economy disavows interiority” and the challenge of the fifth season—the speculative impulse, if you will—was to hold both these standard assumptions in a productive tension. Like McNulty within the show, *The Wire* “sells its own realism” and thereby, she argues, discards the nostalgia that haunts most realisms: the dream of a return to a simpler past of the welfare state, community policing, loving marriages, and clean cities. The nostalgia of return valorizes the imagination of a decaying present and a bleak future; a refusal of that return, as Jameson reminds us, revitalizes the political possibilities implicit in Raymond Williams’ famous observation that actually achieved socialism will be vastly more complex than capitalism.

Settler Marxism and the Murdered and Missing Revolutionary Actors

Sean M. Kennedy

The fucking murders are like a strike, friend, a wild fucking strike.
— Roberto Bolaño, 2666

In the central narrative of the late Roberto Bolaño's sprawling novel 2666, a black U.S. sportswriter named Fate, on assignment in "Santa Teresa," a fictional version of Ciudad Juárez, learns about an epidemic of murdered women in the border city. Breakfasting near the sports arena where a boxing match will take place, he notices everyone talking about something and asks his fixer about it. The murders of women, his compañero says, "bloom": "Every so often...they're news again and the journalists talk about them. People also talk about them again and the story grows like a snowball until the sun comes up and the fucking ball melts and everyone forgets and returns to work." Fate comments on the reference to "work" and his friend goes on, saying: "The fucking murders are like a strike, friend, a wild fucking strike." (My translations from the Spanish.)

Feminicide, as Bolaño suggests in 2666, is a potent way of seeing relations of labor, violence, and power, especially across the three settler states of North America, the vaunted "new world" of European empire. Moreover, following the comparison to labor striking, feminicide is a key lens through

which to think the refusal to work differently, and with a greater potential for revolutionary change. By broadening the target from the wage relation to *all* relations of exploitation, first and foremost those structured by gender and race, which ramify the brutalities of capitalism, the world to come will have a better chance at freedom from all hierarchy and coercion.

As Bolaño makes clear in 2666, the women affected by feminicide are largely Indigenous and employed in the maquiladoras and industrial parks that sprung up in the aftermath of the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994. As U.S. companies lowered their labor costs by outsourcing production to Mexican workers, and narco-capitalists took advantage of the liberalized economy to enhance their own companies through intimidation and fear, Indigenous and darker-skinned women bore the brunt of the bio-political carnage, toiling for sub-minimum wages in subhuman conditions when they weren't exterminated outright.

The epidemic of murdered and missing women in Juárez, like that of women who have disappeared in the U.S. and Canada, is a contemporary iteration of the colonial scene of conquest, genocide, and en-



Esténcil de Roberto Bolaño en Barcelona en 2012. (Barrio de Sant Antoni) – source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/Roberto_bolaño.jpg

slavement. In this scene, women are always disposable. They can be used for sex or household service, field work or procreation. They can be killed because of European settlement—whether by germs or colonial militias—or through the slow violence of the Middle Passage and the plantation. And while this historical configuration of forces may have been particular to (and particularly severe in) the Americas (the Américas), versions of it played out wherever European empires vied for control, territory, and profit. Indigenous women everywhere were simultaneously the most and least valued in heteropatriarchal societies: objects that could be utilized when needed and discarded when not. Feminicide thus presents an opportunity to think beyond the narrow confines of labor as defined by orthodox Marxists, unions, and single-issue activists to query value more generally.

Fate, in 2666, finds the parallel between feminicide and labor striking “odd,” and, indeed, it may seem so to many readers. What, after all, is the connection between the systematic murder of women and the refusal to work? On first glance they appear to be starkly different issues, especially given the one-dimensional nature of most labor strikes that focus only on wages and working conditions, as recent strikes across the U.S. and related fervor at the Graduate Center indicate. Rooted in a metropolitan Marxism that assumes “primitive accumulation” was a precondition of capitalism and not its ongoing engine (think accumulation by dispossession, only starting in the 1490s rather than the 1970s), the strike can occlude the multiple violences that *strike* workers outside the purview of such continentalism.

I call this proletarian-centered approach *settler Marxism* for the disappearing of revolutionary actors that don’t fit its imperial teleology: the narrative in which Euro-U.S. industry, stealing or exploiting the resources of colonies and quasi-colonies, in turn stole the time and labor of factory workers.

These workers then became the privileged actors in the overthrow of capitalism and thus the historical agents of revolution. And this mission continues to be taken up by a motley collection of contemporary workers, across sectors, even as global capitalism continually changes the forms of labor available. As analysts of both *racial* capitalism and settler colonialism—the two intertwined foundations of modernity and its institutions—have demonstrated, this paradigm leaves out the people most affected by capitalism. This includes Indigenous and racialized women, who are charged with the quadruple burden of wage labor, reproductive labor, racism, and sexism, as well as Indigenous and racialized trans and non-binary people, who resist the gender norms central to propagating heteropatriarchal global society.

Indeed, feminicide, derived from the Spanish *feminicidio*, describes more than just the murder of women, one of the reasons it’s preferred over the more common English-language term *femicide*. As Rosa-Linda Fregoso, a leading scholar-activist on the issue, has written, the additional syllable of “in” “functions metaphorically as a register for the relationship between violence in the private and public sphere, between individuals and institutions, between the deadly sexism of persons who murder women and governments who condone this violence.” Further, “The extra ‘IN’ inextricably links INdividual and INstitutional forms of violence, symbolically representing how we conceptualize violence structurally and beyond a singular cause-and-effect model” (her capitalization).

Fregoso’s formulation of violence here is an example of intersectional theory, that much benighted school of thought strategically vulgarized, by both the alt-right and the alt-left, as “identity politics.” But as Fregoso explains—and as Kimberlé Crenshaw, who gave the concept a name, readily asserts—intersectionality is not about identity claims per se but, rather, the relationality of “individuals

and institutions.” It specifically theorizes the ways a person’s *material* vulnerability to various forms of violence is mediated by administrative bodies (including the media, which arbitrates truth claims, always with a bias for the dominant). I emphasize the word “material” above because—far from its caricature as postmodern superstructural nonsense—intersectionality theory factors in the profit motive of capitalists (see, for instance, the redoubtable Combahee River Collective Statement, forty-one years young.) It also shows how institutions, from national governments on down, manage the many violences of capitalism on behalf of its beneficiaries. And, like any good agent, these institutions get a cut of the blood money.

The original colonial scene of the Americas is instructive. As Hortense J. Spillers showed in her landmark essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” the commodity is always already both raced and gendered: the value of enslaved people came directly from “the loss of the[ir] indigenous name/land.” This dispossession of identity and home was nowhere clearer than in the “accounts and ledgers” of the industry, in which “the names of ships and the private traders” were dutifully recorded but the “goods” were simply described as “No. Negroes” and “Sum sold per head.” And while this process made all enslaved African peoples commodities, the master’s need to control the enslaved woman’s body and upend mother-child relations “mark[ed] the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange.”

Before labor, there is the commodity: people reduced to things by the violence of enslavement. That this commodification of Indigenous peoples (of the African continent) took place on Indigenous ground (of the Americas), cleared of Indigenous peoples, underscores the indivisibility of indigeneity and capital—and the imperative to address both together. Furthermore, following Spillers (and numerous other thinkers, I should add), we must always

attend to this relationship in its racial, gendered, and grounded terms. Such an approach necessarily resets the cause-and-effect model (to borrow Fregoso’s phrase) of Marxist theories of revolution that historically originated in the imperial metropole of Europe and that are still the baseline of so much labor and other organizing in the world today. That model, which I call settler Marxism, ignores the full material scope of the commodity in favor of a generic proletarian subject who recognizes the theft of his time and labor and then uses that recognition to strike and defeat the capitalist class, ushering in a socialist-cum-communist society.

Settler Marxism has three crucial faults. First, in failing to account for all the people who don’t fit this proletarian form, settler Marxism doesn’t address the largest possible bloc of revolutionary actors. Where in this model, for example, are the people who aren’t employed and the people who are structurally unemployed? Where are incarcerated people? Land-based communities? The shelter-less? All those whose cosmologies don’t recognize the wage relation or the settler state? Where are the women, non-men, and queer people? The so-called “bread-and-butter” dispensation of most unions, in which wages and working conditions are the sole priorities, assumes that the aforementioned humans and their needs don’t count.

Two, the site of struggle—labor—is misplaced, since the violence of commodification exceeds the violence of wage labor. Wage slavery is not chattel slavery, as Marx averred, but why do we organize around the wage relation rather than the *chattel relation*: that is, the hierarchy of human value? As Denise Ferreira da Silva has precisely and rigorously theorized, the “whole field of modern representation” inaugurated by Enlightenment thought to rationalize European imperialism is predicated on a universal Subject (akin to Sylvia Wynter’s “Breadwinner/Investor subject of the nation-state”) who seeks self-determination through the elimination

of objects: the unhuman others of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. In 2666, Bolaño effectively investigates this relationship between canonical modern thought and the mortality of its others by connecting, in circuitous fashion, European philosophy and its contemporary scholars to the murdered and missing women in former New Spain.

What would happen if we organized around this violence of life and death—of self-determination and extermination—rather than the abstract violence of the wage (which, after all, is a copy of the former)? What if we put murdered and missing Indigenous women (and their descendants) at the center of our collective efforts for transformation? Wouldn't ending violence in all its forms mean the end of the wage relation too?

The third problem with settler Marxism is that if we maintain the wage relation as the horizon of change, all the *other* violences of settler colonialism and racial capitalism will remain. That is to say, af-

ter the settler-Marxist revolution, we may have common ownership of the means of production (and thus an end to capitalism), but settlement, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy will still be present and accounted for, as will institutionality and, arguably, nationalism and imperialism. So, too, will be the psychic economy that Silva adduces, and the hierarchy of human value overall. None of these issues simply "disappear" in the settler Marxist future, as anyone who's been in a room with self-identified leftists can attest. Or look at the rise of the alt-left (exemplified by Chapo Trap House and works like Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* and Mark Lilla's *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*) and its inability to account for (its) whiteness, let alone hierarchy altogether.

Returning to Bolaño's invocation of the strike vis-à-vis the murder of women in Juárez, how might we address the latter through the former? My speculation: by mounting a general strike against the settler

state. In this I follow Cedric Robinson's analysis in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* and Glen Sean Coulthard's thoughts about "red Marxism," both of which assert the importance of land-based communities over the proletariat in revolutionary action.

From the U.S. Civil War, Robinson writes, when "one hundred thousand poor whites had deserted the Confederate armies and perhaps a half million Black workers had abandoned the plantations," to the "Indian Mutiny, the Boxer Rebellion, the nationalist struggles," to "the Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Somalia, Abyssinia, West and southern Africa, and... the 'people's wars' of Mexico and China, "in every instance peasants and agrarian workers had been the primary social bases of rebellion. Nowhere, not even in Russia, where a rebellious urban proletariat was a fraction of the mobilized working classes, had a bourgeois social order formed a precondition for revolutionary struggle."

