Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy

Editorial

I have the privilege to present to you the 25th edition of the ESJP. As always, the texts in our editions are the result of a big collective effort. On the one hand, the authors must rethink and rewrite their work together with our editors, with whom hey are allowed only a mediated contact. The exciting moment of receiving the news of the selection for publication after a couple months of waiting is quickly followed by a editorial process that can be as exhausting as it is rewarding. For taking up this challenge, I thank the authors of this edition: Nena M. Ackerl, Pepijn Op de Beek, and Ties van Daal. On the other hand, the editors, without any special access to the authors' minds, must, as a group, unravel the arguments presented and, as precisely as possible, suggest reflection points or changes to the text without making it their own. For the grace with which this editorial process was conducted, I thank the editors who joined us this year (Héctor Emilio Martínez García, Umut Derman Tacyildiz, Ties van Griensven, Jake Corcoran, Charlie van Dijl, Alice Lucchiari, and Sofya Bilich) and those who decided to commit yet another year to the journal (Menno Lenting, Kasper Essers, Sterre Kanon, and Ties van Daal). None of this would have been possible without the work of Jasper Peters as secretary of the ESJP, who so diligently made sure that everyone (including me) knew exactly what to do, by when. I also must thank Georgina Aránzazu Dijkstra for entrusting me with the journal's direction - a role she held with such care for three years -, for generously sharing her knowledge, and for always being there to help me navigate the ins and outs of the job. Finally, I cannot go without thanking the members of our faculty who help to keep the journal alive by nominating texts and reviewing the ones we select for potential publication. As you see, this edition was built by many hands.

I emphasise the collectivity as the basis of the journal not only because authors and editors need to learn how to think *with* each other, but also because I believe this is the line that weaves together all three texts published in this edition. They show the past that relentlessly makes itself present; the now that announces the gravity of the future we are heading towards; and other paths we may trace together. The starting point of Nena's text are the multiple student encampments in support of Palestinian people that recently disrupted the dreadful normality of many education institutions - including our own. Whilst Nena focuses on the role that art can play in amplifying collective power, Pepijn takes a step back to analyse how the constitution of the European subject enables oppression in the first place. In a world where people's deaths are so easily classified as collateral damage, Ties' work asks us to reflect on the intergenerational consequences of the waste we produce within an ever more entrenched logic of obsolescence and consumerism. Our way of living not only condemns many to precariousness or annihilation now, but also stains the future of those yet-to-be born, both human and non-human.

A shared sense of gravity and urgency permeates this edition and I believe that, having met the authors personally, this very sense drove them to write about what their chosen topics. They would not have put in the effort they did if the subjects were merely trivial to them. I therefore praise the authors for not accepting things as they are - and here is to the certainty that *they can be otherwise*.

Heloísa Nerone

Editor-in-chief

About

ESJP
#25 | 2025

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

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

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

In this Issue

The essay **Art in Times of the Student Intifada, or How on Earth am I Supposed to Study Right Now?** by Nena M. Ackerl is a philosophical reflection on the role of Refaat Alareer's poem "If I must die" in the Palestine Solidarity Movement. Through an analysis of Hegel's and Audre Lorde's accounts of poetry, the author argues that the poem should be understood as a means for liberation rather than a mere expression of freedom. Inspired by Walter Benjamin, they argue that in supporting collective action, such as the student encampments, the poem's political power is amplified. Their essay urges us to see the connection between philosophy and action for a free Palestine.

In their paper **A Fatal Necessity:** *Absent Presence and Assimilation as Obliteration*, Pepijn Op de Beek proposes to think of Europe as a state of exception that is established through the hierarchizing designation of an Other. With Derrida, they argue that this founding relationship between an exceptional Europe and its Other is one of supplementarity, in which the absent presence of the Other exists both as haunting violence as well as a (dis)juncture that holds revolutionary potential for refusal and resistance. Drawing mainly on the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva, who describes the racial analytic that constitutes Euro-white subjects as self-determined and transparent and the 'others of Europe' as outer-determined and affectable, Op de Beek focuses on what Da Silva calls engulfment. Following thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, Audre Lorde, Christina Sharpe, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, they consider how the logic of in-/exclusion, geared at assimilation, functions as a modality of obliteration that fails to confront the racial as a strategy of power and reproduces the necropolitics of racial capitalism.

In **World to Waste:** *The Toxic Legacy of Consumerism and Technoscience*, Ties van Daal explores Hannah Arendt's analysis of acceleration under consumerism and expands upon it through the work of Bernard Stiegler. He examines how technoscience accelerates the transformation of durable objects into disposable commodities, ultimately producing a lasting legacy of highly complex and persistent waste.

ESJP
#25 | 2025

Table of contents

Art in Times of the Student Intifada, or How on Earth am I Supposed to Study Right Now?

Nena M. Ackerl

> The white fathers told us,
> I think therefore I am;
> and the black mothers in each of us – the poet –
> whispers in our dreams,
> I feel therefore I can be free.
> — Audre Lorde, 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury'

Image 1. Painting *A Free Gaza* by unknown artist, displayed at Shireen Abu Akleh Square on Woudestein Campus, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Photo by Samir Abdullayev for Erasmus Magazine on May 31, 2024

The most recent genocidal war on Gaza has led to a renewed global uprising of students fighting the complicity of institutions and governments in the ongoing genocide, occupation and apartheid regime. As I was first writing this essay in June 2024, we were counting 174 solidarity encampments for Palestine around the world. What makes such an encampment? Besides the obvious necessities (a location, protestors and tents), another common feature is art such as drawings, posters, banners, movie screenings, music and poetry. At first glance one might think that art is used to embellish the camps, or that it is supposed to make it more fun or interesting to take part in them. While this is not necessarily untrue, there is more to the role of art at the solidarity encampments.

Much has been said about the importance of art for political movements, from its use as a tool for propaganda, to its ability to arouse emotions or its function as a community-building practice. Rather than a conceptual contribution to this debate, this essay is a reflective engagement with a concrete work of art. It was written for a course on aesthetics that took place simultaneously with the protest camp for Palestinian liberation at the Erasmus University. As the declared 'global student intifada' had reached our

campus, I was thinking: *how on earth am I supposed to study right now?* My course work seemed purposeless in light of anything that could be done to contribute to the camp. The mere ability to study seemed shameful, particularly in light of the scholasticide in Gaza.[1] The only place where I felt justified to study was the camp. But studying at the camp did not mean simply doing my usual course work. It was a different kind of studying altogether – studying on campus but against the university.

At the camp I encountered the poem 'If I must die,' written by the martyred Palestinian writer, poet and activist Refaat Alareer. He opens the poem, written for his daughter, with the words "If I must die, you must live" and proceeds to provide instructions for what to do should he be killed. He asks for his story to be told, his things to be sold, and that a kite be made out of cloth and string that should rise above Gaza, giving the children a sign of love and hope.
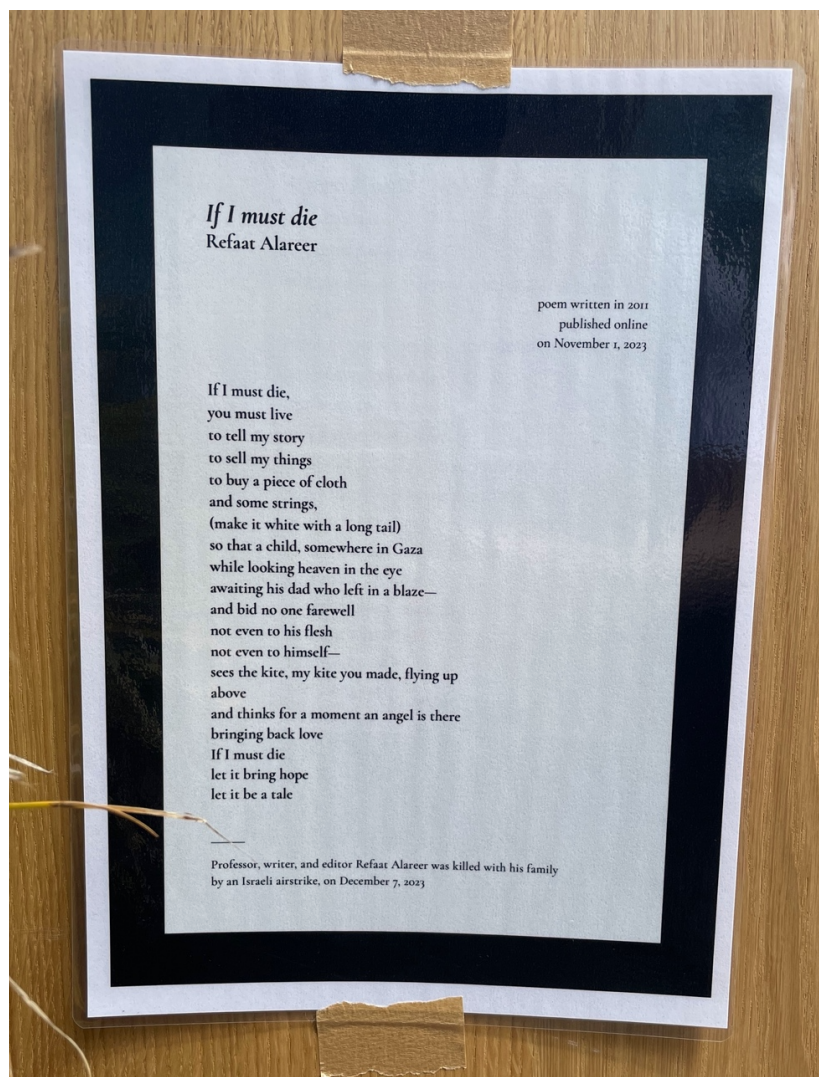
Image 2. Poem 'If I must die' displayed at the Jenin Community Library of the encampment at Shireen Abu Akleh Square on Woudestein Campus, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

In this essay I aim to illustrate the potential role of poetry in protest movements through the example of 'If I must die.' I will bring Alareer's poem into conversation with the work of important authors from the history of aesthetics. I will begin with G.W.F. Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* that includes his analysis of poetry as the most advanced form of art due to its expression of inner truth and freedom. Then, I will

---

[1]   The term 'scholasticide' is often use to denote the systematic eradication of educational infrastructure. When I started writing this essay, all university buildings in Gaza had been destroyed and most schools had been destroyed or damaged. Students and teachers had been killed, wounded or displaced and survivors were struggling to follow their education. As one Palestinian student is quoted in an article for the Middle East Eye: "I watch my lectures while the Israeli army is bombing the area where I am taking shelter" (See: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-gaza-war-education-students-fight-keep-learning).

turn to Audre Lorde's essay 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury' to problematize Hegel's theory and to show how my reading of her theory of poetry as a means for liberation bears on the analysis of Refaat Alareer's poem. Lastly, with Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,' I consider the dissemination of the poem through digital technologies and the importance of the encampment as a form of collective action. I argue that the reading of 'If I must die' at the Palestine solidarity encampments offers an example of how art can be politically potent under capitalism. Next to a philosophical engagement with Alareer's poem, this essay was from its beginning an attempt at grappling with being a philosophy student at a university in the imperial core at the time of the genocide in Gaza.

