Splijtstof
Jaargang 53, nummer 3

Colofon

Splijtstof
Een uitgave van Stichting Splijtstof, ISSN 0928-8139.
Op 15 september 1972 werd Splijtstof opgericht als maandblad van de Filosofenbond. Op 7 november 2013 werd de Stichting Splijtstof opgericht.

Redactie
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Splijtstof heeft tevens een postvakje bij de receptie van de Faculteit der Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen (E15.30) en een eigen kantoor (E14.19).

Prijs
Splijtstof is open access! Alle artikelen verschijnen vanaf dan gratis op www.splijtstof.com. Een fysiek abonnement houden kan.

Het logo van Splijtstof is ontworpen door Ted van Aanholt.

Illustratieverantwoording

De illustraties in deze editie van Splijtstof zijn gemaakt door Katja Rosita en Ava Wood.

Inhoudsopgave


SALE
Now for the low price of your conscience and the blood of innocent lives
SALE
Now comes with free police brutallity

Editorial: Lateness, Perfectionism, Release

Dear reader,

Welcome to issue 53-3 of Splijtstof, finished and released during Splijtstof's 54th year of publication. The conspicuously-mismatched numbers don't lie: we are late. Formerly the *General Edition*, then the *Summer Edition*, and now the *Nazomer Edition*, 53-3 has had many names. It has haunted the narrative of my first year as an Editor-in-Chief of Splijtstof (and the first year of my Research Master's). In fairness, even before my time in the editorial team, instances of a Splijtstof Summer edition that actually came out during the Summer are a hazy spectre on the horizon of my long-term memory. That being said, as I sit writing this editorial indoors with my woolly jumper and thick socks on, occasionally warming my hands under my legs, *Nazomer Edition* feels like the understatement of the decade.

Lateness tends to imply disorganisation and/or apathy on the part of the temporally-challenged. When I am late, no matter what the reason is, I worry that the people who are left waiting for me assume that I am disorganised and apathetic. Our external contributors and members of the editorial team, not to mention our readers, have waited a long time for this edition. It is a brilliant edition (if I do say so myself), and I hope that our readers will enjoy the sharp social commentary, thought-provoking podium pieces and refreshing creative energy of this edition as much as I have. Unfortunately, it is the brilliance of this edition that made it so difficult to finish.

The moniker 'perfectionist' is misleading. It leads so-called perfectionists to believe that their tendency to clutch their work to their chests, agonising over the minutiae, turning it over and over in their heads, just as the relentless ebb and flow of the tide buffs the jagged edges from sea-glass, is what makes their work *perfect*—that is, fit for the purpose it was created for. I cling to my work. I eventually decide it is perfect and release it. It is perfect for the purpose it was created for. It must have been because I clung to it.

I didn't work on 53-3 nearly as consistently as I should have. I am often late, not merely as a result of disorganisation and apathy, but because I am caught in an almost-intractable web of technical and emotional overcommitment. Some people respond to technical and emotional overcommitment by finding something that will unburden them from having to do it themselves. A Large Language Model can spit out a perfectly-worded piece of writing in a few moments (so I've heard), but I take hours and hours to write something embarrassingly bad that requires several re-draftings before it can be read. If perfection is the point, surely I can just use an LLM to do it?

As an editor and proofreader, I had always considered perfectionism—fixing every lost clause, misplaced apostrophe and missing full-stop—to be my method and my purpose. I had to get it done, perfectly. However, when it came down to getting this edition finished, perfectionism was a hindrance, not a help. I wasn't able to commit to editing perfectly, so I couldn't edit at all. I was stuck. Every time someone told me that I could 'just use an LLM' to solve my paralysis, I bristled at the suggestion. How dare they? Did they even understand what philosophy is about? I reserve the right to make my own mistakes. I want to go down in the tradition of writers who become so passionate that they forget entire words, use their own voice in their work unapologetically, and make inconsistent use of the Oxford Comma for reasons that remain unclear even to myself. I want my writing to evolve, slowly but surely. I want to do it myself.

I have a direct route to perfect writing, and I don't want to take it, because it feels *antithetical* to my purpose. If I feel this way, surely *perfection isn't my purpose*. The supposed challenge posed to philosophy by LLMs, and my incredulity at the suggestion that my purpose is simply to write perfectly, reminded me what my actual purpose is as a philosopher and as an editor. I don't feel threatened by LLMs, because our purpose doesn't overlap in any meaningful way. The moment I realised this, I became unstuck, freed from perfectionism's clutches.

My outspokenness against the use of LLMs in philosophy (in spite of multiple assurances that it will help me perfect my work in no time at all) stems from my belief that a grammatically-and-syntactically-perfect LLM-generated piece of writing is fundamentally less philosophical than even the worst essay concepts I've ever managed to dredge up from the recesses of my over-clocked, unfit-for-purpose caveman brain. Philosophy is, in my humble opinion, about the embodied experience of weighing up possibilities and being horribly confused. It's about critical engagement with anything and everything, and the arduous, tedious, iterative process of eking meanings out of something (or nothing). My work has at times been clumsily-worded, badly-argued, littered with inconsistencies, and yet it was undoubtedly philosophical, because I sat at my desk (or stood in the shower til the water ran cold) and did it all for myself. The presence of words on a page is not evidence that philosophy has happened. Philosophy happens elsewhere; we simply write to each other about it.