Picking up this theme through Fanon, Coulthard observes that "the theory and practice of Indigenous anti-colonialism, including Indigenous anti-capitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around the question of land—a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominating and non-exploitative terms—and less around our emergent status as 'rightless proletarians.'" If we are to truly end domination and exploitation, the wage relation and the chattel relation, then perhaps a general strike, for and with the people who are otherwise disappeared—the murdered and missing, the ignored and the unthought—might finally succeed in overthrowing the state: the settler state, shot through with violence.



Crosses erected as a monument to victims of the Juárez femicide – source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Utah_University_pink_crosses_protest_for_Juarez.jpg

Unmasking Musk: *Envisioning HyperCapitalist Futures*

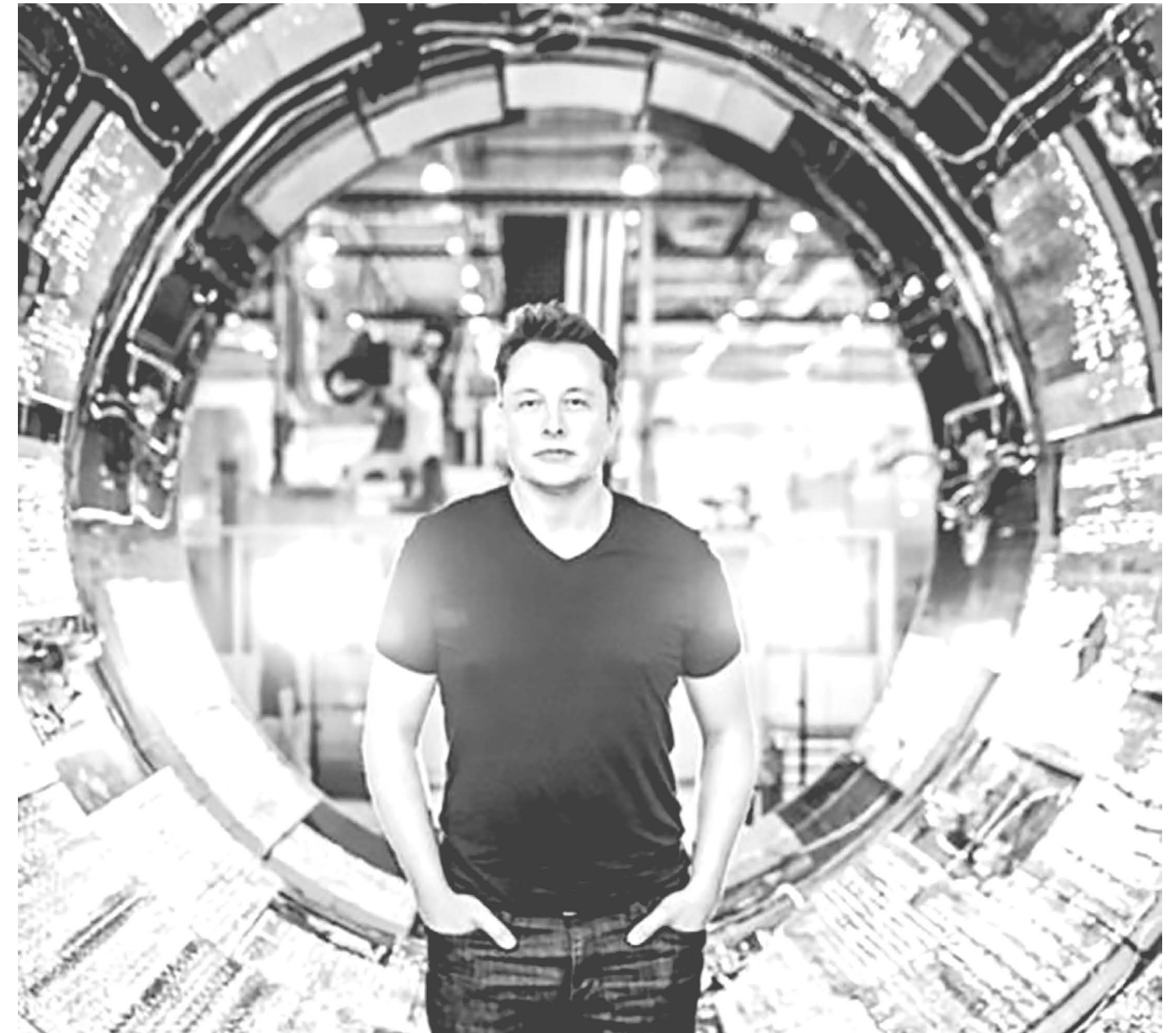
Hillary Donnell

There's something fascinating about the scintillating mythos that American society has created of the man behind PayPal, SpaceX, The Boring Company and Tesla. His rise to prominence as America's innovator-in-chief has been exalted by the growing cult of personality that surrounds him. There are YouTube channels devoted to figuring out the source of his genius, tracking his eating and sleeping habits, while devotees excitedly retweet clips of each fiery SpaceX launch and fawn over his jeans-wearing, billionaire next door persona. But for all the Musk fans, there is a growing cadre of Musk skeptics who are uncertain about the future that Musk wants to sell us. Perhaps, though, it is those millions who hold Musk up as an idol, a harbinger of hope for the future, whose obsession tells us the most about ourselves as Americans. Musk-lovers reveal what we revere: entrepreneurship, innovation, rule-breaking, conquering new frontiers. But there's plenty about Musk's millennial charm and the future he promises that merits closer scrutiny.

Last year at a Halloween house party in Brooklyn I was making casual conversation about Musk with anyone who would listen. I was decrying the supposed achievements of Musk's companies, attack-

ing the low hanging fruit, Paypal, of one of Musk's first successful companies. I was arguing that while Paypal and now Venmo, which Paypal acquired in 2016, has definitely made it easier to pay your roommate your share of the rent, they have done nothing significant to address modernity's most pressing social problems, wage-inequality, gun violence, racial segregation, to name a few juggernauts exacerbated by persistent state disinvestment and neglect. A bystander unimpressed by my pontificating exclaimed, "But you have to admit that he has some really good ideas!" Clearly irritated that I was missing the point of entrepreneurial activity, they continued, "And the thing is, he just goes for it. He actually makes them happen."

Given the urgency and emotion in this person's tone, I backed off, sensing that just one more stab at Silicon Valley's savant might spoil the celebratory mood. Later I considered how this person's reaction betrayed just how much of ourselves we see in Elon. My interlocutor seemed upset not only because I was criticizing Musk, but because I was taking shots at the eroticized spirit of entrepreneurship that he embodies. This is the entrepreneurship that the American collective conscious associates with Manifest Destiny, cowboys, the space race, and a few centuries of American folklore. It's what we believe makes us truly American and Elon Musk is the



kind of guy people admire, if only for the boldness he demonstrates in dreaming up an idea and seeing it come to life. And while a twinge of his South African accent remains, we've been more than happy to adopt him, thanks to his uncanny encapsulation of the American spirit. He's telling us to go into the

wild, dream something up, and make happen with nothing but our wit, a shoestring, and some tape. He's our John Wayne, Buzz Aldrin, Steve Jobs, our Tony Stark, all rolled into one.

But what have we missed while gazing at Musk with our rose-tinted glasses? What makes his ideas

Elon Musk in Los Angeles – source: https://www.gentleman.elconfidencial.com/personajes/2016-11-10/tesla-motors-elon-musk-silicon-valley-marte_1287547/

especially attractive to modern consumers, I would argue, is the subtle appeal to the “common good” embedded in the marketing of his products. Which would be fine, if that’s what his products were actually providing. Rather, “doing good” has become a veritable dog-whistle for those seeking some absolution with their consumption. This appeal is what enabled Musk’s companies to garner billions in public funds and become models for how we conceive of sustainable futures.

As the modern consumer has discovered, living with worlds of consumption at one’s fingertips does not come without a dark side. The globalization of production processes along with the rise of communication technologies means we have more insight than ever about the horrors that characterize the assembly of our iPhones. Abysmal wages, unsafe working conditions, enormous environmental costs. A natural consequence is that consumers begin to have an emotional response to the fact that their consumption is tied, however remotely, to the extreme violence of globalized production. Capitalism’s countermove? Commodify that response. The marketing strategies of SpaceX, Starbucks’, Tom’s and countless other businesses have been tweaked to tap the market created by our guilty conscience. Consider seals of approval vouching for far-off sus-

tainably sourced worker-owned coffee plantations, the advertisement for a pair of shoes that goes to the nameless child in need for every pair you buy, the app that tells you exactly who was harmed and where in the making of that H&M hoodie. In each of these models the *conscious-consumer* is assuaged by a degree of control that they are given over the harm that they cause through their consumption. The ethical consump-

tion craze is a pervasive marketing technique, ensuring that all kinds of goods and services must make some mention that their products are doing their part to chip away at a social problem. By tweaking the business model to incorporate and assuage consumer discomfort, globalized production processes transform the very *act of purchasing* into the promotion of social welfare.

Musk’s businesses are follow-

ing suit. They insist that by being loyal to the brand one is by extension promoting the social good. “Buy a Tesla, save the environment.” But how true is it?

At a Tesla factory in Fremont, CA, one of the most expensive places to live in the Golden State, workers are paid between \$17 and \$21 hourly, well below the \$30 national average for autoworkers. Estimates say that Musk’s companies are responsible for creat-

ing around 35,000 jobs altogether, and since many of these are classified as “green jobs,” his companies have garnered about \$4.9 billion in government subsidies. But what’s green about a job where workers can’t afford to live near the factory and have to commute for hours in, you guessed it, regular fossil-fuel powered cars? Workers at Tesla have complained that language in their contract, ostensibly written to protect trade se-

crets, prevents them from unionizing for a fair wage. The same has been said of the contract at SolarCity, his solar energy company that is a subsidiary of Tesla. A unionized oil refinery worker can’t be expected to leave their six figure yearly salary in a “dirty job” to take up a non-unionized work installing solar panels. Some options present themselves: liquidate all the unions and let the market determine the wage across sectors, or unionize the so-called “green jobs”. One of those two futures seems decidedly more sustainable, but that is not the future that Musk and the state are interested in funding.