From Expressions of Freedom to Means for Liberation

In his *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel (2011, 45) approaches artistic beauty as an object of scientific study. He situates art in his greater philosophical system by explaining its role in the unfolding of *Spirit* (48). Before turning to Hegel's theory of art and poetry, it is important to understand some fundamental aspects of his system. One way to interpret what Hegel means with Spirit, is to understand it as an all-encompassing, self-conscious and self-determining kind of reason, that produces everything that is external and material. There is a productive tension between the finite external material world and the infinite internal Spirit. The external material world is simultaneously subsumed under the force of Spirit (its producer), and integrated in it as a step towards the realization of Spirit (Da Silva 2007, 70-71). Consequently, Hegel is a holistic thinker for whom truth lies in the whole and everything finite is determined by the whole (1807, *Vorrede*).

Hegel argues that through its content, art approximates the idea of beauty contained in Spirit*,* "while its form is the configuration of sensuous material." (2011, 47) He classifies art in three categories based on the relationship between meaning (content) and shape (form) that constitutes an art-form. While symbolic art such as architecture is predominantly determined by its form, in classical art, such as Ancient Greek sculpture, content and form are in harmony (50-51). Lastly, in romantic art the manifestation of the idea (content) transcends the materiality of art (form), since the idea is developed to a degree that cannot be represented externally (52-53). Hegel classifies poetry as romantic art. He states that

> Poetry is the universal art of the spirit which has become free in itself and which is not tied down for its realization to external sensuous material; instead, it launches out exclusively in the inner space and the inner time of ideas and feelings. (57)

He argues that poetry does not only transcend the materiality of art but "in poetry the external material is altogether degraded as worthless" (57). By overcoming the external material world, for Hegel, poetry approaches the realm of freedom (57). And in doing so, it fulfills the purpose he assigns to art which is "the creation of beautiful objects in which the true character of freedom is given sensuous expression" (Houlgate 2024). Thus, what makes art beautiful for Hegel is the expression of freedom which allows us "to become aware of who we truly are" (Houlgate 2024).

Prior to the application of Hegel's theory, it is important to note his racism. He states that the ideas of 'non-Europeans' are "indeterminate" or "determined badly" (Hegel 2011, 49). He believed that while great craftsmanship can be found outside of Europe, beautiful art can only be created by the enlightened European subject (49). We can assume that Hegel would not have considered poetry by a Palestinian writer the kind of art in which an expression of truth and freedom can be found. Thus, I am intentionally misusing Hegel's philosophy of art through the momentary suspension of his racism for my analysis.

Following Hegel, we can understand the poem 'If I must die' as an expression of freedom and truth. We can read Alareer as pointing towards the existence of freedom, even under extreme oppression. The

poem describes the constant threat of death in Gaza, but it also signifies the possibility of hope and love under these circumstances. It reminds us that there is always something that escapes oppression. The poem signifies that the deaths of Palestinian martyrs are not mere tragedies. It opposes the dehumanization and victimization of the Palestinians in Gaza by showing that they are not helpless victims and that their cruel circumstances have not robbed them of their humanity and agency. Therefore, the reading of the poem at the solidarity encampments has been a way to fight this discourse in the imperial core.

As we have seen, through Hegel we can understand 'If I must die' as an expression of freedom and truth. However, there are more fundamental problems with Hegel's philosophy than his overtly racist world view. He has for example been criticized for categorically devaluing the external material (Da Silva 2007, 70-71). By turning to Audre Lorde, I want to critique Hegel's theory of poetry and show how her account allows us to recognize the potential of poetry to not only express freedom and truth, but to yield concrete action.

In her essay 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury,' Audre Lorde (2017) critiques the predominant understanding of poetry in the white androcentric canon and she offers her alternative understanding of women's poetry as a means for liberation. Lorde argues that throughout the white androcentric tradition, ideas have been understood as the catalysts of freedom. Consequently, experiences and feelings have been subordinated to thought, devalued, and their power to produce knowledge and liberatory action has been denied (8). We can identify this in Hegel's system, where feelings and experiences are regarded as mere moments in the unfolding of Spirit, while ideas supposedly exist independently from the material world as they are part of the force of Spirit. He makes this clear when he argues that in poetry the external material world is overcome and made "worthless" (Hegel 2011, 57). For Lorde (2017, 7), however, ideas are not transcendent units; they already exist in our feelings and experiences. In her essay, she shows how women's poetry invalidates and overcomes the supposed dichotomies of experiences and ideas, the external and the internal, the material and the transcendent. She writes:

> I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches so necessary for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight. (8)

Contrary to Hegel's understanding of poetry as the overcoming of the external material through the approximate expression of the idea of freedom, Lorde argues that poetry has the potential to *distil ideas from experience*. She writes that in revolutionary poetry "hopes and dreams" are articulated and turned into "the most radical and daring ideas," which inform action (8-9). For Lorde, ideas are not the catalysts of freedom, feelings are (9-10). In her account, poetry has a strong pedagogical function because it enables us to make sense of our lived experience and to figure out how to relate and respond to it. We can also identify a pedagogical function of poetry in Hegel, as he believes that it teaches us about inner truths (Houlgate 2024). However, there is an important difference. For Hegel, poetry is an expression of abstract truth, while for Lorde it is a process of learning from concrete existence. For Hegel poetry is *expressive*. For Lorde it is *creative, transformative* and *activating*.

The evolution from poetry as a mere expression of freedom in Hegel, to poetry as a means for liberation in Lorde, has strong implications for the analysis of Refaat Alareer's poem.[2] Lorde's text points

---

[2] Even though Lorde's essay was originally written about women's poetry, I believe that her arguments can be expanded to the poetry of all people experiencing oppression regardless of gender.

to the heart of 'If I must die,'[which should not only be considered as an expression of truth and freedom but as a call to liberatory action. The poem arises from the morbid reality of life in Gaza. But the focus is not on death, it is on hope and survival. The horror of another person dead is turned into what Lorde calls "tangible action." (2017, 8) The liberating act Alareer's poem inspires is that of not giving up, holding on to a revolutionary hope. Neither the content of the poem nor its role or effects in the solidarity movement can be understood without its connection to the external material world. 'If I must die' is a poem that springs from the experiences of its author. At its core is the desire to spread love and hope despite oppression and death, through equally material ways symbolized by a kite in the sky above Gaza. It is not a sole expression of transcendent ideas, as Hegel suggests, but better understood through Lorde's understanding of poetry as embodying radical ideas, distilled from experience, that inspire concrete action.

From Action to Collective Action

So far, I have shown how we can move from an understanding of poetry as an expression of freedom in Hegel to poetry as a means for liberation in Lorde. Lorde (2017, 8) describes the kind of action that poetry can bring about as tangible, lasting, liberating and transformative. Regarding the role of the poem 'If I must die' in the solidarity movement, I find it important to highlight the *collective* action the poem supports. I will do so by turning to Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.'

Benjamin aims to formulate concepts and ideas on art that are useless for fascism but fruitful for a "revolutionary politics of art" (Lindner 2011, 97, my translation). At the core of the text is Benjamin's analysis of how techno-capitalist transformation affects the sociopolitical status and function of art (116). Even though he wrote this essay almost a century ago, and technological innovation has progressed immensely since then, it is no less relevant today in light of modern digital technology. Benjamin invites us to turn towards the effects of the "delocalization of art" and to ask the question whether and how art can acquire revolutionary potency (115, my translation). What does it mean for the struggle for Palestinian liberation that the poem 'If I must die' can travel across the globe through one click of a button, to be read in spaces such as the solidarity encampments?

Benjamin argues that the 'technological reproducibility' of art has changed its social function, it has become fundamentally political (Benjamin 2006, 256-7).[3] Its singular and local existence has been replaced by its mass existence (Benjamin 2011, 15). Consequently, art has become increasingly commodified (22), but its potential to mobilize the masses has also expanded (51). On November 1, 2023, Refaat Alareer posted his poem on Twitter. Around eight months later it had over 33 million views, demonstrating the potential of digital technologies to spread art through the masses, even from a territory under military siege.[4]

Benjamin emphasizes that the mere dissemination of art through the masses itself does not make it revolutionary by contrasting the relation of art to fascism with the relation of art to communism. He argues that fascism *aestheticizes* politics by creating sensations that move people while not affecting any material changes in property relations (53-5). This phenomenon is at its peak during war, when extermination becomes "aesthetic pleasure" (Benjamin 2006, 270). We can observe this in the social media feeds of soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces who display their enjoyment of murder and destruction

---

[3]   My reading of Benjamin's essay is based on the German original of the third edition published by Reclam in 2011. For the direct quotes I refer to the translation in *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940* published by Harvard University Press in 2006.

[4]   To avoid presenting (digital) technology in an overly optimistic light, I find it important to acknowledge how technological innovation has had horrific consequences for the Palestinian people because of its crucial role in war and genocide. Most significantly, in the form of military and policing technologies. For an example of the role of digital technologies, see this article: https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/.

(Toler et al. 2024).[5] Communism, in contrast *politicizes* art, since it mobilizes it to effect changes in property relations (55).[6] He argues that art cannot be revolutionary as long as it is regulated by capital (34-35).