My auntie, who is an artist by profession, shared a Paul Valéry quote with me at a formative age: "A poem is never finished, only abandoned". I come from a long line of perfectionists who tend to abandon their work rather than finishing it, and I assumed this meant that the road to perfection is laid with unfinished projects. I was wrong. I now take it to mean something like this: 'You will never feel like your poem is finished, because you will encounter new feelings about your poem as you write it, and you will feel as though those feelings belong in that poem. This is not the way. Those feelings belong in your next poem.' I would not necessarily call this edition abandoned (53-4 and 53-5 were not so lucky). I would prefer to call it 'released'. You can only start your next poem once you release the poem you're still clutching to your chest. We release this edition to you as it is.

I held off on 53-3 for so long because I didn't feel as though I could do the contents justice, and I felt that that meant I had failed in my purpose as an Editor-in-Chief. I was wrong. Splijtstof's primary purpose is not to be perfect, although we set out to meet the high standards you would expect from academic publishing. Splijtstof's purpose is to elevate the voices of philosophers who are developing their style and presence in academia, and to give them a platform to share work that they are passionate about. By virtue of its real, embodied, critical, meaningful contents, this edition was perfect even before we started to proofread it. It is perfect now that we have released it. It is perfect now that you are reading it.

Yours in sincerity,

Charlie Chowdhry
Editor-in-Chief

Campus Food Council as Advisory Committee

Gilles Zuidwijk, Stan Reijnen, Kim Liedtke, and Luka Schepens
(Food Systems Interest Group)

In a treatise on transformative campus food policy (RCSC Author Collective 2024), we called for a campus food policy council to address the main problems of the current food system. Currently, the food system is characterised by unequal power distribution through high corporate control, human exploitation, animal exploitation, and low diversity of cultural foods. On top of that, synthetic fertilisers are still largely involved in food production, leading to toxic environments. Although a campus food policy is a welcome entry point into the messy world of food politics, it misses previously described issues about how food is produced. We argued that any solution to these problems requires food eco-democracy and strong engagement with the bioregion. One feasible way to achieve both is through a campus food council.

So, what exactly is a campus food council? It is a group of students and staff who come together to discuss the food options available on campus—what we eat and do not eat—and explore ways to create a space that promotes sustainable food practices. Essentially, it is an advisory committee focused on shaping the university's food policies. Its participants would ideally come from a variety of groups, including students, academic staff members, and staff from Radboud University's services and facilities. External parties and stakeholders may also be included, such as suppliers and local food organisations. The aim is to find legitimacy for food policies through the collective deliberation about our choices.

The new sandwich on campus, 'Broodje Nimma', is a good example of how the university can join forces with local farmers and makers to make the assortment more sustainable. Yet, as discussed in the treatise, there is no simple route to sustainability: there will always be trade-offs. Local food is not necessarily organic, and organic food is not necessarily produced under ethical labor circumstances. Food systems are complex, and a university has vast amounts of experience and research power in this field. Thus, a university campus is the ideal place to incorporate and test more transformative food practices, such as a food council.

In the Netherlands, there are already a few food councils on a municipal or regional level, such as in Ede, Amsterdam, and The Hague. But there is no campus food council or food advisory committee so far that includes student and staff participants. Therefore, realising this idea will be in uncharted territory. This leaves conceptual gaps which need to be discussed further, like the council's structure: who is going to be part of the council, and how do we ensure a diverse constitution which does justice to the democratic ideal that is at the root of this proposition? In other words, how do we motivate those who are not naturally drawn to discuss food matters to join this deliberation? These challenges require an open dialogue to brainstorm collectively. This will set the tone of inclusive and equal deliberation, which reflects a food council's organisation.

This is why the first step is to set up an open meeting for potential stakeholders to gather ideas on how to actually create a campus food council, as requested during the Radboud Center for Sustainability Challenges dialogue meeting (RCSC Author Collective 2025). The aim is to uncover the ways to build a lasting food council or food advisory committee through the knowledge that students and staff have about certain opportunities, contacts, and initiatives on campus.