The same goes for Musk’s Hyperloop proposal, his plan for a honeycomb of underground tunnels that would connect large cities and solve the problem of lengthy, congested commutes. Again, far from eliminating the problem of congested cities caused by millions of cars, the Hyperloop would merely pack some of them into a high-speed tunnel. Musk maintains that his tunnels will be equitable, by which he means that they will be open to everyone. His claim begs some questions: Does everyone have a car in the future? Are all the cars electric? Can everyone’s car fit into this tunnel? As Paris Marx noted in Jacobin Magazine, the Boring Company (Musk’s corporation digging the tunnels for the Hyperloop) claims to be making



Aerial image of the lithium-ion battery gigafactory that Tesla is building in Nevada and that plans to begin production next year – source: https://www.gentleman.elconfidencial.com/personajes/2016-11-10/tesla-motors-elon-musk-silicon-valley-marte_1287547/



quantum leaps into the future of underground transport, but projects in Madrid, Seoul and Stockholm have already achieved subway tunnel boring at costs similar to those that Musk once claimed only the Boring Company could achieve. Worse, the Hyperloop proposal can carry less than a third the passenger load of comparable high-speed rail projects:

3,650 as compared to 12,000 per hour. Musk believes that the Hyperloop is absolutely necessary, though, because it offers something that public transit projects do not: exclusivity and independence. Musk argues we need the Hyperloop because, “Don’t we all agree [that] public buses are disgusting”. The exclusivity of his ventures is betrayed in the lan-

guage he uses to describe the public sphere and the fact the Boring Company’s first test tunnel connects Musk’s home to SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, CA. His commentary reinforces an opinion that the political right has spent years peddling, and has spent much energy on divestment to ensure its resonance. The opinion that spaces where people who

Image of Falcon 9, the rocket built by SpaceX, whose main innovation is the reuse of the launch vehicle after each mission – source: https://www.gentleman.elconfidencial.com/personajes/2016-11-10/tesla-motors-elon-musk-silicon-valley-marte_1287547/

don’t know one another interact, what we used to call *public spaces*, are necessarily grotesque and should, if possible, be avoided is the opinion that has eroded investment in public parks, libraries, schools and more. It’s also the opinion that Musk seems to hold. Better to own your own luxury electric car than to have to interact with a stranger on what could be affordable, reliable, and rapid public transit.

Viewed from this angle, the world that we’re allowing Musk to envision for us does not appear vastly different from the one we inhabit today—plagued with starkly segregated cities in terms of wealth and presumably still race, decrepit public transport and rising wage inequality— a future backed by billions of dollars of taxpayer funds.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention Elon’s romantic partner at the moment, synth-wave artist Grimes. She recently defended Musk against claims that he has supported union-busting surveillance and harassment tactics at Tesla. I’ve heard grumblings amongst old-guard Grimes fans not pleased with her decision to team up with Musk. Grimes is an artist who self-released her Dune-inspired concept album, *Geidi Primes*, in 2010. Her aesthetic painted pictures of worlds where freaks might be embraced instead of ostracized for their deviance,

and some of us read into her music and her style a radical political stance that perhaps was never there. We have mistaken her deviant futurist aesthetic as implying that she held radical earthly politics. The reality is that we see what we want to see in public figures we admire, just as those of us who want to see Musk as a genius in jeans are willing to overlook more unsavory aspects of his work. And while Grimes never claimed that she was out to promote the social good with her music or her life choices, Musk certainly does. Their union then, is perhaps not so bizarre.

The Boring Company just launched a new product, The (not) a Flamethrower. The “(not)” part was inserted as a media gimmick poking fun at the attempted regulations by the California legislature, which sought to place some limits on who could get access to this \$600 fire-gun. In California where droughts and wildfires have been running rampant in the past year, and in a country where assault weapons are responsible for thousands of deaths per year, some regulation seems necessary. And yet the bill regulating the Flamethrowers died in committee, and 20,000 of them have been sold on pre-order. Government regulation is no match for the appeal of a gadget that portends the kind of dystopia we’re headed for.

It may go without saying that in a nation confronted by catastrophic Trumpian policies on climate change, foreign affairs and domestic regulation, we should be keeping our eyes on the workings of the state. But we should not forget that as state regulatory apparatuses collapse and collude with private interests to undo any grounds for social cohesion, it is imperative to also be critical of Silicon Valley billionaires like Musk. It’s not AI we have to fear, as Musk implores us to believe, but rather the entirety of a hyper-capitalist world where innovations only exacerbate the difficult realities we already face. Changing the most disgusting realities of our current world will take more than one man’s vision.

It is admirable that Elon Musk counts mitigating the effects of global warming and moving us away from fossil fuel technologies as some of his primary goals alongside profit-making. But if we are willing to give him this much adulation, this much airtime, and this much public funding, we owe it to ourselves to hold him to higher standard because, despite what you may have heard, we are capable of designing abundant futures in which equity is not the handmaiden of profit, but the other way around.

Salami Tacticals

Little Nukes — No Big Deal?

Clifford D. Conner

SALAMI TACTICS are how devious politicians attempt to achieve major policy goals that they don’t dare pursue openly and directly. Knowing that they can’t have the whole salami all at once, they lop off one small sliver at a time. If successful, they eventually attain their objective by a series of incremental, irreversible steps.

One policy goal that some American military strategists would like to achieve is the use of nuclear weapons in combat. As Barack Obama acknowledged in 2009, the United States is “the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon.” But since the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, nuclear weapons have, by the greatest of good fortune, remained on the shelf.

A Brookings Institution audit estimated that the United States spent more than nine trillion dollars on nuclear weapons between 1940 and 1996. We must be thankful that the fruits of those trillions were, metaphorically speaking, flushed down the toilet rather than used on the battlefield.

That is not to say, however, that nuclear weapons



have not been used since 1945. To the contrary, they have been used hundreds of times by several nations to intimidate other nations. In August 2017, when Donald Trump threatened to unleash “fire and fury” against North Korea, that was but one in a long string of uses to which the most potent of the world’s thermonuclear arsenals has been put.

During several decades of Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals were used to provide cover for a number of proxy wars between the two superpowers. The nuclear “balance of terror” allowed

for the decimation of populations of smaller allies without causing annihilation of the primary combatants. The long years of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia claimed the lives of an estimated three to four million men, women, and children, none of them killed outright by nuclear weapons.

Restoring the Nuclear Option

The horror of the instantaneous incineration of two Japanese cities and tens of thousands of civilian lives made a lasting impression on public consciousness that has thus far sufficed to deter a recurrence. But ever since the end of World War II there have been unrelenting calls to restore the nuclear option to routine warfare.

Among the most persistent advocates was General Curtis LeMay, who had directed the March 1945 firebombing of Tokyo. LeMay boasted, with characteristic callousness, that his forces had “scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9–10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”

U.S. Air Force General Curtis LeMay

Later, in the early stages of the Cold War era, General LeMay headed the Strategic Air Command, which put him in charge of the U.S. nuclear strike forces. Typifying the kill-it-in-the-cradle instincts of the military mind, he lobbied for massive preemptive nuclear strikes against the Soviet Union, despite the Strategic Air Command’s own estimates that it would annihilate more than 77 million people in 188 targeted cities. Fortunately, President Eisenhower overruled him and disallowed preemptive strikes. All of that was prelude to what was probably LeMay’s most notorious utterance when, as the Vietnam War was escalating, he announced his desire “to bomb them into the Stone Age.”

Strategic versus Tactical Nukes

The central ploy in the salami campaign to undermine antinuclear resistance aims at convincing the public that smaller “tactical” bombs—as distinct from larger “strategic” ones—are no big deal. Proponents of tactical nukes claim that they could be safely deployed in “regional wars” without triggering a massive, planet-engulfing nuclear Armageddon.

Downplaying the dangers of tactical nuclear weapon use is designed to set a precedent—to get the camel’s nose under the tent, so to speak. As of this writing, the effort has not yet succeeded in bringing about the direct use of such weapons, but the campaign to legitimize them continues and the pressure is mounting. Tactical weapons are supposedly intended for smaller tasks than their strategic counterparts, such as knocking out bridges rather than, say, flattening major cities. The distinction between strategic and tactical, however, is arbitrary, to say the least. A leading proponent of combat nukes, Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis, proclaimed there is “no such thing” as a tactical nuclear weapon. “Any nuclear weapon used anytime is a strategic game changer,” he acknowledged at a February 2018 Congressional hearing.

Although the drive to normalize battlefield nuke use has recently reached new and alarming heights, it is not a new development. The promotion of tactical nukes had already reached fever pitch in the 1960s. Herman Kahn, doyen of the military-industrial complex’s favorite think tank, the RAND Corporation, was the model for Stanley Kubrick’s wickedly satirical *Dr. Strangelove*, urging the public to “stop worrying and love the bomb.”

Kahn hailed the usefulness of smaller nukes in his seminal *On Escalation*, which argued that they were necessary to create “gradations” in responses to threats from enemies. They would, Kahn contended, allow the generals to escalate wars while maintaining “escalation control.”

From Davy Crockett to Dial-a-Yield Nukes

The pioneer of tactical nukes appeared in 1961, bearing the name of an American frontier hero with pop culture name recognition, Davy Crockett. The Davy Crockett was a portable bazooka that featured the smallest-yield nuclear warhead the Pentagon has ever created. Though tactical nukes pack a smaller punch than their strategic cousins, their destructive power is small only in a relative sense. The 51-pound Davy Crockett could produce a blast equivalent to 10 to 20 tons of TNT. While that was only about one percent of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, it matches the explosive power of the largest of the conventional bombs in the U.S. arsenal. But measures of explosive power in TNT equivalents don’t tell the whole story of the nukes’ lethality. Their killing capability is not only a function of the power of their blast but also of the long-term environmental poison they leave in their wake in the form of lethal radiation. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, tens of thousands of people died from radiation poisoning in the months and years after the atomic bombs were dropped.

A small squad of soldiers could tote the Davy Crockett around in the field, set it up on its tripod, and fire off its nuclear “cannonball” at will. Historian of science Alex Wellerstein summarized the device’s career in a blog post several years ago: “The Davy Crockett system was actively deployed from 1961 through 1971. The redoubtable *Atomic Audit* reports that they were found to be highly inaccurate and were not effectively integrated into actual war plans. Nonetheless, according to the same source, some 2,100 warheads for the Davy Crockett system were produced, at a cost of about half a billion (1998) taxpayer dollars.”

Although the Davy Crocketts no longer exist, there are still tactical nukes aplenty, and the Pentagon continues to include them in their plans. The distinction between large strategic and small tactical weapons is further blurred by the fact that the same device—



U.S. Air Force General Curtis LeMay

most notably, the B61 bomb—can serve as both. The B61 is the primary thermonuclear gravity bomb in the U.S. arsenal. It is a variable-strength (“Dial-a-Yield”) bomb that can be set to yield anywhere from 0.3 to 340 kilotons, or from about twice the potency of the Davy Crockett to about 22 times that of the Hiroshima bomb.

Loading a B61 thermonuclear bomb onto an F-16 fighter-bomber

A variant of the B61, the W80 warhead modified for use with air-launched cruise missiles and Tomahawk missiles fired from ships and submarines, also had Dial-a-Yield capability. It can explode with TNT equivalence of from 5 to 150 kilotons. The Navy’s tactical nukes were “retired” in 2010, but their advocates, with encouragement from the Trump administration, continue to lobby for their return.