This interpretation of Benjamin allows me to consider the encampment itself as an important factor for the political power of Alareer's poem. Reading it at the encampment means reading it in a small counterspace within and against imperialist capitalism. The communal life in the camp is in many ways an inversion of the life outside the camp. Usually, its inhabitants take care of each other and resources collectively. Because 'If I must die' is not only made available for the masses, but is displayed and read at the camps, the poem connects those fighting the complicity of their institutions with the broader Palestine liberation movement. And, most importantly, it contributes to the transformation of property relations, even if 'only' in the limited sense of supporting the fight for Palestinian liberation through the financial and political divestment of universities.[7] Therefore, it is at the encampment where the revolutionary force of Alareer's poem is amplified through its support of collective action.

Learn, Unite, Fight!

Audre Lorde writes that poetry "lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before." (2017, 9) She argues that it can promote radical change which explains the appeal of poetry for revolutionary political movements. But how does poetry do that? Following the thinkers used for this essay, through its pedagogical ability and the potential to support collective action.

Under the ongoing military siege, many of the most fundamental freedoms of Palestinians in Gaza are restricted. However, we saw how poetry, through its expressive capacity, can teach us that some freedom remains despite extreme oppression and violence. In doing so, the reading of the poem can serve to counteract the dehumanization and victimization of Palestinians. However, learning from poetry is not a process of enlightenment by transcendent ideas but one that is entangled with the very material existence of the author. This is painfully clear in Refaat Alareer's poem. 'If I must die' is about nurturing hope and love in the face of the morbid reality of life in Gaza, especially during moments of intensified Israeli violence. It demonstrates the revolutionary capacity that Lorde ascribes to poetry: to turn experiences and feelings into radical ideas that inspire concrete action. Alareer's poem is not merely an expression of freedom that can teach us something, but a means for liberation.

While learning about the history and the current situation of Palestine is essential, ultimately, collective action is necessary for radical change. Reading Alareer's poem has the potential to inspire and support such collective action. We can turn its teachings into action right here at the university. As philosophers, we think of ourselves as critical thinkers who can elucidate contemporary problems by asking different questions, offering alternative viewpoints and conducting thorough analyses. But sometimes the deepest lesson of our theory is to get up and join a fight.

---

[5]   For example, a video coordinating the mix of a war song on DJ decks with the bombing of houses in the background.

[6]   The abolition of private property and the collectivisation of the means of production are at the core of communism. Hence Benjamin's emphasis on property relations.

[7]   For an explanation of how the collaboration with Israeli institutions makes the Erasmus University complicit in Israel's ongoing genocide and apartheid regime, see the open letter of staff members from May 30, 2024: https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2024/06/07/open-letter-from-staff-at-erasmus-cut-all-ties-with-israeli-academic-institutions/

References

Abdullayev, Samir. 2024. "Protesters camp overnight, plan on staying 'until university acknowledges demands.'" *Erasmus Magazine*, May 31. https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2024/05/31/protesters-camp-overnight-plan-on-staying-until-university-acknowledges-demands/.

Alareer, Refaat. 2023. "If I must die." https://ifimustdie.net/.

Benjamin, Walter. 2006. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Third Version." In *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 2011. *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Philipp Reclam jun. Verlag GmbH.

Da Silva, Denise Ferreira. 2007. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. University of Minnesota Press.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1807. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/hegel/phaenom/phavorr2.html.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 2011. "Extracts from Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art." In *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, edited by Clive Cazeaux. Second edition. Routledge.

Houlgate, Stephen. 2024. "Hegel's Aesthetics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/hegel-aesthetics/.

Lindner, Burkhardt. 2011. "Nachwort." In Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Philipp Reclam jun. Verlag GmbH.

Lorde, Audre. 2017. "Poetry Is Not a Luxury." In *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. Silver Press.

Toler, Aric, Sarah Kerr, Adam Sella, Arjeta Lajka, and Chevaz Clarke. 2024. "What Israeli Soldiers' Videos Reveal: Cheering Destruction and Mocking Gazans." *New York Times*, February 6. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/06/world/middleeast/israel-idf-soldiers-war-social-media-video.html.

A Fatal Necessity: *Absent Presence and Assimilation as Obliteration*

Pepijn Op de Beek

> Today, the watchword is not entanglement but transparency.
> – Walter Benjamin*, The Arcades Project*

> We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone.
> – Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

State of Exception

In the eighth thesis of his late text "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," Walter Benjamin puts forward what is perhaps the greatest insight to be gained from his body of work: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' [*Ausnahmezustand*] in which we live, is the rule" (1991, 697; my translation). Taking this remark as our departure, we can try to gain an insight into the fundamental constitutive analytic of European post-Enlightenment modernity as an 'exception.' Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2021, 27-28) describe the instantiation of this ordering exception in a passage that is worth quoting at length. They write:

> What is implied in imagining that one has become (exceptional)? There will have been the gift of Europe of its own place, at once insular and unlimited, and its own singular and subdivisible time. This transcendental honorarium, wherein gift is conceptualized as the given and the given is conceptualized as gift, will have granted Europe (the) world as the place and time of exception. But someone will have had to except Europe, to allow the constantly emergent state of its exception, to sacralize its politico-theological ground and atmosphere. Someone will have had to give to Europe(ans) the capacity to be one. (Some)one will have given man the power of being one, a completeness that will have been as if it were given.

Someone will have had to except Europe. Harney and Moten here point to the fundamental fracture that needed to take place for Europe to come into place, to come into its particular place of/as exception. This fracture is based on the need to designate an Other of Europe, to bring into signification groups that are distinguished from proper (Euro-white) subjectivity, most importantly as those that do not *own*. This speciation is described similarly by McKenzie Wark (2004, §177), who notes: "Property founds subjectivity as the relation between possession and nonpossession."[1]

Meaning comes into being through differentiation (Hall 1997, 234). The meaning of an exceptional Europe necessitates the designation of a nonpossessing Other, of the others that Europe excepts itself from (Fanon 2004, 5). This mythic lawmaking of Europe as 'the One' over and against 'the Other' can only affirm itself by repeating this instituting violence (Derrida 1996, 79; Benjamin 2004, 248). This exception is a racialized dynamic of *dis-identification*, where the completeness of full humanity that is reserved for whiteness, depends on the less-than-human status of blackness (Weheliye 2002, 27; cf. Trouillot 2015, 76, 81). This is also the dynamic that Edward Said (2003) describes in his classic work *Orientalism*. There, he notes how it is the Orient, *as European production*, that has defined Europe, or the

---

[1] In which this is also, crucially, to be understood as self-possession.

West. The latter needs the Orient as its negative to define itself. As Said writes: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (40).[2]

Thus, Europe's Other is the exception to the exception that proves the rule, the state of exception that is the rule (cf. Agamben 2005, 40). The founding of Euro-white modernity relies on this "coterminous birth of Man and his Others" as his constitutive outside (Yusoff 2018, 55). There is, then, the European interior on the one hand, and its outside on the other. Though one cannot subsume this relationship of inside/outside under one of its terms, their autonomous and coherent presence as binary opposites is false and cannot be sustained. Both of its signifiers are mutually dependent and do not have a claim to completeness, to presence as such, to being one. They exist, and can only ever exist, as a relation of *supplementarity*. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida (1997, 144-5) describes such a relation as follows:

> the supplement … harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. … But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.

It is important to note the destabilizing potential that exists at the heart of the supplement. It is through the Other's absent presence not only that Europe comes into being, it is also this 'subaltern instance' that has the latent explosivity capable of dislodging said European post-Enlightenment order. Crucially, in constituting itself as exception, Europe grants an originary power to its supplementary Other. The exception is haunted, always and forever (Bouteldja 2016, 40-41). The exception is indefensible (Césaire 2000, 32). Following Derrida, Miranda Joseph (2002, 2) notes how in such a relationship the

> supplement to the structure supplants that structure; insofar as the structure depends on this constitutive supplement, the supplement becomes the primary structure itself; its own logic becomes, or at least may become, dominant or destabilizing, a blockage to the continuity, a sign of crisis or incompleteness.

Derrida (1997, 144) indeed calls the supplement "a fatal necessity." For racialized others that are forced to bear the brutal gift of Europe's exception, their *dis*-place of emptiness is the haunting void that exposes the fragility at the heart of the Euro-white structure. Attending to this fragility is made possible through the notion of supplementarity. This approach is different from traditional (Hegelian) dialectics, destabilizing the totalizing and binary presence of contradictions and instead focusing on the excess, the aporetic absent presence that ultimately escapes subsumption. As Christina Sharpe (2016, 4) writes in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*: "even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not *simply or only* live *in* subjection and *as* the subjected" (cf. Wang 2023, 200). The ordering subjection of a

---

[2]   Another way in which this becomes apparent is the "integration" discourse in a nation such as The Netherlands. "Integration," whether it is used to discuss migrants, incarcerated people, or another group of people deemed insufficient in some way, works as a diagrammatical, operative notion that produces "society" and/through its (racialized) others that are not (yet) "integrated" and exist outside "society" (Schinkel 2008, 39; cf. Wekker 2016, 7, 21).

structure that is unable to determine *absolutely* the modalities of supplementary displaced life "also produces Black resistances and refusals" (Sharpe 2016, 124).[3]

Racial Exteriority, Transparent Interiority

It is the above described dynamic of dis-identification and supplementarity, of the exceptional European interior and its othered outside, that is the subject of Denise Ferreira da Silva's book *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007). Outlining the conditions of the production of modern subjects, she traces how an order of raciality "institutes the global as an ontoepistemological context – a productive and violent gesture necessary to sustain the post-Enlightenment version of the Subject as the sole self-determined thing." (xii-xiii). Self-determination becomes the prerogative of European post-Enlightenment subjectivity through an *analytics of raciality* that distinguishes self-determined subjects (man that is one) from those that Da Silva calls the 'others of Europe,' who are 'outer-determined.' This prerogative of man is sustained only in reference to these others. The ontological context for which this racial order is constitutive is one of *globality*, which produces these two different "coexisting and relational" types of modern subjects as properties of different global regions. Where the 'others of Europe' are *affectable* – that is, subject to/of outer determination – the Euro-white subjects that are granted the status of 'man' are written in *transparency*. Universal reason, for the self-owning subjects of transparency, is "an interior guide," while for subjects of affectability it "remains an exterior ruler" (xxxix). The racial, as a strategy of power, is deployed to (re)produce this "founding modern ontological statement" (xiv).