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SPLIJTSTOF


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PERSONALITY UPLOAD
... NEARLY COMPLETE

Self-Care and Capitalism

How and Why Individuals Adapt

Olivia McGrath

This paper aims to explore the following question: How and why do individuals living within capitalist systems adapt in order to fulfil the individual responsibility to care for and improve oneself according to the neoliberal ideals of 'self-care' and 'self-improvement'? Firstly, Michel Foucault's conception of biopower, and his differentiation between biopower and sovereign power, will be explained. Following this, the paper will explore the relationship between biopower and capitalism. It will argue that, whilst biopower initially played an essential role in the development of capitalism, biopower has since been subsumed by capitalism: the optimisation of life is treated as a means to an end and is firmly aimed at the production of capital and the maintenance of neoliberal, capitalist systems. In this context, the responsibility for the care of the self is placed firmly on the individual. This is another manifestation of the neoliberal view that one should 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps', rather than relying on assistance from sources outside oneself, such as the state. Here, we find an example of how biopower has been subsumed by capitalism: the state seeks to relinquish its responsibility for the wellbeing of citizens in favour of a more privatised, individualised, neoliberal system of care.

One example of this individualistic approach to self-care is the mindfulness industry. As part of these practices, individuals are taught to self-regulate by directing their attention inwards, rather than directing their energy outwards towards systemic change. Additionally, other self-care practices within the fields of personal and professional development result in the commodification of the self, or the creation of a more palatable version of the self via value-laden performance or consumption. Thus, it is clear that individuals use self-care to adapt to life under capitalist regimes; these strategies are the result of the responsibility to optimise life being placed in the hands of individuals, who must both acquire commodities, and become desirable objects for consumption in themselves. In these ways, self-care practices serve to reaffirm the capitalist system.[1]

In "Right of Death and Power Over Life", Michel Foucault traces the development of biopower. Firstly, he illustrates the workings of sovereign power. This is where a ruler has the right to decide whether an individual

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1 This essay focuses on the appropriation of self-care for capitalist purposes. For self-care in a radical black context, i.e., as self-preservation in the face of systemic oppression (whether racial, gender-based, queer, etc.), see Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light: Essays (1988).

lives or dies, as they can require that their subjects sacrifice their lives for them (Foucault 2013, 41). In the present day, the way power functions has changed. Power is now wielded with the aim of optimising life, rather than suppressing it (43). Biopower can be directed towards the optimisation of an individual's body, but also manifests itself in terms of the control and regulation of a population as a whole (44). One example of biopower at play is the one child policy which was in place in China from 1979 to 2015. In this case, the Chinese government exerted control over a biological function of a population group, namely the reproductive systems and choices of couples. The government at the time believed the population was growing too quickly (Pletcher 2025). Thus, the aim of this policy was to optimise life for the population as a whole by controlling population growth, making the one child policy a textbook example of biopower.

Biopower played an instrumental role in the development of capitalism. Both biopower and capitalism are characterised by striving towards increased productivity (Braun 2021, 147). In the case of biopower, this takes the form of fostering and optimising life. Under capitalism, this, of course, entails the production (and accumulation) of as much capital as possible. In order to fulfil the economic function of capital production, populations needed to adapt in ways that made them fit to serve these processes, i.e. it was necessary for the “controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production” to take place (Foucault 2013, 45). Investment in the optimisation of individuals and populations via biopolitical intervention enables human beings to participate more effectively as producers of value in capitalist systems. In this way, biopower can support capitalist systems.

It is important to note that biopower operates within the context of the economic and political systems of a given society. Whilst, as discussed above, biopower aided in the development of capitalism by adapting and organising populations in order to promote the generation of capital, the operation of biopower does not necessarily lead to the creation of a capitalist economic system (Braun 2021, 147). This is evidenced by the fact that Stalin employed the biopolitical tools of psychiatric hospitals in order to control the population of the USSR (151). Thus, it seems biopower can support various economic systems, taking on a different role within each social and political context. It is clear that within the context of capitalist systems, biopower has been subsumed by capitalism. This is because biopolitical tools are implemented with the aim of increasing economic productivity, and individual bodies and populations are commodified and are viewed through the lens of monetary value they have the potential to create. One example of this phenomenon is the framing of discussions regarding the health of the population. This topic is often considered in economic terms with the conversation focusing, for example, on the financial costs of illness in terms of rising insurance contributions and the number of lost work days due to illness (Rose 2001, 5). Another example of the financial framing of biopolitics can be found in our approach to medical research. Access to knowledge of the body at the molecular level is only possible via the use of expensive equipment, e.g., extremely powerful microscopes, thus knowledge of biological processes is sequestered behind a paywall maintained by those who have the ability to fund this research (15). In addition, medical research and the production of health serves and is guided by the interests of wealth production because it "must be legitimised by the logistics of product development and market share" (15). Under capitalism, even the physical matter of the individual's body can be transformed into a commodity, as is demonstrated by the existence of practices such as gene patenting and the trade of human tissue (15). These examples demonstrate that biopolitics clearly operates beneath a capitalist framework within capitalist contexts.