The 21,600-pound Mother Of All Bombs

In April 2017, MOAB, the famous “Mother Of All Bombs,” was dropped in a rural district of Afghanistan—the first combat use of the largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal. It was an especially ominous event because the decision to experiment with the explosive power of the mega-bomb was taken unilaterally by General John Nicholson, the commanding general of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In praising that decision, President Trump declared that he had given “total authorization” to the U.S. military to conduct whatever missions they wanted, anywhere in the world. That declaration seemed to issue an open invitation for field commanders to fire off a tactical nuclear warhead. Will that be the next slice of the combat experimentation salami?

The Obama-Trump Nuclear Modernization Program

In October 2009, President Barack Obama signed a National Defense Authorization Act to “modernize



Dr Strangelove directed by Stanley Kubrick

the nuclear weapons complex,” a commitment to spending some \$300 billion over the following ten years to upgrade and expand the American nuclear arsenal. In addition to replenishing the stockpile of nuclear warheads *per se*, the plan called for 12 new nuclear-capable submarines, 100 new bombers,

and 400 new intercontinental ballistic missiles to deliver them. The \$300 billion was just the initial estimate; the 30-year cost of the upgrade was projected to be well over a trillion dollars. This major escalation of the arms race was carried out by a president who had won office after promising that nuclear dis-

armament would be a central goal of his administration. In April 2009, the newly-elected Chief Executive publicly vowed, “I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” Those were fine words, for which six months later, in October, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But before the month of October had ended, the new Nobel laureate had signed into law the act initiating the trillion-dollar-plus expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

There was no admission of a flip-flop. Obama said he continued to seek disarmament, but was obliged to negotiate from a position of strength, which required a reliable, modernized U.S. arsenal. Obama’s disarmament legacy was to turn over authorization for unprecedented expenditures on nuclear weapons to the warhawks of the Trump administration, who swiftly dispensed with the pretense that the upgrade was actually in the interests of disarmament. Secretary of Defense Mattis declared that “recapitalizing the nuclear weapons complex of laboratories and plants” was “long overdue.”

As of February 2018, the U.S. arsenal contained about 500 tactical nukes, 200 of which were deployed with aircrafts in Europe and the rest in the United States. The Obama-Trump upgrade calls for creating two new types of tactical nukes: a warhead for submarine-launched ballistic missiles and a sea-launched cruise missile. An analysis of the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review reports that it “bristles with plans for new low-yield nuclear weapons.” Moreover, as a recent article by David Sanger and William Brand in the *New York Times* notes, “critics of the low-yield weapons say they blur the line between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, making their use more likely,” and “the Trump policy explicitly threatens to launch nuclear strikes in response to acts of terrorism and to cyberattacks.”

Normalizing the use of smaller nukes would provide the generals with political cover for their entire stockpile of nuclear weapons, small and large alike. To buttress his contention that “a low-yield nucle-

ar weapon is a must-have, not a luxury,” Albert Mauroni, an Air Force think tank director, argues that “eliminating tactical nuclear weapons could result in the U.S. government self-detering itself from using larger nuclear weapons in a future crisis against another nuclear-weapons state.” “Given,” he continues, “that the U.S. military is increasingly involved in numerous conflicts all over the globe, can it afford to not invest in low-yield nuclear weapons and delivery systems?” The more urgent question is: Given the existential threat thermonuclear war represents, can humanity afford a nuclear-armed U.S. military aggressively pursuing conflicts all over the globe?

In October 2017, more than 240,000 troops in at least 172 countries and territories were waging “America’s Forever Wars,” the *New York Times* reported. U.S. forces were “actively engaged” not only in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, but also in Niger, Somalia, Jordan, Thailand, and elsewhere. “An additional 37,813 troops serve on presumably secret assignment in places listed simply as ‘unknown.’ The Pentagon provided no further explanation.” Congressional oversight of these activities no longer merits even lip service. Opportunities for field commanders to launch a tactical nuclear warhead are thus proliferating. The danger to humanity is incalculable. Despite the



salami slicers’ denials, even the smallest thermonuclear exchange is rife with doomsday potential. It is incumbent upon civil society

to mobilize massive opposition to the irreversible step of exploding a tactical nuke on an active battlefield.

Science for the People, a leading radical science magazine, was originally published from 1970-1989. Activists are planning a relaunch of the magazine, including republication of its complete archives, begin-

ning later in 2018. For more information on *Science for the People’s* activities and archives, please visit their website (scienceforthepeople.org/index.php/publishing).

The 21,600-pound Mother Of All Bombs

The Campaign for Full and Fair Funding of all GC Doctoral Students

The Adjunct Project

On Friday, 27 April, the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council of the Graduate Center passed a resolution calling for the full and fair funding of all GC doctoral students (please see the text of the resolution at the end of the article). Created by the Adjunct Project (AP) in close collaboration with several GC doctoral students, the resolution details the problem of underfunding at the GC and offers steps for remedying this inequity.

Although the funding inequities at the GC have been an issue of the AP going back many years, they became a primary initiative of the AP this past spring semester, thanks largely to the experiences and commitment of AP co-coordinator Lynne Turner, a sociology Ph.D. student going into her fifth year at the GC. Entering the program with only a five-year tuition fellowship, supplemented by occasional temporary Graduate Assistantship D lines, Turner, like many GC doctoral students, lived with ongoing uncertainty about her livelihood and her path toward a degree. Though she now has a Mellon Humanities Alliance fellowship beginning this fall, Turner's difficulties prompted the AP coordinators to seek a perma-

nent fix for this urgent issue — for the sake of all GC doctoral students, whether they receive full funding through a Graduate Center Fellowship or not. The issue of funding binds us together as GC doctoral students, from the admissions process through to the attainment of the Ph.D.

To maximize feedback and collaboration, the AP created a working group on the issue comprising several GC doctoral students, who started the campaign for full and fair funding along with the AP coordinators, eventually leading to the DSC resolution. We've also produced stickers highlighting the campaign, are starting to collect student testimonials, and will be releasing a survey to collect the funding data the GC has so far denied us (see Turner's testimonial below for more details). Indeed, we're excited to take this campaign to the next level in the fall!

To that end, the following testimonials from Turner and Merrit Corrigan, Thayer Hastings, and James Tolleson — all members of the campaign working group — amplify how the lack of full and fair funding affects them — and, by extension, all GC doctoral students.

I had been a union and community organizer for many years prior to entering the doctoral program and, through the Adjunct Project and as a member

of the union, I have been organizing for parity for adjuncts, including a livable wage of \$7,000 per course. The two-tiered funding system at the Graduate Center is generally kept under the radar, the unnoticed elephant in the room, leading to our decision at the Adjunct Project to make this an organizing priority as well.

Personally, it took a while for it to sink in how stark the inequality was and the outsized obstacles this presented for me and other underfunded doctoral students. Each semester entailed an exorbitant effort to reconstitute an income and health insurance from contingent adjunct and research jobs — time and men-

tal energy allocated just to obtain work and juggle multiple jobs rather than focused progress within our doctoral programs. I was on my department's admissions committee and could observe how competitive the ranking process is, which can negatively impact admissions and funding prospects for non-traditional and working-class students. I am convinced that there is no justification for this inequity based upon merit.

This spring, I co-signed a FOIL request submitted by the GC PSC chapter and the Adjunct Project to obtain information linking levels of funding to demographic information as well as timely progress towards degree and successful outcomes. Our FOIL request and subse-



Source — https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/Images/Commencement/Comm2013Images/Rotator/CUNY-GC-Commencement-2013-125.jpg?width=460&height=306&ext=.jpg

quent appeal were denied based upon the claim that since the GC doesn't collect this information it would require substantial computer programming to obtain it. It's mind-boggling that the GC doesn't consider it within their purview to examine how institutional funding, or lack thereof, aids or hinders student progress and successful outcomes, raising concerns about both transparency and political will to back up the GC's stated com-

mitment to diversity and inclusion with concrete measures to provide the support necessary to engender success.

— Lynne Turner

I was thrilled when I got the news that I was off the waiting list and in reach of a tuition-only fellowship. I consulted with current students and considered waiting to re-apply for the following year,

but from my view, in a \$10.50-per-hour service job, I couldn't pass up the opportunity. My partner agreed that we could take on the financial burden together. Although we're "making it," I'm convinced that the two-tiered system significantly harms the GC's ability to create a space for doctoral students to thrive.

Every semester I seek out adjunct teaching positions to help support myself, but neither steady

work nor pay is guaranteed. This semester one of my discussion sections was dropped, and my pay was cut nearly in half, due to low student enrollment. I also spend significant amounts of time searching, applying, interviewing, and waiting for other potential sources of income, which leaves me in a state of uncertainty about funding for next year, not to mention the next 3, 4, 5 years of my program. Applying for dissertation and "write-up" grants will be hard enough! We need full and fair funding to eliminate this additional stress and make the GC a top-notch setting for all doctoral students.

— James Tolleson

I entered the Graduate Center with a tuition-only fellowship nervous and unsure how I would pay rent, access health insurance when I turned 26, or feel as though I belonged in the stratified doctoral community. Tuition-only fellowships make for a precarious doctoral student experience. Each semester the relief I felt progressing in study was clouded by the worry that it may no longer be possible financially to continue on in a few months. Although I now have three years of funding through a GC Digital Initiatives fellowship, this veil of uncertainty, impacting individual scholarship and our

larger learning community, will continue to hang over the GC until we have full and fair funding for all students.

— Merrit Corrigan

It is hard enough living in New York City on the full Graduate Center fellowship. Members of my cohort without stipends are put in a near impossible situation and are forced to devote large amounts of their time to additional teaching, working outside jobs, and applying for internal and external grants. Even only in the first year of my program, underfunding has taken its toll. The students without full funding are clearly carrying a heavier burden than the rest of us and that affects their ability to prepare for classes and participate more broadly. This is a loss for my cohort and the GC community as a whole. The difference between "full" and partial funding is in degrees of precarity.

— Thayer Hastings

Not having funding to complete my dissertation has been a heavy burden, as it has put me back at least a year as I try to cobble together the money to pay tuition and fees and to complete my research. My advisor has been a great help in getting me funding, but those efforts do not make up

for the structural failings of the Graduate Center to provide full and equal funding for all of us studying here. I have had to take on teaching an extra class as an adjunct for a total of three, in addition to a consulting gig, and working as one of the co-coordinators at the Adjunct Project in order to save money in NYC to do my field work in an international setting.

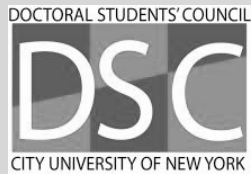
I love teaching and working with my students, but it is sad that the lack of a transparent and just funding structure by the GC makes us choose one or the other in this imposed zero-sum equation. This is clearly an issue of how class, gender, race, and sexuality oppression put many of us even further behind in creating an even playing field or successful efforts to value its students' diversity by the GC.