The supposedly self-determined European subject is thus in its own right outer-determined by its necessary others, even though it, in the words of Derrida (1997, 144), "claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself." This *transparent 'I'* makes a false claim to the position of "absolute referent … that precedes and institutes signification" (Da Silva 2007, 26). A claim that is false, as this subject of transparency cannot exist without "its productive violent act" which institutes others and at the same time relegates these others to an absence, threatens them, places them before the horizon of death (26-8). It "brings into existence, and disavows, that which signifies 'other'-wise, announcing its necessary elimination" (xiv). This shows the importance of the notion of supplementarity in understanding this racial-global order. It enables us to see the necessary violent interdependence central to this state of exception, while at the same time revealing the lynchpin of 'other'-ness and exteriority to be a fatal vulnerability.[4]

The exceptional particularity of Europe is haunted by its ghostly others, the absent presence of the other-wise modes of being, the gift that it needs but cannot bear (cf. Harney and Moten 2013, 26). Within the modern economy of signification, Da Silva identifies the supplementary haunting that the other-wise forms for the transparent subject in universal reason. That universal reason was articulated to emphasize the particularity of the transparent Euro-white subject. However, the same universality immediately needed to be disavowed, so as to not threaten the self-determination that this transparent subject was awarded – its most important attribute (Da Silva 2007, 30). Universal reason threatens "the self-unfolding, self-representing, transcendental 'I'" that is marked by self-determination (39). The endeavor to secure

---

[3]   Fred Moten (2022) has described the project of the Black radical tradition as a project wherein histories of brutal displacement become activated as radical project of liberation by undermining the normative modern self-possessed spatial settler-subject (cf. Sharpe 2016, 22, 76; Yusoff 2018, xi). Following Moten and others, blackness is here understood not as identity but as relation (of nonnormative subjectivity) (Yusoff 2018, xii, 19, 56; on the Black radical tradition, see also Davis 2016, 39, 112).

[4]   As Derrida writes: "As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L'Un se garde de l'autre*. The One guards against/ keeps some of the other. It protects *itself* from the other, but, in the movement of this jealous violence, it comprises in itself, thus guarding it, the self-otherness of self-difference (the difference from within oneself) which makes it One. The 'One differing, deferring from itself.' The One as the Other. At once, at the same time, but in a same time that is out of joint, the One forgets to remember itself to itself, it keeps and erases the archive of this injustice that it is. Of this violence that it does. *L'Un se fait violence*. The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to itself but it also institutes itself as violence. It becomes what it is, the very violence – that it does to itself. Self-determination as violence" (Derrida 1996, 78).

self-determination in interiority and shield it against exteriority is insecure, the excepted and transparent subject is haunted by the above discussed ontological primacy the outside/exterior necessarily acquires (41).

This haunting is a threat of affectability, that undermines the position of the Euro-white subject as non-affectable, transparent, owning, self-determined. What is necessary, then, is a disavowal of exteriority that professes its ontological irrelevance and places the ontological primacy on the interior thing, the mind (42-44). Through figures such as Descartes, Leibniz, Herder and Kant, Da Silva analyzes modern philosophy and science as an attempt at grappling with this threat of affectability. This leads up to Hegel, whose philosophical contribution to this problem is a reconciliation of interiority and exteriority through *transcendental poesis*, in which exteriority becomes but a moment in the interior trajectory, universal reason domesticated as interior-temporal force of transparency. This is a 'strategy of engulfment,' which engulfs universal reason into the historicity of self-determined autonomous man. Hegel fashions exteriority as a moment in a trajectory towards transparent self-consciousness, with reason becoming an attribute of not just any human, but those specific Euro-white temporal-historical-spatial subjects that have attained transparency and self-determination, as well as their corresponding "post-enlightenment European social configurations" (85). The 'others of Europe,' unable to attain this transparency, subjected as they are to exterior determination, are left to dwell in affectability. But still, this attempt to make autonomous the exception that comes into being only through its Other, can never fully succeed. Exteriority persists, exteriority haunts (71). Any attempt to defend Europe is doomed. Meanwhile, it is within this fatal necessity that we live and die, within the necessary fatality that marks the murderous brutality of the exception's failure (Harney and Moten 2021, 30; Wekker 2016, 44; Césaire 2000, 31).

Obliterating Inclusion

Da Silva describes the dual strategy of the modern racial order as *engulfment* and *murder*. The latter is obvious, there is direct physical destruction, material annihilation, total obliteration. We can see this clearly, right now, when looking at the genocide in Gaza, where 'affectable others' are getting murdered in huge numbers. What I want to focus on, however, is the analysis of engulfment. What Da Silva puts forward is a radical critique of inclusion, one in which assimilation is to be read as *a modality of obliteration*.

Audre Lorde (2019, 108) notes how "institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people." This rejection of difference as engulfment, alongside and as a particular form of obliteration, shows how in many instances, racialized violence happens precisely through a certain inclusion. The color line is not simply an outcome of colonial power structures, it is also what Houria Bouteldja (2024, 22) describes as "a technique for the expropriation or extraction of surplus value" (cf. Yusoff 2018, 33). Under the necropolitics of racial capitalism, racialized others are, as non/beings, "always available to and for death" (Sharpe 2016, 86). Their lives are disposable as well as exploitable, "the two logics reinforce and are bound up with each other," as Jackie Wang writes (2018, 88, 123). In this way, organized abandonment can appear as a form of inclusion.[5] Something perhaps most apparent in imprisonment, that possibility of total inclusion within state power that makes up a social death in which one's outsideness is most starkly and violently produced, about which Angela Davis (2003, 16) has said that it "has become a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited."

---

[5]   In her book *Carceral Capitalism*, Wang (2018) for instance describes predatory lending as a form of "*expropriation through financial inclusion*" (70, 134). This she discusses as "racialized accumulation by dispossession" (114). In a different vein, in her text "Eating the Other," bell hooks (1992) elaborates on the violence of inclusion through commodification and fetishization of otherness, where imperial white male desire, the racist fascination with the other as an exciting, intense and adventurous play-thing can even be presented as affirmation of an open-minded or "multicultural" tolerance. While it ultimately depends on racial differentiation, and produces and affirms the subordination that lies in this assertion of difference, it maintains a view of itself as positive inclusion (cf. Wekker 2016, 136).

The Logic of Exclusion

Da Silva (2007) shows how much of the approaches to racial subjection assist the obliteration of the 'others of Europe' by relying on, repeating and affirming the violent logic of transparency and self-determination (cf. Sharpe 2016, 13). For this, Da Silva takes aim at what she calls "the sociohistorical logic of exclusion" as a mode of inclusion that is obliterating. This logic supposedly critically addresses racial subjection, but does so through a liberal logic that actually keeps the ontological framework of raciality intact and reproduces its violence. While "any radical remapping of the contemporary global configuration should neither rely on nor reassemble universality and historicity," this logic is an attempt at writing subaltern modern subjects into these positions of universality, historicity and transparency (Da Silva 2007, 34). It reproduces the logic of the autonomous and self-determined subject, the liberal-historical being of the "individual" (xxx, 3). This is an attempt "to write the 'others of Europe' as always already historical subjects … to capture a moment before racial subjection, where they are already historical, enjoying transparency before engulfment" (178). What this logic of emancipation as entry into universality fails to recognize is the antecedent of not the uncorrupted universal transparency of the ante-racial subject prior to the misfortune of violence, but precisely of the necessary and violent inscription of the 'Other' into the universal as, in the words of Kathryn Yusoff (2018, 51), "*a space of privileged subjectification*." There will be no emergence of a transparent subject once the veil of oppression is lifted (Da Silva 2007, 266).

According to Da Silva, these "sociologics" present a particular kind of obliteration through assimilation, in which eschatologically, the racial and cultural difference of the Other has to be wiped out as it presents an affectability incompatible with the transparent (Euro-white) society (155-9).[6] This is suggesting that "the racial subaltern's desire for emancipation … is fundamentally a desire for self-obliteration" (160). In the final analysis, a "proper modern social configuration" is deemed identical with "universality and self-determination" (165). Calls for inclusion, as such, are calls for annihilation.

In contrast with the prophets of inclusion, Da Silva repeatedly emphasizes how (global) subjects do not "precede their emergence in representation" but precisely "emerge in signification" (27).[7] The racially constituted modern subject of globality is not an actually, really existing transparent liberal subject that has been misapprehended through ideological appropriation, as "if before racial violence there is a pristine black subject fully enjoying its 'humanity'" (8). The cultural, the racial and the nation are instead to be viewed as *productive* (7). These strategies of power produce, rather than respond to, racial signifiers as actually-existing substantive differences (296). Yet the logic of exclusion, presuming empirical blackness, anticipates a real basis upon which oppression acts, and thus is a woefully inadequate mode of analysis, unable "to comprehend how the analytics of raciality operates as a political-symbolic arsenal" (133). Subjection becomes, in this view, an unfortunate exclusion from universality that is the result of erroneous perceptions of certain physical traits (xxxiv, 7).

This is why the reformist discourse of ex/inclusion is so bothersome to Da Silva. In its insistence on seeing racism as an effect of nineteenth-century 'pseudo-science,' it makes clear the stakes it adheres to. It presupposes "that the racial is extraneous to modern thought" (2). Within this logic of exclusion, race appears merely as a ruse of reason, an obstacle to be dealt with on the road of progress towards

---

[6]   To be sure, the cultural is not the quick fix to raciality that some take it to be. For Da Silva (2007), cultural difference is only a reconfiguration of the racial, yet another strategy of engulfment (xxiii, 139). This approach reproduces the racial, is yet another moment of it, through presupposing the existence of an actually existing and "irreducible and unsublatable difference between the kinds of minds indigenous to Europe and those that originated in other global regions" (133, 151).

[7]   As Judith Butler (2007) has famously shown, gendered subjects also do not precede their gendered articulation but rather are produced as naturalized "prediscursive" gendered subjects through the law-making violence of their performative, discursive assertion as such. They write: "The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object" (xv).

transparency. But this obstacle cannot be cleared away; this road, of historicity and temporality, is itself a product of the analytics of raciality. Instead of innocently encountering and either accidentally misinterpreting or malignantly exploiting racial difference as a given, this analytic itself conjures up the differences through which global subjects come to be apprehended. As a strategy of power, the racial then retroactively establishes its own ground (Derrida 1992, 14). Returning to Said (2003, 6), he also emphasized that the structure of Orientalism is not merely a collection of lies, as if to simply uncover the truth would instantly dissolve this structure. Just like Orientalism, modern racial globality is a productive and constitutive material form of power, not just some misstep that stands to be corrected (cf. Van Reekum and Schinkel 2024).