Individuals are also encouraged to take responsibility for their own health in a manner that reflects the individualistic, neoliberal values of the societies in which they live. Whilst it is true that the governments of capitalist countries retain responsibility for managing the health of their populations to a certain degree—by organising sewage and other waste disposal, ensuring the availability of clean drinking water, and regulating the sales of food products and medicines, to name a few examples—it is clear states are taking a distinctively neoliberal approach to biopolitical action and are trying to free themselves of many of the responsibilities associated with caring for the health of their citizens, hence the rise of the private health insurance industry (Rose 2001, 15). Within this context, individuals have taken it upon themselves to manage not only their physical and mental wellbeing, but also the health of their professional lives. Therefore citizens living under capitalist economic systems must adapt to fit expected norms through the use of strategies of self-care and self improvement. This occurs in several different ways.

One example of a self-care and self improvement technique which individuals utilise in order to manage their mental health is mindfulness. During mindfulness practices, individuals are encouraged to be fully engaged in the present moment and cultivate a sense of awareness of one's own body (Mindful Staff 2025). Through directing their attention inwards, practitioners aim to become less reactive to, or overwhelmed by, what is happening around them (Mindful Staff 2025). Practitioners often access pre-recorded audio meditation guides via applications which charge a subscription fee.

The mindfulness application industry is a very lucrative one as the mindfulness application market was valued at $97.6 million in 2021 and is expected to be worth $307.1 million by 2031 (Allied Market Research 2022).

Citizens living under capitalist economic systems must adapt to fit expected norms through the use of strategies of self-care and self improvement.

Mindfulness can be considered to be a self-care method that conforms to neoliberalism because the individual must take responsibility for their mental wellbeing by looking inwards. In his book *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (2019), Ronald Purser argues that these practices produce a momentary calming effect but are highly reductive as they do not take into account psychological and social factors that could negatively impact wellbeing (Barker 2021, 252). Mindfulness is often promoted to individuals who suffer under capitalist and neoliberal systems. One example of this is that some large corporations do not wish to lessen the demands they place on their employees (presumably because doing so would reduce profits) so they instead purchase mindfulness training in an attempt to manage employee burnout (252). Another example is that schools, especially those in areas where students are likely to come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, often employ mindfulness as a disciplinary tool (255). In both of these instances, those who are directed towards mindfulness practices are taught to see their poor mental health and feelings of discontent as internal imbalances that they must learn to self-regulate, rather than reasonable responses to poor external socioeconomic circumstances such as coming from a low income household, or being forced to keep up with the potentially unreasonable demands of your employer (255). This push towards individual responsibility for self care mirrors the neoliberal idea that one should 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' rather than seeking to improve your situation by enacting systemic change. In addition, due to their inward focus, mindfulness practices can isolate individuals (252). Therefore, not only is the responsibility to improve mental wellbeing placed solely on the individual, but mindfulness also affirms neoliberal systems by dismantling any sense of collectivism and moulding society into an atomistic collection of individuals (252). In the absence of collectivist structures that may seek to support the mental health of their community members, individuals who live under capitalist, neoliberal systems are forced to adapt and fulfil the responsibility of managing their own care. By turning to mindfulness, these individuals are supporting an industry that profits substantially from, and further entrenches neoliberal ideals through its use of an atomised approach to self-care.

Coaching is another way through which individuals who live under capitalist regimes adapt themselves in order to fulfil the responsibility to care for themselves. This form of self-improvement aims at improving one's career prospects by gaining skills and attributes that will increase one's desirability in the eyes of a potential employer. Capitalism creates instability (McCormack and Salmenniemi 2016, 7). This is demonstrated by the existence of the gig economy (which currently makes up almost 12 percent of the global labour market) (World Bank 2023), in which demand for one's labour, and therefore the income one can expect, are famously inconsistent. Additionally, even those with more secure forms of employment can be subject to economic uncertainty: the recent past has been plagued by financial disasters such as the 2008 Financial Crisis and the economic shocks that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these conditions of instability, individuals must compete in order to appear desirable to employers, hence many turn to professional coaching as a form of self-improvement. Thus, one can argue that, as well as existing as a response to the insecurities that exist within many labour markets, professional coaching may be seen as a manifestation of the need to continually optimise oneself (McCormack and Salmenniemi 2016, 12). Hence, seeking professional coaching could be interpreted as an example of how individuals living under capitalism adapt and care for themselves in relation to their professional lives. Through engaging in these coaching programmes, participants demonstrate that they possess good work ethics, making them appear more desirable to potential employers (12). Hence, there is arguably a performative element present in this method of self-improvement. In participating in professional coaching, individuals are commodifying themselves by branding themselves as desirable products for the consumption of potential employers in order to survive under the capitalist systems that generate these commodification processes in the first place (12).

The responsibility for individuals to optimise their own lives through self-care and self-improvement is also depicted in media. In Bo Burnham's film *Eighth Grade*, it is clear that the neoliberal conception of self-care has taken root in the life of Kayla, the protagonist (O'Donnell 2020, 307). The same can also be said for Earn, the protagonist of the 'FUBU' *Atlanta* episode. However, whilst both teenagers take part in self-improvement rituals, results differ due to race and gender—Kayla is a white girl whilst Earn is a black boy (309). Earn's self-improvement aims at acquiring economic security and social mobility, whilst Kayla desires social connection with her middle school peers, who are mostly white and upper-middle-class (311). These pieces of media are, of course, mere representations of social and cultural phenomena. However, they can function as a lens through which we can understand the experiences of individuals under neoliberalism (307).