— Rafael A. Mutis

If you'd like to get involved in the campaign for full and fair funding, whether by sending us a testimonial or contributing in another way, email the AP at the-adjunctproject@gmail.com. And make sure to check out the section of our website dedicated to this issue at <http://cunyadjunctproject.org/funding/>. We'll be updating it throughout the campaign.



Graduate Center building in New York (5th Avenue and 34th street). Photo by Alex Irklevski – source: <http://lab.softwarestudies.com/2014/07/new-cuny-center-for-digital-scholarship.html>



DSC RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF FULL AND FAIR FUNDING FOR CUNY GRADUATE CENTER PHD STUDENTS

Submitted by Adjunct Project working group for full and fair funding
Adopted by the DSC during Plenary on April 27, 2018

WHEREAS, CUNY was founded as a public academy “to educate the whole people” and the Graduate Center represents CUNY’s important endeavor to offer doctoral education to “the whole people”;

WHEREAS, many current and incoming doctoral students at the CUNY Graduate Center, as much as 50% of some new cohorts, receive no funding at all beyond five-year tuition waivers;

WHEREAS, this lack of financial support forces underfunded students to:

Expend time and energy cobbling together a living each semester through highly contingent fellowships, temporary graduate assistantships, and adjunct positions;

Take on multiple adjunct positions paying less than \$3,500 per course in order to qualify for NYSHIP health insurance and survive economically;

Scramble to teach whatever courses are available, requiring more preparation time and making it more difficult to specialize in certain courses;

WHEREAS, underfunded doctoral students are virtually excluded from some fellowships – like the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) fellowship – and this exclusion makes underfunded students less desirable candidates for highly competitive fellowships and academic positions;

WHEREAS, underfunded students, being forced to rely on less stable employment, are not guaranteed consistent union representation by the Professional Staff Congress (PSC);

WHEREAS, these obstacles make it disproportionately difficult for underfunded students to achieve program goals, to dedicate time to publishing and other requirements for future success, and to generally prioritize on- time program completion and successful outcomes;

WHEREAS, the Graduate Center, its academic departments, and all of its students benefit from the presence of students who are currently underfunded, since larger cohorts result in expanded choice and number of classes and greater prospects for state funding;

WHEREAS, academic departments are currently told that they cannot transfer vacated Graduate Center Fellowships to underfunded doctoral students in their departments; and

WHEREAS, the Graduate Center administration has denied requests for demographic and completion data in relation to student funding, and provides no clear indication of the process by which fellowships and other funding sources are distributed;

Be it **RESOLVED** that the DSC supports and advocates:

Full and fair funding, including access to quality health insurance, for all current and incoming Graduate Center students;

Transparency in the allocation of fellowships across departments through the release of relevant information, including about the demographics of underfunded students and the impact of underfunding on students’ trajectories through their programs; and Vigorous efforts by the Graduate Center administration, department chairs and academic advisors to obtain the full and fair funding necessary to ensure the success of all students, especially those from underrepresented and socially and economically disadvantaged groups, while maintaining or expanding cohort size in all departments.

Be it **STILL FURTHER RESOLVED** that while these issues pertain specifically to unfunded and underfunded doctoral students at the GC, we are also in solidarity with master’s students here, so be it resolved that we do not support any fee hikes on master’s students at the Graduate Center to fund their programs nor as a way to fund the doctoral programs.

Fan Fiction as Emotionally Inclusive, Anti-Ableist Praxis

Jenn Polish

Whenever I tell someone that my students at LaGuardia Community College write fanfiction for their first assignment in Composition 2, I either get major skepticism or major excitement. Never ambivalence. There's something about fanfiction that evokes either end of the emotional spectrum but nothing in between.

For the uninitiated, fanfiction is when fans write stories that use characters and worlds originally published by other authors. They can be short one-offs or novels or even independent series in themselves. For example: if you didn't like the ending of Marvel's *Infinity War*, you can write your own and call it fanfiction. Did you think that Regina and Emma from ABC's *Once Upon a Time* belong together, and it was only heteronormative television that kept them apart? Literally everyone agrees with you and would love to read your version in which the Savior and the Evil Queen do, in fact, live happily ever after with their son.

Fanfiction can be a form of looking deeper into

canons, providing details and highlighting nuances. At its finest, fanfiction can be a form of protest, an intricate close reading that challenges out-of-character writing, racist writing, cissexist writing — writing that erases queer realities and destroys queer characters for the development of cishet characters; writing that murders characters of color for the development of white characters. When we write the stories so that the lesbians live, get the girl, and actually get their traumas addressed and cared for (not calling out the CW's *Supergirl*, but I'm calling out the CW's *Supergirl*), when we rewrite season 3 of CW's *The Flash* so it's not torture porn in which a powerful Black woman is reduced to a helpless side character whom we watch die over, and over, and over again — when we rewrite these things, we are protesting them.

We are protesting, and we are analyzing. Good fanfiction provides closer close readings than anything I've ever read in even the best research papers or academic essays. The form demands it. The form rewards it. The form thrives on it. Without analysis of canon, fanfiction could not exist. Without the need to write ourselves into the canon that we are often denied, fanfiction would not be such a powerful art form.

I've long been an advocate of fanfiction as a form of potential community building. It can be a radical reclaiming of who gets to create the narratives we tell of ourselves. Emotions — the grief of straight, cis, white, able-bodied men writing everyone else's stories, as well as the sheer joy of recognizing ourselves on the backs of dragons — drive fanfiction. So, too, does a deeply-felt sense of social justice and the thirst to be included that marginalized creators feel in our bones. And if fanfiction is about joy, about community, about justice and representation and improving our writing skills while flex-

ing our inclusivity muscles, why, then, should it not be practiced in our writing classrooms? A labor of love — unpaid, ungraded, too often even unrecognized as “real” writing—fanfiction is a far cry from the stale essays we generally require our students to write, the ones that tell them not to use “I” statements and emphasize number of paragraphs over literary passion and the skills that can be honed through precisely that passion.

So, this past term at LaGuardia, I had my composition students write fanfiction about Nikki Giovanni's poem “Poem for a Lady Whose Voice I Like.” I have never

seen them all take to an assignment with such fervor (and my students have made me comic books before, so that's saying something) and it was absolutely amazing. Letting them analyze the poem and engage deeply with Giovanni's text and subtext while being able to craft their own original stories has been an absolute revelation.

Their work was of spectacular quality; their peer reviews were insightful and supportive and helpful; the depth and range of creativity and narrative as well as rhetorical skills they brought to the assignment were out of this world. Beyond that infusion of



<https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-OsXvnk2ZszU/V9nziUqsJKI/AAAAAAAAAPJM/BFwyoFg-5DkFEN7RvQiDjdfznVNvh4JmwCPcB/s1600/Once.jpg>



joy, though, this assignment was by far the best I've ever given even by the standards of academic writing, which demands close engagement with texts and original analysis. Because it's often the assignment, rather than the students themselves, that determines the quality of analysis they will produce. That is not to say that students don't have agency when writing, of course they do. But we must also take responsibility for poorly-designed assignments that validate only certain kinds of thinking and writing, inadvertently excluding many students from the process, and strive instead to make multiple forms of complex analysis central to the creation process.

To write these fics, the students had to close read the text in ways that simply don't compute with most traditional research or argumentative essay assignments. Students had to get inside the characters and bring them to life, rather than examine them in the disembodied way we too often promote in teaching essay-writing. They had to examine every word, sink

their teeth into the double entendres and imagined facial expressions and vocal tones and surrounding context; they had to leave no proverbial stone unturned in the original text, in order to use it as a base for their own explorations of the two people presented in the poem itself.

The results were spectacular.

By now, I definitely convinced you of one thing, and hopefully, might have started to sway you about a second thing. The first is that I'm an irredeemable nerd. We know this. It is, one might say, canon. The second—the hopeful thing—is that I've opened the possibility to you (if it wasn't already) that fanfiction can be a profound form of close reading, of protest, of José Esteban Muñoz's disidentification at work, of teaching quality thinking and writing. But my title promised you something else; something about fan fiction as anti-ableist praxis, as an inclusive pedagogical practice that emphasizes access to students with different language backgrounds, dis/abilities,

and learning styles, all while presenting a rigorous intellectual challenge.

So, why *am* I including this kind of assignment as an example of an anti-ableist, inclusive practice?

Because emotional inclusivity and emotional access to classrooms is, I believe, just as necessary as any other form of access. Yet they are perhaps the ones we talk about least. Are all my students fanfic readers and writers? Nope. Have each and every one of them expressed excitement about the idea that they're allowed to craft their own tales as a valid way to analyze literature? Have all of them found that their chosen forms of expression — and their chosen forms of learning — are sanctioned and encouraged and rewarded in the classroom? Yep. Yep, they have.

That, to me, is every bit as anti-ableist as it can come, especially when we consider the sheer number of depressed and anxious young people who find fanfic an engaging experience outside of the classroom. Fanfiction is a refuge for people with many kinds of marginalized identities, especially to those of us who also live with depression, anxiety, and other dis/abilities that impact our feelings of self-worth, of energy, or the very ability to get out of bed (which, too, are issues that affect most of us when we're in school, not just those of us with dis/abilities). Bringing fan fiction into the classroom validates the quiet nerds whose social anxiety keeps them more on the internet than out of it, the depressed kids who need to scroll through fanfiction to keep ourselves calm, comforted, and feeling seen, the queer kids who just want to see ourselves, finally, being happy and safe and real in fiction, and the kids of color who get to explore the intricate lives of characters whose importance is otherwise sidelined, if not entirely absent.

Fanfiction has long been a form in which people whose first language is not English practice their writing skills, and it's long been a form in which people of all language backgrounds find their first writing community, their first dis/abled community, their first queer community, or some combination

thereof. Bringing this form into the classroom as a valid, important kind of writing not only sharpens students' analytical skills and close reading techniques, it also serves as key emotional and intellectual validation to those students whose skills, interests, and identities are far too often sidelined by canonized academic texts and canonized academic assignment structures.

If you're scratching your head and wondering how the heck one would even scaffold an assignment like this, that's understandable! To start, I suggest doing all of the following activities yourself and then having students do the same:

- Read and extensively discuss Kimberly Karalius' "[Fan Fiction in the Composition Classroom](#)";
- Read some stories about their favorite books, TV shows, comics, and/or movies on fan fiction sites like [Archive of Our Own](#), [Wattpad](#), and/or [fanfiction.net](#); and
- Think of something—anything, whether it's a movie ending, a romance, a piece of character development, a plot point, a missing scene to expand on—in one of your favorite pieces of fictional media that you'd like to change. Draft your own version (or outline of what you would want to see/read) and share with your classmates.

That last one? It sparked an absurd amount of unsolicited discussion, diagramming, laughing, and yelling about how Jack could totally have fit on that plank with Rose at the end of *Titanic*. All that passion, and that too during an 8:00am class for which many students were coming right from the night shift! Fanfiction really is magic, for welcoming the full bodies and hearts of our most marginalized students into the classroom.