The same critique, in correspondence with Da Silva's analysis of the racial as productive, can be levelled at all-too easy explanations of racism as mere ideological-superstructural strategy of division in the interest of capital accumulation.[8] That this functionalist explanation is not historically accurate, we can learn from Cedric Robinson, who in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* points out that "the development of capitalism can … be seen as having been determined in form by the social and ideological composition of a civilization that had assumed its fundamental perspectives during feudalism" and that premodern European forms of racialism provide the context of emergence of capitalism rather than a development specific to and only functional for the capitalist mode of production (2021, 24, 28). The nineteenth century triumph of capitalism took place not only because of the *creation* of certain "social divisions and habits of life and attitude," but also because of their *persistence*, that is their persistence from a racial order "that predated capitalist production" (42).

To Begin

These considerations show how inclusion is a category of brutality. One perhaps more nefarious than outright attacks, this aspiration to the Faustian bargain of gaining access, or at least closer proximity to the subject position of self-determination, and to pursue the never-ending promise of deferred transparency. As Audre Lorde famously said: "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*" (2019, 105; cf. Taylor 2017, 139). When assimilation offers no refuge from annihilation but only a prolongation of the

---

[8]   While a proper treatment of the topic falls outside the scope of this article, it is interesting to consider the relations between Da Silva's argument and the (post-)Marxist tradition. The most fruitful and positive aspect Da Silva finds in Marxism is the basic acknowledgement of entanglement, the primacy of affectability (labor). However, as she writes, "Marxism's embracing of historicity limits its deployment as a basis for the project of racial emancipation" (Da Silva 2007, 262). Da Silva's commitments seem to be in line with other anti-political tendencies within abolitionist and Black radical thought, exemplified by Harney and Moten in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013). They describe the stifling enclosure of critique and politics that endangers the entangled and fugitive sociality of the undercommons, writing that "it is recourse to self-possession in the face of dispossession (recourse, in other words, to politics) that represents the real danger. Politics is an ongoing attack on the common" (17). Here, politics is a way of bringing others into the fold of transparency. Instead of succumbing to inclusion in politics, the presupposed necessity of a totalizing emancipatory subjectivity that needs to rule out any other-wise being is refused in favor of ungovernable forms-of-life. The subaltern, then, can maybe not speak (Da Silva 2007, 184), but she can sing, shout, scream, and flee the incarcerating intelligibility of Euro-white speech. Compare this fairly classical account of Chantal Mouffe (2005, 18): "Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. … Things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities." Eschewing the trap of politics and refusing to (re)affirm a liberal discourse of pluralism, Harney and Moten recognize that not only could things be otherwise, *they already are*, all the time. This is fugitivity. Harney and Moten, together with so many others, urge us to revel in our entanglement. Because what is love other than affectability? (For ultra-left/anarchist anti-politics, see for example Invisible Committee 2009; Agamben 2023). (Vulgar) Marxism can be its own form of obliterating engulfment, representing not just an inclusion in politics but even a blatant instantiation of racial analytics. This is most certainly true when it takes recourse to what Alberto Toscano (2023, 2) aptly describes as "the sociologically spectral and suspect figure of the 'forgotten' white working class … this racialized simulacrum of a proletariat is not a steppingstone towards class politics but rather its obstacle, its malevolent and debilitating ersatz form." For many, then, the combination (or even equation) of the Black radical tradition with Marxism is seen as a theoretical and historical assimilation that is to be rejected. More recently, however, in his polemical book *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics* (2023), Kevin Ochieng Okoth has criticized this view, taking to task the theoretical discourse he dubs Afro-pessimism 2.0, whose most notable exponents are Frank B. Wilderson III and Jared Sexton, but which for Okoth also involves figures such as Harney and Moten, Saidiya Hartman and Cedric Robinson. He attacks this discourse as an "anti-politics of despair" (28) that encourages "retreat instead of revolt" (25), accusing it of an "erasure of anti-colonial Marxism" (xi) and as "preclud[ing] Black people's participation in radical politics" (34). Interestingly enough, while some of the political implications of her argument seem to coincide with the theoretical strands he derides, Okoth points to Da Silva (2007) as a positive contribution, lauding her emphasis on the global historical context as providing a fruitful impetus for analysis of "the multiplicity of afterlives of both slavery and colonization" while avoiding "parochial ontological conceptions of Blackness" (Okoth 2023, 64). Okoth proposes to embrace historical materialism (16) but does not elaborate as much as one would like on his understanding of it. Noteworthy however, is his productive engagement with different revolutionary anticolonial histories, as well as his relevant emphasis on contingent praxis (14-15), the latter reminiscent of something that is articulated so well in abolition feminism, namely the "ambiguous terrain located in the space between necessary responses to immediate needs and collective and radical demands for structural and ultimately revolutionary change" as "the productive tension of holding onto a radical, real, and deep vision while engaging in the messy daily practice" (Davis et al. 2022, 5, 16).

obliterating logic of the racial, then demands for recognition and rights become clear as only in service to the structure we should seek to eliminate. It is the abolition of the present state of things that we need, not their reconfiguration. In keeping with this insight, appeals to transparency and requests or arguments for inclusion can no longer be maintained, they can only make us wonder, "how could we fail to understand that we have better things to do than follow in that Europe's footsteps?" (Fanon 2004, 236). The best thing to do, then, is to start. Aimé Césaire (1995, 99) teaches us: "We do have to start. / Start what? / The only thing in the world worth starting: / The End of the world, for Heaven's sake."

To begin, as June Jordan (2021, 7) writes: "To begin is no more agony / than opening your hand"

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. The University of Chicago Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2023. "On Anarchy Today." *Ill Will*, February 28th. https://illwill.com/on-anarchy-today

Benjamin, Walter. 2004 [1921]. "Critique of Violence." In *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bollock and Michael Jennings. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1991 [1940]. "Über den Begriff der Geschichte." In *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I.2.*, edited by Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann. Suhrkamp Verlag.

Bouteldja, Houria. 2016. *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*. Translated by Rachel Valinsky. Semiotext(e).

Bouteldja, Houria. 2024. *Rednecks and Barbarians: Uniting the White and Racialized Working Class*. Translated by Rachel Valinsky. Pluto Press.

Butler, Judith. 2007 [1990]. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Césaire, Aimé. 1995 [1939]. *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*. Translated by Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard. Bloodaxe Books.

Césaire, Aimé. 2000 [1950]. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. Monthly Review Press.

Da Silva, Denise Ferreira. 2007. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. University of Minnesota Press.

Davis, Angela Y. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

Davis, Angela Y. 2016. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Haymarket Books.

Davis, Angela Y., Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie. 2022. *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* Haymarket Books.

Derrida, Jacques. 1997 [1967]. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1992. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'" In *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson. Translated by Mary Quaintance. Routledge.

Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. The University of Chicago Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 2004 [1961]. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1997. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. 2013. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. 2021. *All Incomplete*. Minor Compositions.

hooks, bell. 1992. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press.

Jordan, June. 2021. *The Essential June Jordan*. Penguin.

Joseph, Miranda. 2002. *Against the Romance of Community*. University of Minnesota Press.

Lorde, Audre. 2019 [1984]. *Sister Outsider*. Penguin.

Moten, Fred. 2022. "Building and Bildung und Blackness: Some Architectural Questions for Fela." NOMAS Lecture. Posted April 6th 2022, by MIT Architecture. https://youtu.be/EW1aR3rHeZE?t=2009

Mouffe, Chantal. 2005. *On the Political*. Routledge.

Okoth, Kevin Ochieng. 2023. *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics*. Verso.

Robinson, Cedric J. 2021 [1983]. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Penguin.

Said, Edward. 2003 [1978]. *Orientalism*. Penguin.

Schinkel, Willem. 2008. *De Gedroomde Samenleving*. Klement.

Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, ed. 2017. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Haymarket Books.

The Invisible Committee. 2009. *The Coming Insurrection*. Semiotext(e).

Toscano, Alberto. 2023. *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis*. Verso.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2015 [1995]. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press.

Wang, Jackie. 2018. *Carceral Capitalism*. Semiotext(e).

Wang, Jackie. 2023. *Alien Daughters Walk Into the Sun: An Almanac of Extreme Girlhood*. Semiotext(e).

Wark, McKenzie. 2004. *A Hacker Manifesto*. Harvard University Press.

Weheliye, Alexander G. 2002. "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music." *Social Text* 20 (2): 21-47. muse.jhu.edu/article/31935

Wekker, Gloria. 2016. *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Duke University Press.

Yusoff, Kathryn. 2018. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press.

World to Waste: *the Toxic Legacy of Consumerism and Technoscience*

Ties van Daal

How will future generations look back upon contemporary Western society, how will they remember it? Of course, this is an impossible question without a definitive answer. But as a speculative exercise, what insights can it bring regarding Western society as it operates today? If Ancient Egypt is remembered for its pyramids, what artefacts will constitute the remembrance of current times? (Slade 2006, 7) What is the story that this artefact will tell, and how will it do it? In this text, I propose that this intergenerational horizon, and the question of intergenerational transmission, can only be thought from the perspective of consumerism and the way that it simultaneously renders worlds obsolete as well as that it produces waste. Waste is often seen as a byproduct from processes of consumption and innovation, but in the age of forever chemicals and permanent innovation, it is one of the only durable things that will outlast the generations that currently roam the earth.[1]

This text starts from a reading of Arendt's *The Human Condition* where the modes of activity labour and work will inform a reflection on consumer society and waste. Under consumerism, the durability of the world is threatened, and use-products become products of consumption. Arendt observes how this "turnover of the world" is accelerating and fundamentally changes the relations with humans and the world they inhabit. Arendt, however, does not explicitly attempt to explain the root causes of this acceleration. First, this acceleration is explained based on an economic analysis, where the accelerated turnover of the world is interpreted as synchronizing with the acceleration of capital's turnover, its circulation. Second, the notion of innovation will be introduced to enrich Arendt's descriptions of consumer society from a technological perspective. Based on the work of Bernard Stiegler and his notion of "permanent innovation" the acceleration described by Arendt is understood in relation to technoscience and the way that it destabilizes the world as well as that it produces waste. The figure of "forever chemicals" is used as a thought figure to illustrate how the world has lost its durability under consumerism, but that this non-metabolizable waste that it produces now fulfils this function. The situation of the contemporary consumer is that they are "proletarianized" they do not have the knowledge to understand the products they consume, but the effects are very real and don't care about this ignorance. The consequences of these forever chemicals affect the health of living humans and non-humans, as well as impact the lives of those generations that are not yet born. This toxic epistemic condition is thus related to the intoxication of the earth as such, and a pollution of what is inherited by future generations, as well as an intoxication of their horizon.