Individuals are commodifying themselves by branding themselves as desirable products for the consumption of potential employers in order to survive.

In the ‘FUBU' episode, Earn finds an FUBU jersey whilst shopping in a discount store with his mother, Gloria. After Earn begs Gloria to buy the shirt for him, she agrees on the condition that he “work[s] for it” by bringing her a bag of crisps from another part of the store (O'Donnell, 2020, 312). Here, we clearly see the neoliberal idea of the importance of hard work being imparted onto the young protagonist. During the late 1990s, in which the ‘FUBU' episode is set, the brand was popular among black youth; an item of FUBU clothing would have functioned as an impressive status symbol, with a jersey costing around $100 (313). One would not have found an authentic ‘FUBU' jersey in a discount store and Earn's family certainly wouldn't have been able to afford an item such as this (312). By buying the discounted (and almost certainly fake) jersey, Earn is attempting to create an improved version of himself by projecting an idea of inflated wealth and status to his peers. However, Earn's plan to portray this improved version of himself does not go entirely smoothly. When Earn arrives at school wearing his new jersey, another boy, Devin, is wearing a similar one and the boys are scrutinised by their peers who are trying to determine which person is the imposter wearing fake branded clothing (316). Later in the school day, Earn is bullied for wearing fake FUBU by older students: “Hey, this nigga ain't got on FUBU. He got on FEBE... type of nigga to wear four-line Adidas and shit” (318). This act of bullying demonstrates another way in which individuals adapt to life under capitalist systems. Whilst Earn is trying to improve himself by creating a facade of wealth and high status through wearing his fake jersey, the older boy is enforcing the status quo which Earn is struggling against by drawing attention to the facade he has built. It is essential for the bully to reinforce the idea that wearing fake branded clothing is unacceptable as this preserves the value of name brands and the true social status they hold (318). It is also possible that this bully has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and he could view the potential upward social mobility of Earn as a threat to his own social standing. When it is eventually decided that it is Devin, and not Earn, who is wearing the fake FUBU, Devin takes his own life that night and this is partially attributed to the bullying he suffers (319). This demonstrates the social ostracising power of consumerism and materialism under neoliberalism as those who fail to meet the standard, such as Devin, experience crippling social rejection.

In *Eighth Grade*, Kayla addresses topics such as *Being Yourself* and *Putting Yourself Out There* on her YouTube series, Kayla's Korner, which is aimed at other young people. Kayla is not participating in capitalism in the same way as Earn, i.e., she is not buying a physical product. However, her motivational videos sell the neoliberal idea of self-improvement to the small number of individuals who watch her channel (312). There is, however, a clear disconnect between Kayla's online persona and how she functions in real life. This is clearly demonstrated in a scene where Kayla attends a pool party hosted by one of the more popular girls from school. Here, Kayla is reluctant to leave the car, and the shot of her in front of the entrance of the house makes her appear small and timid as the camera is angled upwards, emphasising the contrast between Kayla's small frame and the large building (O'Donnell 2020, 312). As Kayla makes her tentative approach towards the house, audio from her YouTube channel plays in the background: "... I guess that's what I'm basically trying to say is... you just need to like put yourself out there and face your fears and, you know, let people know the real you..." (O'Donnell 2020, 313). It is clear that Kayla uses her YouTube channel to project an alternate, improved version of herself to the world—a version of herself where she is the confident girl who has achieved social connection with her white, upper-middle-class peers, giving advice to young people struggling with social pressures, rather than a young person who is also struggling with shyness and longs for a sense of connection with, and belonging within, the "in" group. In this way, the online version of Kayla can be considered a neoliberal creation. In devising a more desirable persona, Kayla becomes "a performer, critic and impresario of [her] self" and she offers an improved version of her personality to be "judged in the democratic marketplace of public approval" (Bayman 2019, 286). This is also a manifestation of the subsumption of biopower by neoliberalism: Kayla does not question the premise that her self is a thing which she has the responsibility to continuously improve.

Here, there is a parallel with Earn's story: whilst Kayla attempts to convince others and herself of the reality of her self-assured online persona, Earn tries to convince his classmates that his jersey is authentic FUBU (O'Donnell 2020, 315). Both young people are attempting to improve themselves and their social standing, although in different ways. Earn's consumerism and Kayla's creation of an improved version of herself via her YouTube channel are both highly individualised methods of self-care. Like the mindfulness techniques and the coaching discussed previously, the subject of neoliberal capitalism is encouraged to look inward for solutions and the biopolitical responsibility to optimise one's life is placed on the individual.