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In Conversation with Harry Belafonte

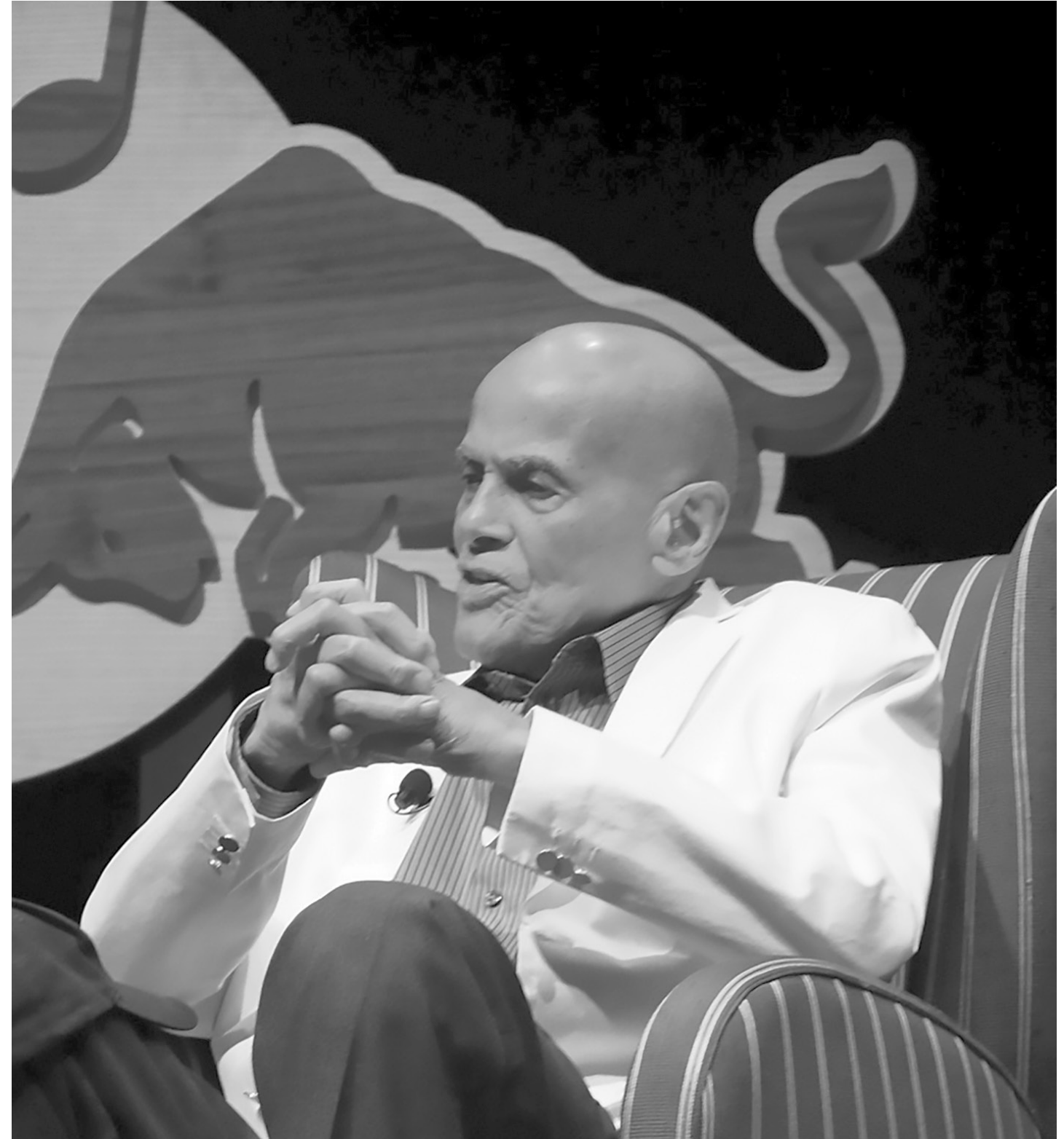
Christopher M. Morrow

On 5 May, the legendary performer and activist Harry Belafonte visited Hostos Community College for a conversation with Kimberly Drew, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Drew introduced Belafonte to a standing ovation, to which he responded by waving in a humble exchange. Hostos Community College was an appropriate venue for the Harry Belafonte conversation. As an activist and artist, Belafonte had made it his life's mission to advocate for the poor and the disenfranchised. From the onset of the evening, he spoke of his early commitment to resisting oppression for the Black community and highlighted the persistent problem of poverty in communities of color. Belafonte credited his working-class Jamaican mother for his value system and as inspiration for the development of his activist ideals. His commitment to social justice issues was born out of a lived experience in working-class communities in Jamaica and in the United States. "I have never understood the cruelty of the system," he said "why people have to be poor."

Belafonte identified first and foremost as an activist, and claimed to have stumbled upon art and mu-

sic after he had already engaged in social activism. He used music as a platform to continue his activism, elevating him to a level of prestige both amongst musicians and with activist leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But his life story was not one of unhindered successes. Belafonte discussed how his activism cost him his livelihood, such as when many venues blacklisted him for the political content of his music. It also positioned him as a respected figure amongst civil rights leaders. "Being an activist a lot of people sought my services. Most notably Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Robeson and Malcolm X," he said.

Belafonte spoke extensively about MLK, who was only 24 when they first met at the Abyssinian church in Harlem. He left a lifelong impression on Belafonte, who was only two years younger. Belafonte said he immediately committed to the civil rights movement after that first long conversation, and also recounted a nervous tic that had plagued MLK in his early years, which disappeared in time. "What happened to the tic, man?" Belafonte asked him during one of their many conversations to unfold over the years — to which MLK responded that it disappeared once he overcame his fear of death. This was a significant moment for Belafonte; it shifted his perspective on the



Harry Belafonte, credit: Jill Newman

interplay between life and death.

Drew prompted Belafonte to speak to the relationship between his activism and art, specifically focusing on his collaborations with Charles White. White was an African American Social Realist artist and a peer of Belafonte. Belafonte praised White in professional and personal terms and described him as “an enormous force in our community.” He encouraged the audience to visit White’s retrospective, which will

be on display at MOMA beginning October 2018.

As the conversation transitioned to President Trump, Belafonte’s tone became more somber. Following his life’s engagement with activism and art, Trump’s politics manifested the most problematic aspects of American history. His concern was not that Trump exists, he said, but the level of support that elected him into office. The audience echoed his statement

as they clapped and hummed in unison. “Donald Trump is not in my history. Not in my DNA” said Belafonte.

The evening concluded with a Q&A which drew two snaking lines on either side of the auditorium. Attendees included students, educators, artists, curators and fans of Belafonte. A music student and folk singer visiting from California asked about what attracted him to the folk form and song. “To me folk song carried informa-



Kimberly Drew and Harry Belafonte at Hostos



tion. Carried history.” Belafonte responded. He went on to sing a few bars from his classic, “Day O.”

*Work all night on a drink of rum
Daylight come and me wan’ go home
Stack banana till de morning come
Daylight come and me wan’ go home
Come, Mister tally man, tally me banana
Daylight come and me wan’ go home*

“Hearing him talk about his experience with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, it was very inspiring” said Yarlyn Mercedes, African American studies major from

Kimberly Drew and Harry Belafonte at Hostos

Lehman College. Mercedes is one of many who attended the talk as a part of a Lehman College class on the African American Family. The students were accompanied by their professor, Dr. Mary Phillips, who enthusiastically advocated for students and youth learning from activists of previous eras. “Harry Belafonte is a living archive” said Dr. Phillips. When asked about the link between her course and the evening’s conversation, she said that “whenever we are talking about civil rights or poverty or mass incarceration, we are talking about families.” Dr. Phillips emphasized the importance of her students to be able to get a first-hand accounting of social historical events from Be-

lafonte, and their implications on current events.

All proceeds from the event were directed to SANKOFA, a social action organization founded by Belafonte to match “high profile artists” with communities in activist and artistic collaborations. The term Sankofa is derived from West African mythology, explained Belafonte, and it is a metaphorical symbol used by the Akan people of Ghana – generally depicted as a bird with its head turned backward as if taking an egg from its back. It expresses the importance of reaching back to knowledge gained in the past and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress.

Some Theses on Stupidity

Milo Ward

Forgive the absurd title, but if we are obliged to take Kant seriously, then we can be forgiven for not burdening ourselves with a similar sobriety. Besides, it is Kant himself that enables this stupid reading. For Kant, the power of judgment is the ability to distinguish when something is subsumed by or falls under a rule or concept. Those who have difficulty performing this operation are stupid, he says, and will be in constant need of examples to successfully exercise this faculty. “This is also the sole and great utility of examples,” Kant writes, “which he who lacks the natural talent for judgment can never do without.”

He goes on to say that overreliance on examples actually does “damage” to the concept, because concrete examples only ever partially satisfy the universal rules of concepts. Kant wants reason to lead in its exchange with experience; for him reason must act like a “judge,” not as a “pupil” if it is to be instructed by nature. “Thus,” he says, “examples are the leading-strings of the power of judgment.” He intends this metaphor to be dismissive. Leading-strings are the tethers that help teach a child to walk, but simultaneously restrict its capacity to go very far.