The Life of Labour and the World of Work

In *The Human Condition* (1958) Hannah Arendt anticipated a fundamental change in the relationship between humans and the world, driven by the rise of what she termed "consumer society". In this new economic and cultural condition, durable objects—once crafted to last and be used over generations—are

---

[1]   This is based on the work of Lisa Doeland, (2020) who on the basis of the work of Derrida and Žižek shows how seeing waste as the non-essential informs an ontology that becomes a hauntology. Namely, waste is something that is not rendered essential to the production or consumption process and is therefore excluded. But this exclusion backfires, waste comes to *haunt* those activities deemed to be essential. After all, once something is thrown away or rendered obsolete it always returns in one way or another, it is not deleted off the earth but often diverted to marginalized communities, such as non-Western countries in the Global South that have become dumps of waste that is produced in the West. In this sense, waste is only a byproduct from a certain perspective, and from a more holistic perspective waste is simply a product.

increasingly treated as disposable; consumed rather than preserved. Arendt's description of consumer society must be understood in the general schema of the human condition that she develops. Labour, work and action make up the modes of the *vita activa*, the active life of human beings, as opposed to the contemplative life, *vita contemplativa*. Labour and work are especially important to understand Arendt's description of consumer society.

Labour is human activity tied to the biological process of the body, in its metabolic relation to its environment, it is bound to the necessities of the circle of life, that of growth and decay (Arendt 1958, 7). The human activity of labour, tied to life and earth, is aimed at fulfilling man's biological needs of subsistence, the necessities to stay alive. Besides biological necessity, labour is also repetitive, it is cyclical like the metabolism of the earth, it must be done every day anew. It is quite simple: people who only drink water once a week will not survive, the body demands this nourishment every day anew. Labour, as a form of human activity is characterized by direct consumption. The goods of labour are consumed immediately and are not durable; they disappear in its consumption, which is its real quality. A loaf of bread disappears in its consumption, it is metabolized, converted into energy.

The relation between waste or excrement is present in Arendt's description of labour but is only loosely worked out. Arendt for instance describes how labour also encompasses the repetitive task of cleaning or repairing the waste of yesterday without going into further detail (Arendt 1958, 101). In extension of Arendt's loose descriptions can be said: to consume is also to produce waste. To drink is to urinate, to eat is to shit, to toil is to sweat. In labour, consumption and waste are co-extensive (Reno 2018). Labour is vital for human existence, but labour is not regarded as something that belongs to the highest articulations of human existence, or human freedom.

A different mode of being-active is to *work*. Whereas labour is necessary, cyclical and repetitive, work ends with a finished product (Arendt 1958, 98). These finished works constitute a world with a distinct 'thing-character,' as they are constructed out of artefacts. These works are characterized by relative durability, in contrast with the labour in which the object disappears in its consumption. Arendt distinguishes between labour and work based on the difference she draws between use and consumption, "The world . . . consists not of things that are consumed but of things that are used." (Arendt 1958, 134). A table is often something which gathers people, for instance a dinner table. It would be ridiculous if this table would be consumed like the food and wine placed on it; a product of work does not disappear in its usage but endures it. Hence, the things of the world, the products of work, are marked by 'durability', they last. This durability of things is not only relevant for living generations as it outlasts the life of an individual. Jewellery can stay in the family for generations through inheritance. Its durability is the condition of possibility for this transmission. What is directly consumed does not have this quality. A baker's child might inherit the family bakery – the building, the ovens, as well as documented recipes and permits - but surely not the bread.

The durable thing-character of the world thus is a 'beacon of stability'. Amidst the cyclicality of nature's metabolism - of growth and decay, of consumption and waste - the world, according to Arendt, constitutes a place where people can feel at home (Arendt 1958, 134). The human who works (*Homo faber)* is the fabricator of the world, and strives for permanence, stability, and durability (Arendt 1958, 125). But under consumerism, this relation between work and labour is fundamentally altered. In terms of the schema that Arendt sets out this means that the sphere of *labour* takes over the sphere of *work*. Consumerism blurs the distinction between durable works and consumption, eroding the boundaries that once protected the world from nature's cycle. Regarding consumerism Arendt writes: "It is as though we had forced open the distinguishing boundaries which protected the world, the human artifice, from nature..." (Arendt 1958, 126). Work, which Arendt explains as the 'artificial' as it is constructed by humans

and placed outside of the natural metabolism of growth and decay, is drawn into the circulatory process of the natural metabolism of the earth. What are the effects of this on the human-world relation?

Consuming a World Once Durable

Arendt observes how the sphere of work is slowly overtaken by the sphere of labour. Arendt observes that the products of work have been losing their durability; objects that were once meant for long-term use are now consumed and discarded. What Arendt describes is the emergence of a 'consumer society'. Under consumerism the differentiation between works that are durable, and the results of labour that are tied to the circularity of man's natural, metabolic relation to the earth is rendered insignificant. Arendt describes this transformation in terms of *acceleration*—the speed at which works are used and discarded is increasing *(*Arendt 1958, 125). Arendt writes:

> Under modern conditions, not destruction but conservation spells ruin because the very durability of conserved objects is the greatest impediment to the turnover process, whose constant gain in speed is the only constancy left wherever it has taken hold. (Arendt 1958, 253).

Arendt delineates a turnover process of things, of objects that used to be durable that are now consumed but fails to explicate the driving force behind this acceleration. I think the acceleration that Arendt describes, which she connects to the emergence of consumerism, marks the acceleration of this circulatory process of capital. The perspective of Marx is helpful to illustrate how this accelerated turnover rate of the world corresponds with an acceleration in the turnover rate of capital. Capital can only make use of its 'power of breeding' by being in movement, by circulating (Marx 1992, 128). Money becomes capital when it is invested to generate a return; capital is money that begets money. Marx distinguishes three distinct phases in the circulatory process of capital. Capital can exist in money-form, invested in production, or in the form of commodities (Marx 1992, 133). For instance, a venture capitalist has capital in the form of financial means, which are then invested in certain production facilities, raw materials, and labour to create a product. At the end of the production process the capital becomes fixated in the products that are made. The money that was first liquid is now fixated in the products, only when these are sold the capital is 'freed' and can be reinvested. This reinvestment is necessary as capital always searches for a new profitable investment to valorise itself, this marks the start of a new process of circulation.

Arendt is less concerned with the cause of this acceleration, and more with the way it affects the human-world relationship and the modes of being-in-the-world. Arendt remarks regarding this accelerated turnover of the things of the world that "we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability; we must consume, devour" (Arendt 1958, 126). But the image that Arendt draws for this destabilizing effect on the world is even more dramatic. If we were to live in an absolute consumer society, where all work is entirely replaced by labour, Arendt warns: "we would no longer live in a world at all" (Arendt 1958, 134). In that situation, the artificial boundaries of the world would disappear, and the human would be completely subjected to the circulatory process that marks the metabolism of the earth. This economical perspective on the turnover of the world must now be substantiated by looking at different types of obsolescence.

Obsolescence and Consumerism

The previous paragraph laid bare the relation between the world of things and the world of capital, as manifest in consumerism. To understand the relation between the circulation of capital and consumerism it is important to look at the economical concept of Customer Lifetime-Value (CLV), which estimates. the total revenue a business can expect from a single customer over their entire relationship with the

company. From the perspective of CLV there is a maxim to increase the frequency of sales, if one customer only would buy one car in their entire life the revenue stream of the company would not be maximized. For a capitalist, this is suboptimal, as it limits the revenue stream extracted from each customer, which reduces overall profit. To repeat the words of Arendt: "*not destruction but conservation spells ruin.*"

There are various ways in which the frequency of sales can be increased, related to three types of obsolescence: planned obsolescence, psychological obsolescence and technological obsolescence (Slade 2006, 4). Planned obsolescence is the deliberate limitation of the lifespan of products and rendering products obsolete in an earlier stage of the product cycle. Thus, a renewed demand for new products is consolidated, which benefits the long-term profitability of the economy. Historically, the strategy of 'planned obsolescence' emerged after the Great Depression as a means of sustaining economic growth (Bisschop, Hendlin, and Jaspers 2022).

Psychological obsolescence is based on the perceived obsolescence by the consumer, where the desire for renewal is cultivated regardless of the durability of the object. This logic can be found in a speech Mark Rutte gave in 2013 where he argued that Dutch citizens could consume their way out of recession and deter corresponding severe austerity measures if and only if they consumed more. He encouraged the Dutch citizens to buy a new car even if the old car was still working perfectly (NOS, 2013). Hence, in the consumerist mode of capitalism the economically 'sound' thing to do is simple: consume and discard.

Where in the description of Arendt the root of this acceleration remains obscure, it turns out to be closely related to the circulation of capital, which is dictated by the laws of accumulation, of valorization. The last form of obsolescence is technological obsolescence which follows from technological invention and innovation which render earlier products impractical and obsolete. Understanding this requires a thorough analysis of technology as such in relation to consumerism. This will be conducted based on the work of Bernard Stiegler.

The Perspective of Technology

The commonalities between the work of Arendt and Stiegler are remarkable. Both are concerned with the destabilization of the world in the light of consumerism. Stiegler opens his second book *Technics and Time 2* with the following paragraph:

> An ordinary person of two centuries ago could expect to die in the bed in which he had been born. He lived on a virtually changeless diet, eaten from a bowl that would be passed on to his grandchildren. Through seasons, years, generations, his surroundings, possessions, and daily routines were close to identical. The world appeared to be absolutely stable; change was such an exception that it seemed to be an illusion. (…) Technics, as technology and techno-science, is the chief reason for this reversal. (Stiegler 1998b, 1)

What Stiegler sets out here mirrors Arendt's description of consumerism. Just like Arendt Stiegler notes how the world has been destabilized, change is no longer an exception, but the rule. Where Arendt only noted an acceleration without examining its causes, Stiegler explains why the acceleration occurs and what causes the transition from a world where stability is the rule, towards a world where it becomes the exception: technoscience. Furthermore, Stiegler points towards the durability of things, which stabilizes the human condition as a world, and allows its intergenerational transmission which is a topic that will return in the later part of this text. For now, it is important to understand technoscience and how it can be seen as an explanandum for the acceleration described by Arendt.