In conclusion, this paper has explored the question of how and why individuals living within capitalist systems adapt in order to fulfil the individual responsibility to care for and improve oneself according to the neoliberal ideals of ‘self-care’ and ‘self-improvement’. It has traced the transition from sovereign power, which functions using the threat of death, to biopower, which aims at controlling the bodies of individuals and populations in order to optimise life. This may be achieved using the instrument of the state to regulate the biological functions of populations.

Biopower also aided in the development of capitalism as it allowed for the bodies of individuals and groups to be optimised in such a way as to promote the maximisation of the production of capital. Within capitalist contexts, biopower has been subsumed by capitalist economic systems as is demonstrated by the commodification of the human body and the framing of the health of the population in terms of economic productivity. Within these contexts where neoliberal values prevail, biopower has shifted away from the shrinking state and individuals are forced to take responsibility for their own health by implementing self-care and self-improvement techniques. Examples of these techniques include mindfulness practices and professional coaching. Mindfulness practitioners are taught to look inwards to cultivate a sense of calm. Responsibility for emotional regulation is placed on the individual, rather than attributed to external causes of stress such as systemic inequalities, such as being subject to the whims of a demanding employer, or experiencing the ramifications of economic disadvantage in childhood. Through coaching, individuals manage the health of their professional lives by cultivating selves that are more appealing to future employers. In a system where individuals are valued based on the value of the commodities they are able to create, professionals themselves must market themselves as desirable workers, i.e., valuable commodities in themselves, to potential employers.

In addition, media such as Bo Burnham's *Eighth Grade* and Donald Glover's *Atlanta* demonstrate the impact of the neoliberal ideal of continuous self improvement on young people as the protagonists seek to create improved versions of themselves in different ways. Through her YouTube channel, Kayla creates an alternative persona that meets the neoliberal ideal of continual self improvement; the purchase of a branded jersey is a vehicle which Earn uses to climb the social ranks of the young black community at his school.

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REAL
HON-
EY
HONEY

Honey, Honey, How You Thrill Me

A Look Into the Authenticity of Honey

Caetana Ribeiro da Cunha

Whenever we are telling stories about our childhood, looking back at core memories and thinking of the cute and naïve ingenuity of five, six, and seven-year-old us, my family always includes one of the many stories about me and honey. I had just gotten home from school and was sitting at the kitchen table. My mom was preparing a snack for me and my siblings, and we were all talking chaotically about our school day and getting ready for our afterschool activities. In the hustle and bustle of 5 p.m. on a Tuesday, my mom put a piece of my favourite bread, brioche, next to the jar of honey that our family friend had brought us a few weeks earlier. I ran to the cutlery drawer and fumbled around to find the wooden honey dipper that had been around for as long as I could remember. At last, I was collecting the honey—grainy, perfectly thick but still dripping slowly—and drawing it sloppily over my toasted brioche slice. Happiness. Here is the part of the story my family always likes to mention: during this casual Tuesday snack time, with chaos all around us, which is what normally happens with three children and a single mom, sweet six-year-old me said "I love honey so much; when I grow up, I'm gonna marry honey", and proceeded to move on with my day. I do not have many memories of my childhood, but I perfectly remember bursting this out. I think I remember this because it is still true: I still love honey.

I have said many things when asked, "what do you want to be when you grow up?", and "married to honey" is not something that comes to mind for many children. But now, as I am grown up, and in fact, not married to honey, I might as well be, because every single day without fail I eat a little bit of honey. Be it in my mouth-watering yoghurt bowl, my morning tea, the afternoon toast, or even in the salmon I make with veggies for dinner. Everything will have honey. And this is how it will be for the rest of my life. That is how much I love it.

Here is where the story shifts. When I was growing up, the honey we ate was the most authentic, real, raw honey you could find. It was either straight from the farmer's market for a whopping 15 euros per kilo, or from the family friend who has a farm where—among many other produce—they also have a side business of producing honey for friends, or from the side of the road along the mountain where the old man sits all day, waiting for a car to pass by in the hopes of selling a jar of the best honey ever for half the price it would be in the city. The honey I ate was *real*. That is why I wanted to marry it. Who wouldn't?

One of these mornings, I was preparing my breakfast: a yoghurt bowl with fruits and cereal, topped off, of course, with a drizzle of honey. Happiness. But this time, the honey just drizzled. Quick. Light. Effortless. Suddenly, it did not look like the same honey I wanted to marry when I was six. The other honey took about five business days to drizzle, and it was as thick as a log, almost black, with loads of sugary grains—those that occur when honey is created authentically and has sat in the jar for a while. This new honey, the one which sat next to me, which I bought for 2.46 euros, barely has any colour and drizzles way too fast, is not the same honey. It got me thinking, where are all the grains? Where is the colour? Where is this honey coming from?