This dismissal of examples is consistent with Kant’s insistence that pure reason must be strictly segregated from the sort of reason that is embedded in experience. Luckily for us innately stupid people,

who cannot conceive of anything that isn’t grounded in some way in material experience, Kant never is able to describe any transcendental realm of pure reason without relying on metaphors and examples from experience to explain what makes transcendental reason and transcendental aesthetics possible as categories. Therefore, a stupid reading will be one that takes these metaphors and examples to be as important as the concepts they purport to specify. An even more stupid reading will argue that the *Critique of Pure Reason* requires a stupid reading on its own terms, and it is not entirely clear which of the two you are about to read.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant set himself to the task of establishing “What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free of all experience.” In Susan Buck-Morss’s seminar on Critical Reason this spring, we began our study of Kant’s *Critique* by asking ourselves why it was relevant to study this text once the only comprehensible examples Kant ever supplied of elements belonging to the realm of pure reason had been thrown into question. If Kant bases his ideas of reason, particularly his division between the empirical and the *a priori*, on the sciences in the first case and mathematics in the second, how meaningful are his conclusions after the very footing on which he grounds them has been overturned? In other words, does it matter that the way Kant resolves the very *possibility* of making synthetic *a priori* judgments is contingent upon the validity of

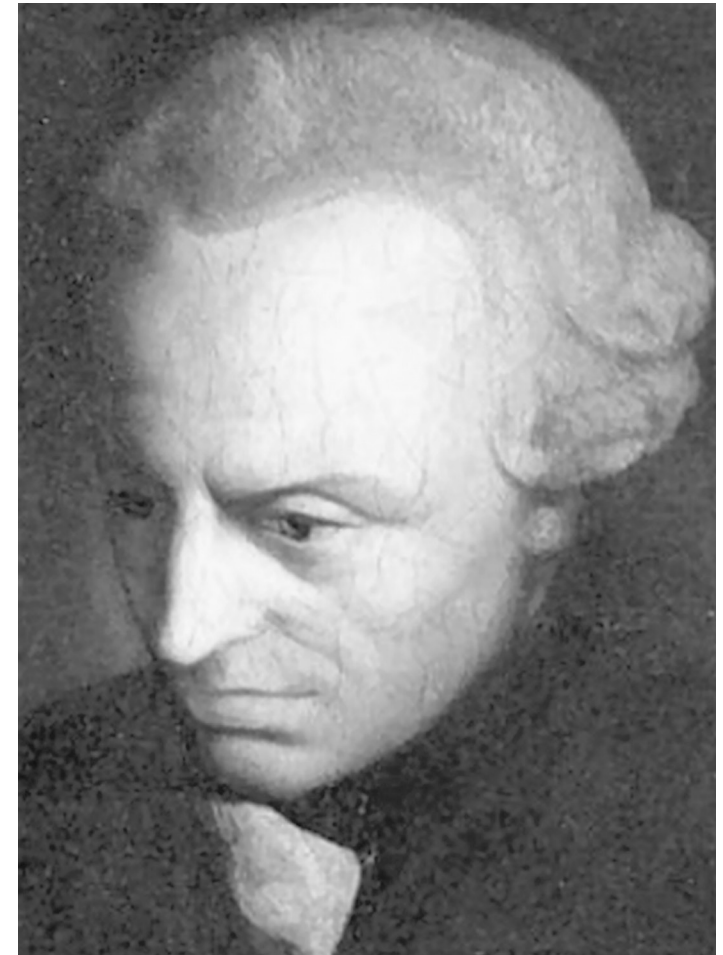
principles that have been outmoded within their own fields? Even in 1959, when Theodore Adorno gave his lectures on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno addressed what he perceived as a suspicion of his students that Kant is only still taught because of the long enduring “habit” of professors to do so. Acknowledging the legitimacy of this concern, he notes that most students,

...will probably have an idea that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is concerned on the one hand with particular questions of scientific theory and that it is filled with discourses pertaining to the individual sciences, discourses that for the most part have now been superseded. For example, you will all have heard something to the effect that the Kantian theory of the *a priori* nature of time and space has been undermined by relativity theory, or that the Kantian theory of causality as an *a priori* category has been refuted by quantum mechanics.

What we did, following Adorno, was bypass such questions of validity by approaching the *Critique* in a way that did not attempt to treat philosophy as dependent on the determinacy of the grounds on which it is bases its claims. By doing so, neither Adorno nor we sidestepped the declining authority of Kant in order to reinsert his position within the history of philosophy as belonging to an intellectual history and therefore beyond reproach. Adorno engages the issues Kant raises in the *Critique* as an “essential part of the history of philosophy,” in order to “rehearse the experiences that underlie this work as objective realities.” What Adorno means here is that he does not want to provide a clean account of what Kant argued, nor what Kant intended to say, nor locate Kant in his proper place within a philosophic tradition, but instead to address “whatever Kant’s philosophy contains that is *over and above* the immediate meaning of the text.” As philosophy is principally concerned with truth, what Adorno is really after is how “Kant reveals to us the movement of mind itself, of what we might term the internal history of truth, as this has been expressed on the sundial of truth itself.” Crucial

for our purposes is the emphasis placed on framing Kant’s *Critique* in terms of his ‘expressions.’ The expressions of philosophical ideas are the precipitates of an entire atmosphere, or what Adorno will describe in terms of philosophy as a “force field” or “constellation” of truth, which can only be perceived through “extrapolation.”

Our seminar’s method of approaching Kant ran parallel to this effort. Before fully developing how we approached Kant’s expressions, it is important to understand that what makes Kant so inspiring to Adorno is that the force field Adorno envisions looks something like a clamorous playground of thought where contradictions “express the life of truth.” Adorno finds in Kant a thinker that preserves such contradictions. Kant anticipates that by dividing his argu-



Immanuel Kant, 18th-century portrait – source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant#/media/File:Immanuel_Kant_\(painted_portrait\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant#/media/File:Immanuel_Kant_(painted_portrait).jpg)

ment about autonomous reason into subjective and objective deductions. Kant says that some might view him to be “expressing an **opinion**” because he begins his analysis with the assumption that there is an understanding that exists outside of experience, without ever proving “‘how the faculty of thinking itself is possible.’” If his “subjective deductions” evincing the possibility of pure reason prove unsatisfactory, then, he argues, his objective ones will suffice. This is to say that when he demonstrates how pure concepts can be intelligible by giving us mathematics as evidence, this is in fact his subjective way of showing an analog to pure reason, and in the form of example, it is liable to error as an outcome of subjective act of judgment. The objective conditions for the possibility of all *a priori* concepts are then maddeningly derived from the fact that they are necessary to “supply the objective ground of the possibility of experience.” Kant explains that through experience we are not only given sensations, but that even in a state of total passivity every sensation will always appear as “a concept of an object in general.” These *a priori* cognitions, although not derived through the experiences in which they make their appearance, have no content, nothing to grasp onto without experience. This contradiction is constantly rearticulated—the logical tumult of which Adorno revels in—because Kant persists in insisting that these objects have no basis in experience even as he fails to provide a convincing (at least for Adorno) measure of what they could possibly be without drawing from material reality.

As Adorno demonstrates, if one attempts to conceive of space and time devoid of any empirical content, even if these concepts provide a conceptual template without which experience is impossible, it is still futile to try to imagine them without using material from experience as a guide. Although, Kant is dead set on establishing the autonomous space for pure reason, he also repeatedly emphasizes why thought cannot do without experience:

Without sensibility, no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought.

Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts). Further, these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything and the senses are not capable of thinking anything.

The modifiers ‘empty’ and ‘blind’ do something here. They make the problem that Kant is circling familiar and available to the reader in an intimate way. The passage suggest that these things are necessarily intertwined — empty thoughts and blind experience are somehow familiar, and their alienation from one another carries historical analogs. It is important for Adorno that everything that he reads into and emphasizes in Kant is something that can be firmly located in the text itself. This particular explication is quite nice for Adorno’s purposes, because it becomes a principle that has ripples throughout Kant’s entire argument, by establishing that the purely subjective and the purely objective are eternally wed to one another, even as their roles cannot simply collapse into one another. This space where they cannot collapse is in Kant’s delineation of a restricted but nonetheless boundless field known as the transcendental realm.

Adorno sees the space carved out for the transcendental as a “torturous process” of *borrowing* from various other realms, but most importantly from metaphysics, from which it derives its claim to the “absolute validity” of thought that “creates and generates everything else.” Adorno views the production of the transcendental as actually taking Kant all the way to the Hegelian idea of the “identity of logic and metaphysics,” even if this is not something that Kant is willing to say outright. Adorno is less interested in demolishing Kant’s claims to reveal what they really should say than in demonstrating that even if Kant fails to get what he was after, there is already more there. By narrowing in on the metaphorical language, the figurative ‘borrowing’ that Adorno describes Kant

as doing can really be grasped in an immanent and historically sensible way.

In our seminar, we justified reading the *Critique of Pure Reason* in its entirety solely on the basis that without it we would miss Kant’s “doves.” We were reading Kant because there is something essential to the *Critique* that is impossible to get from a summary of the logical conclusions alone. It is one thing to understand that Kant lashes pure thought to experience, it is another to become familiar with examples he gives. Here are the doves:

Mathematics gives us a splendid example of how far we can go with *a priori* cognition independently of experience. Now it is occupied, to be sure, with objects and cognitions only so far as these can be exhibited in intuitions. This circumstance, however, is easily overlooked, since the intuition in question can itself be given *a priori*, and thus can hardly be distinguished from a mere pure concept. Captivated by such a proof of the power of reason, the drive for expansion sees no bounds. The light dove, in free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea it could do even better in airless space. Likewise, Plato abandoned the world of the senses because it set such narrow limits for the understanding, and dared to go beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of pure understanding. He did not notice that he made no headway by his efforts, for he had no resistance, no support, as it were, by which he could stiffen himself, and to which he could apply his powers in order to put his understanding into motion.

We have already seen how helpful Kant’s metaphorical language is when he gave the description of blind intuition and empty concepts. The example of the impulsive dove helps us understand that Kant effectively compels reason to reason itself into quagmires. Kant prefaces the *Critique* by describing the fate of human reason, which, like the dove, is innocent in the blunders that lead it into controversy. First, he says reason constructs principles that are both necessary and backed up by experience. Then,

as it becomes clear that experience will never cease to present challenges for reason to overcome, reason produces principles that seem to be in harmony with existent experience and yet exceed the domain of experience. Once that grounding is gone, reason has entered a problem space where all sorts of errors and contradictions can arise that have no clear resolve because they have left behind the only basis upon which truth can be oriented. This is what Kant describes as the “battlefield of...endless controversies” properly known as metaphysics. Like real battlefields, Kant describes how from the beginning its violence is uncontained and threatens always to spill out in all directions. The two extreme poles of this battle are, on one end, the despotism and dogmatism of objective truth and, on the other, the anarchic indifference of an entirely subjectively fashioned world. Neither, Kant says, have ever “gained the least bit of ground” nor held any lasting advantage in this battle.

Kant’s intervention is intended to impose order onto the battlefield of reason. What is needed, he says, is a “court of justice” to govern over reason using reason’s own native “eternal and unchangeable laws.” Adorno points out that Kant is essentially calling for a “tribunal” where “the judge, the prosecutor, and the accused are actually one and the same person” such that reason is forced to establish reason’s own autonomy. Hidden in Kant’s conception of autonomy, Adorno spies the bourgeois experience of society, where freedom is equated with the autonomy of self-government or individual sovereignty. According to Adorno, this equation is the key to recognizing the “very dark secret of bourgeois society,” which is that “freedom manifests itself as a function of law.” Adorno adds: “This idea, that freedom and obedience to the law are one and the same thing, means that there is indeed an end to tutelage, but that freedom ends up merely as something that is determined by law.” By making reason autonomous through its own immanent juridical authority, we arrive from another direction at the conclusion that to make the transcendental realm *transcend* the empirical world that

it orders, Kant secularized the formerly theological realm of metaphysics, a secularization framed in juridical terms. This is perhaps hardly a surprise, because Kant told us from the start that this battlefield was formally known as metaphysics, and only after law and order steps in is whole terrain divvied into disparately occupied zones.