Technoscience denotes a historical situation where technology and science have become inseparable and give birth to industrial technology (Stiegler 2007, 30). Technology and science can no longer be separated, science is technological praxis in relation to nature, whereas science informs technological development. Stiegler situates the beginning of this discussed destabilization of the world in the 19th century, and attributes it to the rise of technoscience amidst the (second) industrial revolution. This historical epoch of technoscience marks the convergence of capital, science and technology, which are not *opposed* to one another, but *compose* what Stiegler calls technoscience (Stiegler 1998a, 39).

For Stiegler, the corporate R&D department is a key locus of technoscientific development, where innovation and the marketisation thereof are no longer separable (Stiegler 1998a, 41-42). As Stiegler writes: 'strategic marketing dictates the directions and conditions of innovation' (Stiegler 1998a, 89). What this means is that the aims of technological development are subjected to criteria of profitability, it must generate a return that is monetizable. In Stiegler's work this calculus of profitability is contrasted to what is beneficial for a system, what contributes to overall well-being (Stiegler 2010, 83). Technoscientific development relies on investment in the future—both financially and anticipatorily. That is, it is both a matter of expected return as well as a practice of projecting the possible on the horizon. In this system, profitability becomes the primary factor shaping the trajectory of technoscience and its openness to future possibilities. The horizon of technological development becomes a horizon of new possible markets, investments and profits. Thus, the development of technoscience, and the ever-recurring need of capital to be put into circulation to multiply, converge; the development of technoscience and capital are co-evolving.[2] And Stiegler, like Arendt, also observes an acceleration, he speaks of "permanent innovation". But before this can be grasped, it is important to take a step back and reflect on the notion of "innovation" as such.

The Notion of Innovation

The notion of *innovation* is absent in Arendt's work, but it is helpful for what I propose here; a technoscientific interpretation of Arendt's description of acceleration. According to the contemporary sociologist Benoît Godin, the current dominant meaning of the notion of "innovation" is 'innovation as commercialized technological invention' (Godin 2015, 9). Not only does this align with Stiegler's conception of technoscience it also makes it possible to connect the notion of innovation with Arendt's descriptions of the turnover of the world.

Innovation, as understood in the sense developed by Joseph Schumpeter as 'creative destruction', is always a combination of a development in the social domain and the technological, or economical domain. This is an example of how a purely technological or techno-economical understanding of innovation is too narrow (Blok, 2021). Schumpeter mobilizes this to explain how the evolution of capitalism is never stationary and how the economic structure is transformed '*from within,* incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one' (Schumpeter 1976, 83). Thus, an existing economic structure forms the basis on which an innovation can emerge that destroys this base on which it is founded. In this sense, innovation is not a linear progress, but it also harbours a "Faustian", a destructive, component (Blok and Lemmens 2015). Each invention that is marketed disrupts the world from which it emerged, and thereby the modes of relating to it. Each innovation manifests technological obsolescence. This does not only point towards the disruptive effects of innovations but also that there is no technological change without corresponding social innovation.

---

2 A full grasp of this relation between technoscience and capital would require a historical account of how banks and other financial actors have made the British and German industrial revolution(s) possible, which is beyond the scope of this text, but can for instance be found in Guinnane, Timothy W. "Delegated Monitors, Large and Small: Germany's Banking System, 1800-1914." *Journal of Economic Literature* 40, no. 1 (2002): 73–124. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2698594. And for the British context: Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *The Wealth of a Nation: Institutional Foundations of English Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023) pp. 158-184.

The notion of innovation as creative destruction is thus helpful for thinking about both the obsolescence of the artefacts of the world and the obsolescence of modes of being in that world. However, current complex innovations introduce another layer of destructivity. Take, for example, the transition from gas stoves to induction cookers powered by electricity. This transition has rendered not only gas stoves obsolete but also those pots and pans that "fit" a gas stove but do not fit an induction cooker. In this way, many artefacts were turned into waste, prompting a new wave of consumption, while certain modes of cooking became impossible on the new induction cooker. But this is not the only waste produced by this transition. This transition increased the demand for non-stick cookware, as electric stoves typically require pans with a flat, heat-conductive surface. Many non-stick pans are coated with materials that may contain Per- and polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), which is released from non-stick pans when they are overheated, scratched, or worn out. This is not a waste that enters its environment when it is rendered obsolete, but when it is used. This means that this form of innovation no longer pertains to something called "creative destruction" but rather a *destructive creativity*. One cannot understand this problem of PFAS without a technoscientific perspective on consumerism, which is provided by Stiegler.

Permanent Innovation and Time

What remains at stake in this text is to substantiate Arendt's take on the acceleration of the turnover of the world. Stiegler uses the notion of "permanent innovation" to explain the acceleration of innovations. This concept, borrowed from French historian Bertrand Gille, denotes a historical epoch where 'the rhythms of cultural evolution and the rhythms of technical evolution' are developing at different rates (Stiegler 1998a, 15). Technoscience, which marks the advent of permanent innovation, causes the technical system to develop faster than the social systems it is embedded in. The development of the technical system is thus always in advance related to a delayed social system. The problem is thus not essentially that innovation is disruptive, as the disruption of an older redundant system can also be something good. Rather, Stiegler problematizes the rate at which consecutive innovations follow up on one another, which makes it almost impossible for the relatively inert social system to recuperate the new technical developments.

The disruptive quality of innovations was already outlined Schumpeter, and Stiegler largely takes over the Schumpeterian account of innovation, where innovation is always tied to social innovation and disruption (Stiegler 1998a, 14). For Schumpeter the development of capitalism through creative destruction is what adds value, this is where Stiegler's analysis of innovation departs from Schumpeter's. For Stiegler, due to its speed, and its state of "permanence" where change has become the rule rather than the exception, innovation rather means an acceleration of 'the individuation of the technical systems without regard to the condition of psychosocial individuation' (Stiegler 2015, 188). In other words, the becoming of the technical systems overdetermines the becoming of the social systems and the psychological development of individuals. Innovation is regarded only as something techno-economical without considering its disruptive, social effects as something costly or something to take care of.

In accordance with Arendt's concern with altered human-world relations, and manifested in Rutte, Stiegler writes that permanent innovation installs 'a system tending to produce *chronic and structural obsolescence, a* system for which the *normal* relation to objects becomes *disposability*' (Stiegler 2010, 83). But Stiegler goes way beyond Arendt as he explicitly analyses the speed of innovation, the acceleration of the turnover of the world as a relation between technics and temporality. Stiegler writes: 'the transfer time of scientific discovery to technical invention and then to technical innovation has considerably shortened.' (Stiegler 1998a, 40). This acceleration of innovation – understood as marketed invention - compresses the time available for society to 'adopt' new inventions and find practices and orders in which this invention is

embedded. This adoption is rendered impossible as the *time* were these delayed social practices catch up, is already overtaken by new disruptions, perpetually postponing the possibility of calibration between the technical and the social. The interval of time that is necessary to think and to generate practices which embrace these new technical artefacts is shortened to such an extent, that it disappears. This installs what Stiegler calls 'proletarianization', this must be understood in relation to the knowledge and consciousnesses of consumers.

Proletarianization and chemical consumption

The problem of technoscientific consumerism is on the one hand, the complexity of the products it produces, and on the other hand, the speed of its development which makes it impossible for the social system to *adopt* the technics because there is a delay in the knowledge the community has of these complex products (Stiegler 2010, 100).This becomes clear in the case of these chemical substances where the products arrive at the market before the community of consumers have sufficient knowledge on the effects on their health and the effects on ecosystems in general.

A recent example is that the chemical substance bisphenol A (BPA), which is frequently used in food containers, reusable plastic bottles and coffee mugs, turns out to be harmful to the immune system, to fertility, and disrupts the hormonal balances of those exposed to it (Stikkelorum 2025). The question whether there has ever been a demand for carcinogenic chemicals in consumer products is a silly question. The fact that there have been consumers that have bought these products does not mean that they have been aware of the consequences. After all, these chemical substances are very complex, and most consumers have not followed a chemical education. In the terms of economists this means that there has not been 'perfect information', in the sense that uncertainty of the effects was not known beforehand for both consumers and producers, which is oftentimes true for these novel chemicals. Another option is that there has been an "information asymmetry" and that the producers had more information than the consumers and lacked the incentive to make this public. This has been the case with PFAS (Gaber, Bero, and Woodruff 2023)

The situation with BPA and PFAS both show how consumers are exposed to potentially toxic chemicals about which they lack the adequate knowledge to assess the potential negative effects of the materials or production process on their health and that of ecosystems in general. This is the direct result of permanent innovation, where the speed of innovation destroys the time of the social system to generate adequate knowledge about the technical system. Nevertheless, there is an incentive to introduce these new products anyway, as it is an opportunity for profit, for turnover.

This situation, where complex toxic chemicals roam the earth and exposure to it has become almost inevitable is called the 'chemical Anthropocene' by Yogi Hendlin (2021). Hendlin argues that the current "safe until proven harmful" model of chemical regulation has failed, as once chemicals enter the market, they are difficult to remove despite emerging evidence of harm. This failure is exacerbated by weak regulatory oversight. Regulatory agencies test only a fraction of chemicals, while industry resistance and long epidemiological timeframes delay the knowledge required to take restrictive action. Under 'permanent innovation' potentially harmful toxic chemicals are given the benefit of the doubt, which benefits those with a financial interest in it, whilst the risk that exposure to this chemical entails is often diverted to marginalized communities. Stronger precautionary measures are necessary. Advocating for ex-ante (pre-market) rather than ex-post (post-market) toxicity testing is fundamentally a call for delay—ensuring that risks are evaluated before products reach consumers. However, such delays directly contradict the logic of product turnover and threaten the projected revenue streams of innovation as they delay its marketisation.