And then I picked up the 'Miele Millefiori Squeeze' 400g bottle of expected happiness and was met with some defeat. I looked for an ingredient list—something, as a 20-year-old girl with a thing for diets, happens more than it should. Yet I could not even find an ingredient list. The only thing on the label was the address of the supermarket headquarters, an explanation of how honey could, with time, crystalise, a list of the division of recycling bins each part of the honey bottle had to go into and lastly, information about where the honey was produced: in the EU, Hungary, or Ukraine. I must say, what really shocked me most was the fact that there was no ingredient list. I find ingredient lists everywhere! Where was this one?

So, I turned to Google, my faithful partner in all my academic endeavours, but also my partner in searching for the most embarrassing and humbling questions that appear in my head. And that is when I found search results such as "The cold truth about fake honey" or "How to spot fake honey from raw honey in the supermarket", among others.

Of course, I knew that the honey I was buying now, on a student budget and living alone in a different country, is not going to be even close to the one my lovely mother buys for us in my sweet home country: Portugal. But I never wanted to give that idea much thought because, after all, I wanted to marry honey; so, I never actively thought about how the honey I wanted to marry when I was six years old is not the one I am dating when I am twenty years old. How could I tell her—young me—that I have betrayed the good honey? What is fake honey, what is real honey, and how exactly does that fit into my profile as a consumer in countries that are part of a Minority World— which is really just another term for developed countries? This is a privileged world, one where I may be a part of an exclusive chain of produce and simultaneously be a part of a complex set of trading systems for a single, small product.

Killing Me Softly—Real or Fake Honey?

The thing is, looking at my 'Miele Millefiori Squeeze', I could not help but accept that perhaps the honey I loved as a child was no longer the same one I was consuming today. This led me to research it. It turns out that there is a substantial increase in the production of 'fake honey' in Europe and the USA. While the real honey I used to consume was produced by the bees, collected by beekeepers, and placed in a jar that would directly go onto my brioche toast, those days are over for most of today's honey. Fake honey has become growingly present in people's pantries due to the increasing price of raw honey. "Counterfeit honey, often referred to as adulterated honey, is honey that has been diluted or altered with other substances" (Hebein 2023), meaning that producers of fake honey take a small sample of raw honey and dilute it either with water or other syrups, mainly made from rice, corn, or sugarcane.

These substances with which the raw honey is diluted are cheaper to collect and to produce, which allows me to buy honey for 2.46 euros rather than 8 euros—the average price of raw honey in the same supermarket. Although these syrups are much cheaper and give similar tasting experiences, they have numerous health repercussions. Sugarcane, rice, and corn syrups, among others, which may be used to dilute honey, are under certain institutions' guidelines for intake recommendations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). This suggests that it should be as low as possible—less than 10% of daily energy intake (World Health Organisation 2015; Turck, Dominique et al. 2021).

Let us take a look at sugarcane, which is likely to be involved in the production of many 'fake honeys'. To reach cane syrup, a series of processes must be conducted, most of which end up in the following: "A factory evaporator syrup is often completely inverted, and mixed with an uninverted syrup, to give a product of approximately 85° BRIX, 25-30% sucrose and 50-53% invert" (Clarke 2003, 5711). I am no scientist, but this sounds incredibly complicated to reach only *one* part of the final product: honey.

Not only are these processes extremely long and reduce the quality of the final product at each step, the health benefits the syrups involved offer are near to none. It can contribute to—sometimes unwanted—weight gain and is a promoter of the "development of chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes" (Ajmera 2023). That which is going into my body under the guise of honey is promoting scary things that six-year-old me does not even dream of when thinking about her future marriage partner.

But we have yet to understand exactly why I am taking on hundreds of other processes and multiple substances in my breakfast instead of raw, authentic, basic old bee honey. The growing difficulties for bees—their reducing numbers—lead to an increase in the price of the final product. Many of us have heard of trending movements like saving the bees and promoting their wellbeing, but I had not really thought about what it would do to me, Caetana. The problem is that as the number of actual honey producers (bees) is decreasing, the price of production substantially increases, as beekeepers have to spend more money in sustaining their existence as well as ensuring their wellbeing. This makes it unachievable for some people to buy the real honey. Families with low income or students like me seem not to have money to spend on the purest form of honey. Therefore, we must be satisfied with the alternative: honey that is diluted with endless other substances, adding up to a different product—fake honey.

To extend the problem even further, we can see now that an increase in fake honey leads to a decrease in the demand for real honey, which, in turn, increases its final price even more as the production continues, but no one buys it. The cycle perpetuates itself and creates unsustainability. Domestic and authentic beekeepers do not have the capacity to keep fomenting their own produce while big corporations and factories produce fake honey which appears to be generally more successful on the shelves in so many countries where financial instability is growing.

Where Did You Come From, Where Did You Go?—Into the Origins of Honey

Where does the sugarcane come from? Where does the 'Miele Millefiori Squeeze' come from? Hell, where do the blueberries I like to eat my yoghurt and honey with come from? Because all of this ends up inside of me. And it is quite disturbing to know that everything I consume comes from places I probably do not even know exist.