Adorno describes the metaphor of the battlefield as “stroke of genius,” because it reveals how Kant’s thinking goes beyond what he might have intended by showing that when metaphysics is on its own and without supervision, it is a realm of fierce antagonisms, or dialectics, rather than eternally fixed propositions. This is crucial to Adorno, who refuses to let Kant brush over his own failure to get what he wants: a successfully separate sphere for the absolute objectivity of reason, which then provides a mediating barrier between the metaphysical plane and that of experience. It is the metaphor that exposes this by running antithetically to Kant’s intention of establishing a sanctuary for pure reason. We don’t need the doves because they are so nice, but because they are our access to the materiality in the concept. They are the empirical footprints clinging to abstractions. And it is only through recognizing this that we can even read Kant against Kant.

Recall Kant’s dismissive comparison of examples as the leading-strings that rein in the unsteady but willing locomotion of children. Kant believes examples to be more contained versions of concepts because they can never stray too far. However, not straying too far from the referent, from what Adorno will call origins, is exactly what Adorno wants us to resist in a philosophy that tirelessly tries to create absolute and

eternal truths that appear without any source in material reality. We can use these leading strings to get us back to the origins, back to the history in truth. By looking at the metaphorical language in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can create a mirror where the historical world reappears in the reflections of *a priori* reason. Metaphors escape concepts and we can follow their return to earth. Adorno believes that the effort to disguise and to disappear the origins of conceptual categories has been uniformly practiced by all philosophers, “whether we are talking about Plato with his Ideas or Kant with his synthetic *a priori* judgments, or rather with his notion of original apperception, or whether we are thinking of Heidegger, who has made an absolute of the concept of origin and turned it into a metaphysical entity.” These philosophers look at their eternal categories related constitutively to society, and not “based on analogy,” and thus we can use their analogies to read society back into them. Philosophers are always protective of the autonomy of their categories and for good reason, as Adorno explains: “The idea of genesis is intolerable in these philosophies because the things they defend have cause to fear reflection on their origins.” Philosophy, “like the cat burglar”, always covers its tracks. We respond by reading forensically.

Christian Daniel Rauch, (1777-1857) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Bronze 29.6 x 10.7 x 9.0 cm – source: <https://inmortalis.livejournal.com/386789.html>

Adam Robert’s *The Thing Itself*: A Book Review in Four Antinomies

Asher Wycoff

I. a. The universe has a beginning and an end in time and space.

b. The universe is unbounded in time and space.

In the 1990s, underground cartoonist William Barker published a series of black-and-white, single-panel stick figure drawings. The subjects of these panels populated a variety of daunting, visually distorted landscapes pockmarked by flying saucers and interdimensional portals. Settings ranged from the familiar (grids of cubicles, suburban neighborhoods, city streets packed with billboards) to the alien (extraterrestrial deserts, abstract geometric planes) with a seamless continuity. Barker grouped these panels under a loose narrative about the “Schwa Corporation,” a kind of ET Enron which systematically intervenes in human affairs for unclear but likely nefarious purposes. The political theorist Jodi Dean described Barker’s illustrations as encapsulating the nebulous kind of paranoia that permeated the US cultural landscape after the Cold



War. The alien resides at the core of our world, structuring and connecting every aspect of social reality — yet it remains a “fugitive truth,” undetectable unless you know precisely what to look for and how to look for it.

Adam Roberts’s *The Thing Itself* recalls this placement of the extraterrestrial at the center of our world, accessible just beyond the peripheries of human sense-perception. The novel’s central narrative follows Charles Gardner, an involuntarily retired astrophysicist who suffered permanent disfigurement after a close encounter at the South Pole in the 1980s. Charles’s research partner at the South Pole base, Roy Curtius, is certain he’s solved the Fermi paradox: the question of why, despite the high probability of their existence, alien civilizations have never made contact with Earth. The answer lies in the *Ding an sich*, or thing-in-itself, Immanuel Kant’s conceptualization of reality as being unmediated by the categories of human cognition. We have not made contact with extraterrestrial life because it resides in the *Ding an sich*, beyond our cognitive rubrics of time and space. This plane of existence remains definitionally out of reach to human beings, but Roy contends it can be accessed by artificial intelligence. During a disastrous experiment to test this conclusion, Roy unleashes an Eldritch horror and leaves Charles

frostbitten and incapacitated in the Antarctic tundra.

II. a. Every substance in the world is comprised of simple parts.

b. The world is irreducibly complex; there exists nothing simple.

We rejoin Charles three decades later, when he is approached by representatives from a mysterious, state-funded organization simply referred to as “the Institute.” The Institute hopes to resurrect Roy’s project of accessing the thing-in-itself via artificial intelligence, with the ultimate hope of manipulating it for the British government’s benefit. As is the case with most public-private partnerships, the Institute’s precise goals are ill-defined, obscured by red tape, or both. In the course of trying to uncover the nature of the Institute’s operations, Charles becomes a target of the Institute’s flagship AI, British intelligence services, his former research partner, and a disfigured ghost child, all of whom chase him through space, time, and several extended dialogues on metaphysics.

This narrative is interrupted every other chapter by vignettes from other time periods, whose subjects encounter the same strange entities Charles encountered at the Antarctic research

base. This constellation of ancillary narratives enables *The Thing Itself* to put an engaging spin on the dreary, expository conversations that frequently speckle science fiction. In each of these accounts, we see the same phenomena (or noumena, more appropriately) through the given narrator’s perceptual framework. To the central protagonist, writing in our present, the *Ding an sich* is explicable as a discovery of artificial intelligence. To Thomas Firmin, a seventeenth century English servant boy, the applicable rubric is Gnostic demonology. To an unnamed bohemian tourist in prewar Germany, H. G. Wells provides the descriptive vocabulary. This fragmentation of perspective allows Roberts to play with the rule of “show, don’t tell.” Telling becomes showing, as divergent explanations of the same *Ding* reveal the critical gaps between the various narrators’ social and historical positions. It’s a clever conceit, if applied slightly ostentatiously

III. a. Spontaneous action is a precondition of the laws of causality.

b. Causality precludes the possibility of spontaneous action.

The book does contain, however, a handful of worn-out tropes

that Roberts doesn’t offer a twist on. It’s unfortunate that the central plot saddles readers with Charles, a standard-issue male antihero whose two defining character traits are jaded flippancy and implacable horniness. The book’s ancillary plots offer a nice respite at first, until one of them slides into a sequence of wholly unnecessary rape scenes. Overall, the role Roberts affords to sexuality is less than inspired, revolving chiefly around heterosexual male frustration with an occasional detour for pedophilia. (That said, it is perhaps to Roberts’s credit that one of the book’s only pleasant sexual encounters takes place between a twenty-second century androgyne and a time-traveling ghost.) While *The Thing Itself* largely avoids feeling derivative, its depictions of sex definitely lend the enterprise an aura of Vonnegut pastiche, insofar as the novel’s transcendental themes remain firmly rooted in the main characters’ sexual neuroses.

These complaints aside, the core mechanics of *The Thing Itself* work more often than not. The central plot remains engaging throughout, Charles’s insufferability notwithstanding. The same holds true for most of the novel’s ancillary plots. Roberts is a remarkable prose stylist, and he weaves disparate narratives and literary genres together with ease. Most surprisingly, the periodic

discussions of Kantian metaphysics actually work as intended, lending the novel a satisfying thematic coherence without becoming obtrusive or distracting. Often, Charles’s story serves chiefly as a vehicle for ruminations on the structure of human cognition, the in-built limitations of spatial and temporal categories, and the existence of God. These discussions build, narratively and thematically, to a sincerely affecting first-person account of religious revelation at the novel’s climax.

IV. a. There exists an absolutely necessary being.

b. No, there doesn’t.

Nietzsche famously mocked the concept of the thing-in-itself. Kant’s conception of an unmediated reality behind the world perceived by human beings earned him the classification of *Hinterweltler*, or “backworldsman,” alongside Plato and various Christian theologians. Upon his first exposure to Kant in the Antarctic research base, Charles echoes this dismissal. Kant’s categories of cognition are too tidy, and the concept of a world-behind-the-world is speculative and absurd. The central thread of Charles’s character development is his departure from this line of criticism, his growing acceptance of the limits to his own cognition, and his

gradual embrace of a grand design beyond empirical validation.

In the acknowledgments, Roberts describes himself as “an atheist writing a novel about why you should believe in God.” Given Roberts’s periodic tendency to spell things out to fault (the acknowledgments also explain several of the literary and historical references made throughout the novel, in case you didn’t get them), *The Thing Itself*’s endorsement of Kantian theology is refreshingly subtle. Transcendental realities cannot be demonstrated by logical proof, but this does not diminish them as realities, still less as guides to reason and action.

That this lesson comes at the end of a story about aliens, artificial intelligence, and time-traveling ghosts is not necessarily surprising; plenty of science-fiction has high philosophical ambitions. What is surprising is that it *works*. In the hands of a less skilled author, a novel like this could very easily crumble into a confused, pretentious heap. It is a miracle that *The Thing Itself* is fun, engaging, and cohesive instead — a modest miracle, granted, but precisely the kind of small favor worth thanking God for.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL STUDENTS OF
THE GRADUATE CENTER AND CUNY
FOR FINISHING UP YET ANOTHER SEMESTER**

With the semester coming to a close, the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council (DSC) would like to remind all Graduate Center students of the following information.

2017-18 DSC Participatory Budget Initiative

Students involved in submitting proposals to the participatory budget initiative were asked to reflect on the process. We were especially interested in understanding how the initiative may be used to continue identifying needs on the campus. Here are some memorable responses provided as follows:

“I think there are a number of student needs that remain unfulfilled at the Graduate Center. Some priorities that I think should be considered for future projects include a bicycle storage room, an onsite gym, and phone charging stations. This process has made me optimistic [...] in actually making a difference for student life in our school. I suggest for future students who submit projects for participatory budgeting, that they seek to make a difference across disciplines and benefit everyone in the building.”

“I have a sense that the best thing about this [participatory budget initiative] is not the money itself (which helped, and motivated us to get started) but the fact that it opens a conversation with Facilities and Building Design and IT, and allows students to address some long neglected issues.”

If you are interested in the participatory budget initiative or are considering submitting a proposal for a 2018-19 cycle and have questions, please email dsc@cunydisc.org. Pending budget approval, the proposals guidelines will be announced in September 2018.

Program Governance

The DSC Governance Task Force is interested in working with students to address questions and concerns about the implementation of your program's shared governance. Email govtaskforce@cunydisc.org with any questions you may have.

Chartered Organizations

The DSC sponsors over 40 interdisciplinary student organizations, and they are doing some amazing events and initiatives this semester. To get the funds and support they need to run these events, they need roster signatures from enrolled students every semester. Please sign their rosters here: <http://cunydisc.org/works/chartered-organizations/list> (note that you need to have a DSCWorks account to sign rosters). Learn about chartered orgs and their events at <http://opencuny.org/charteredorgs/>, or look for their events on DSC and program listservs.

See you all this fall! Until then, wishing you a pleasant and productive summer!

– The Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council (DSC)