This epistemic condition of consumers, in which they are foundationally stupid, is described by Stiegler as a process of 'proletarianization', a process of losing knowledge (Stiegler 2010, 83). Individuals or communities within this system no longer possess knowledge about the structures they inhabit and rely upon. This loss of knowledge is not incidental to consumerism; it is a fundamental feature of it. The "ideal" consumer" is a proletarianized consumer, someone who has little knowledge and little know-how is more likely to consume goods and services, and throw-away rather than repair since they miss the knowledge and skills. The ideal consumer can only consume and discard and is thereby reduced to a standing reserve of purchasing power and nothing more. This was visible in the formal approach to a consumer based on CLV, the consumer is reduced to a potential revenue stream. For Stiegler, this toxic relation with the technical system goes hand in hand with the actual intoxication of the earth and even the bodily interior of human and non-human beings by chemical substances, and it points to   structural toxicity of the relation between the social and the technical system (2010, 49).

Inverting Arendt

The devastating effects of toxic chemicals, that are produced in the age of technoscientific consumerism, do not only concern living humans and non-humans, but it also jeopardizes the health of future generations. This is most evident in the existence of 'forever chemicals', such as PFAS. Forever chemicals are non-metabolizable (according to present-day scientific research) and in that sense take an awkward position in the Arendtian schema of labour and work. When waste becomes durable, it paradoxically takes on the characteristics of a work, it becomes constitutive of the world. This is something that has not been considered by Arendt.

Arendt understands that work becomes labour when she writes that under consumerism 'the whole economy has become a waste economy' (1958, 134). However, what she omitted was to recognize that durable waste also means that the domain of labour comes to resemble that of work. Not only has the economy become a waste economy, but the world has also become wasted and consists of waste. As Michael Marder describes in his book *Dump Philosophy* (2020)*: the planet has become a dump for non-metabolizable industrial outputs, for the excesses of consumerism. He defines the word "dump" as 'a massive fall of stuff unloaded with unalloyed indifference, snowballing, swallowing all of the above into itself' (Marder 2020, 103). Marder writes that the world has become a dump, which means that the world is lost, which comes close to something Arendt only warned against (Marder 2020, 8). In addition Marder points out one cannot live in a dump whilst not being affected by it, the inhabitants of the dump are the 'dumped dumpers' (Marder 2020, 87). The following forms of dumping are all co-extensive: consumer products are dumped on the market, the world turned over is dumped, the world has become a dump which invokes dumping, and those who inhabit this world have also become dumped as mere standing reserves of purchasing power inhabiting structures of which they do not have adequate knowledge or skills to understand.

With the emergence of durable chemical waste in technoscientific consumerism, the Arendtian schema becomes inverted: the world is destabilized and consumed, whereas the waste of this consumption is durable, and thereby constitutes a world, a world that transcends the life of individuals and is inherited by the upcoming generations. The presence of toxic chemicals in consumer products exposes individuals to harm, but their effects extend beyond current consumers. Forever chemicals, defined by their extreme durability, create a persistent material presence that transcends individual lifetimes, forming a lasting imprint on the world in the Arendtian sense. 'Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all.' (Arendt 1958, 7). This means that this form of waste is an example of 'our past colonizing the future (Renfrew and Pearson 2021, 158). The waste of the 'chemical Anthropocene' haunts the living, but it will also haunt

those who are not yet born. How should we understand the implications of a world where waste becomes more permanent than the objects we create?

A Legacy of Waste

It is ambiguous whether or not this intergenerationality, mediated by dumped, durable chemicals, can sufficiently be thought by means of Arendt. On the one hand Arendt describes how (political) action is conducted 'without the intermediary of things' (1958, 2). Whereas on the other hand she argues that the world *is* the human condition and in that sense conditions those born into it. The position that I take is that there is no natality without thrownness, there is no creative act that is not embedded and situated in a specific historical context (culturally, linguistically, economically, geographically etc.). The Stieglerian take on this, is that this intergenerational embeddedness is always of technical nature, technical artefacts function as intergenerational intermediaries which make this transmission possible.[3] To be thrown is always to be born into a world that pre-existed this new life of which the traces are inscribed in technical 'works' that are durable and therefore can contain a message or necessitate interpretation. Once again, the work of Stiegler is helpful in understand how the human condition is always a technical condition and that there thus is no human action that is absolutely independent of artefacts (Stiegler 2013, 63).

The actions of unborn generations are conditioned by the world they are thrown into, they must deal with the traces that previous generations have left, whether this consist of churches, books or the chemical traces imprinted on the surface of the earth and the world, in the soil, the water and the air. The world one enters as a baby is always already there, it is built up of traditions and traces that are left by individuals who are no longer present as such, they have left the world behind after their death, a world that indeed transcends their individual life. Stiegler conceptualizes human existence as fundamentally mediated by technical objects, which form a 'prosthetic milieu' that precedes and conditions the self. Stiegler writes:

> The self is surrounded by *[au milieu de]* "itself", by its objects and prostheses, a milieu that is therefore not itself but its *other*. And this *other* precedes it, is *already-there,* as an unlived past. (2011, 49)

All newborns must relate to this other, this prosthetic milieu, that precedes it. Hence, there is no inheritance that is not mediated by "these thingly supports of everyday life, which supported the world and the making-world" (Stiegler 2013, 63). Hence, the existence of toxic chemicals in the environment of future generations will be a reminder of the present culture. The dumped chemicals, and other forms of waste such as plastics and e-waste, will remind them of the general dump that contemporary society is, which relates to both artefacts as well as human consciousnesses.

Time to Think

The speed and complexity of innovation have three effects that have been discussed in this text: the destabilization of the world of things and the modes of relating to it, the shortening of the time-interval in which social systems can adopt new technical developments, the production of waste that haunts living and unborn humans and non-humans. The life of the living, and the to-be born, is fundamentally conditioned and delimited by the microplastics in the water streams, and the forever chemicals in the soil of the backyards and agricultural lands. New generations are not born on a blank slate, but in a world, consisting of the durable traces left by previous generations. Within technoscientific consumerism, individuals disoriented by permanent innovation may be unaware of the lasting effects of their waste on

---

[3] This is the Stieglerian topic par excellence, the relation between technics and time, how technics relates to temporality, in this case it concerns memory, earlier we saw how speed or acceleration also is a concept that draws in the relation between technics and time.

the planet. Yet this unawareness does not make the consequences any less real. As the speed and direction of technical development - technoscience - remains subject to the logic of the accumulation of capital, it becomes tied to the circulation of capital which will not slow down by itself. Not only will this result in a constant reconfiguration of the world, and the modes of relating to it, it will also lead to more and more waste, as more and more things are rendered obsolete. Furthermore, the introduction of new materials constantly brings into the world highly complex products of which the long-term harms are not yet clear. What is needed most is not necessarily something new, a new product, an innovation, but a delay, a delay that constitutes the time of knowledge as the negation of acceleration. As time seems to be running out, and the dystopian future is no longer on the horizon but unfolds in the present, this time of knowledge is necessary to reflect upon the complex world that is inhabited as well as to create frameworks and practices that allow for the "undumping of the dump" (Marder 2020, xiv). This concerns both the intoxication of our consciousness by proletarianization, as well as the material intoxication of the earth with waste and forever chemicals.

References

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press.

Bisschop, Lieselot, Yogi Hendlin, and Jelle Jaspers. 2022. "Designed to Break: Planned Obsolescence as Corporate Environmental Crime." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 78 (3): 271–93.

Blok, Vincent. 2021. "What Is Innovation? Laying the Ground for a Philosophy of Innovation." *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 25 (1): 72–96.

Blok, Vincent, and Pieter Lemmens. 2015. "The Emerging Concept of Responsible Innovation. Three Reasons Why It Is Questionable and Calls for a Radical Transformation of the Concept of Innovation." In *Responsible Innovation 2*, edited by B. J. Koops, I. Oosterlaken, H. Romijn, T. Swierstra, and J. van den Hoven, 19–35. Springer.

Doeland, L. 2020. "Turning to the Specter of Waste: A Hauntological Approach." In *Perspectives on Waste from the Social Sciences and the Humanities: Opening the Bin*, edited by R. Ek and Nils Johansson, 21–36. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Gaber, Nadia, Lisa Bero, and Tracey J. Woodruff. 2023. "The Devil They Knew: Chemical Documents Analysis of Industry Influence on PFAS Science." *Annals of Global Health* 89 (1).

Godin, Benoît. 2015. *Innovation Contested: The Idea of Innovation over the Centuries*. Routledge.

Guinnane, Timothy W. 2002. "Delegated Monitors, Large and Small: Germany's Banking System, 1800–1914." *Journal of Economic Literature* 40 (1): 73–124.

Hendlin, Yogi Hale. 2021. "Surveying the Chemical Anthropocene." *Environment and Society* 12 (1): 181–202.

Hodgson, Geoffrey M. 2023. *The Wealth of a Nation: Institutional Foundations of English Capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Marder, Michael. 2020. *Dump Philosophy*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Marx, Karl. 1992. Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 2. Translated by David Fernbach. Penguin.

NOS. 2013. "Rutte: Koop Nieuwe Auto of Nieuw Huis." Video, December 10. https://nos.nl/video/577209-rutte-koop-nieuwe-auto-of-nieuw-huis.

Renfrew, Daniel, and Thomas W. Pearson. 2021. "The Social Life of the 'Forever Chemical.'" *Environment and Society* 12 (1): 146–63.

Reno, Joshua O. 2018. "What is Waste?" *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1 (1): 1–10.

Schumpeter, Joseph Alois. 1976. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Psychology Press.

Slade, Giles. 2006. *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America*. Harvard University Press.

Stiegler, Bernard. 1998a. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, Bernard. 1998b. *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*. Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, Bernard. 2007. "Technoscience and Reproduction." *Parallax* 13 (4): 29–45.

Stiegler, Bernard. 2010. *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. Polity.

Stiegler, Bernard. 2013. *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*. Polity.

Stiegler, Bernard. 2015. *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*. John Wiley & Sons.

Stikkelorum, Merel. 2025. "Het zit in vershoudbakjes en waterflessen en is nu verboden: BPA." *NOS*, January 22. https://nos.nl/artikel/2552805-het-zit-in-vershoudbakjes-en-waterflessen-en-is-nu-verboden-bpa.