To start with, sugarcane (our aforementioned enemy) tends to be grown in tropical regions, such as Southeast Asia, India, New Guinea, etc. Funnily enough, on my quest to find out more about fake honey and real honey production, I came to the information that China and India are a few of the world's biggest honey producers. In fact, China has been put on the European Union's warning list for exporting honey to the continent due to its heavy indications of 'fake honey' sales.

Where does the real honey come from? Well, this honey I bought in particular was produced in the EU: either Hungary or Ukraine. First of all, this ambiguity of whether it was produced in Hungary or Ukraine makes me quite sceptical: why can they not just give me a country? It only perpetuates the instability and weak sources of their honey and emphasises how little they actually know about the product. If the firm does not even know which of the two countries produced my honey, what else do they not know about? Second of all, it did leave me quite unsettled to know that I might be consuming produce coming from Ukraine while there is a literal war going on—talk about an obnoxious statement. I mean, on the one hand, it can be uplifting, and I may actually be keeping a Ukrainian business afloat by maintaining production; but on the other hand, who is to tell me that the person producing my honey in a war-torn Ukraine has not lost all of their family as war casualties, and still produces my honey despite all of this?

This concern led me to research where Ukraine stands with regards to honey production. Apparently, it is "one of the top ten exporters of honey" (Rodriguez 2022) in the world. As it turns out, with the Russian invasion on Ukrainian soil, "many apiaries were destroyed or left unattended as they were close to the front lines or beekeepers left to fight in the war" (Rodriguez 2022). This means that although honey production is a big industry in Ukraine, it still remains an issue as they have had to substantially decrease their exports. This led to an increase in the imports that the EU makes of Asian honey, which, as it turns out, was mostly fake honey, something Europeans apparently cannot stand (but still purchase as if there were no alternative).

There is still hope, as even though there are several obstacles for beekeepers at this point in Ukraine, they have been hit by a wave of solidarity from beekeepers from other countries, which "have come together to raise funds" (Rodriguez 2022) to help them. For now, maybe I am not even in that bad a position by buying honey from Ukraine (or Hungary), as I may actually be helping them. But this might just be wishful thinking.

That's Life—Network Thinking

The problem is that the honey I eat every day at home *is* the real deal. I know it is organic, authentic and raw. It has all the indications. I even buy it from the farmer who produces it himself or whose friend does, or the producers themselves offer it to me. This is why it hurts: to know that as I become a student and have to make my own purchases and live on a relatively tight budget, I lower my standards and stoop down to the level of buying fake honey, even though I (now even further) know that I am pumping bad things into my body.

This reminds me of the idea that the gift-giving circuits do not even allow for the product to be fully immersed in the market. I will give you an example: one of my closest friends has an enormous farm in the interior of Portugal, where she raises cows, sheep, makes olive oil and cheese, and produces meats, as well as honey. It is truly an out-of-this-world experience every time I go there because everything is either grown on the farm or it is exchanged for other materials with nearby farms. Every time I go there, I come back with a 2kg jar of the freshest, most authentic honey you can think of, as a kind of "thank you for coming over". It is by far the best honey I have ever eaten; but it is still a product, which actually is not even on the market as they make it only for close friends. The thought that the Minority World has the privilege to create a circuit of people who trade products for the sake of gift-giving makes me really aware of how decently we live. That I do not even have to spend money on one of the best products really shows that.

But this is a completely different reality from what I find myself in now: I am buying a product that costs way too little, is not even close to half as good, and has plenty of other ingredients that have no business being there. I went from having the best product living in my little bubble of richness and gift-giving reliance to having to purchase the fake, average, honey you find in the store. This is the reality for so many people.

Conclusion

Now that I have had to force myself to look at the reality of one of my favourite commodities out there, and was confronted with facts I did not really want to know, it truly makes me wonder what else is being kept from me by goods enterprises. What else am I failing to acknowledge? The blueberries I eat daily make me think about the migrants' scandal that happened in Portugal a few years back. The Zara Sweater I am now wearing reminds me of all the documentaries I have not put myself through about sweatshop conditions. As for the laptop I am typing on, I have no idea where all the materials come from.

Everything I use, everything I consume, is a part of a never-ending network of production. Hundreds of people are involved in making a final product, acres of land are exploited to give me one little piece of fruit, ten people are living in a $20m^2$ room to give me a pair of jeans, and thousands of litres of water are used everyday when I shower. I could stay here all day perpetrating my newfound guilt for my problematic position of being an over-consumer. But regarding the honey, I will keep my privilege of having friends producing honey, and I will keep it at that. Once this 'Miele Millefiori Squeeze' bottle is finished, you will not see me buying another one. I will stay with the good honey, the one I can ensure was made with the finest producers: bees, and that the workers taking care of them live and work in good conditions. All the rest I just mentioned is a problem for future me, but I need to rethink my consumerism, and that starts with present-me. It starts with all of us.

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Morele ambitie (*Moral Ambition*), Rutger Bregman (2024)

Stefan Schevelier

In his latest book, Rutger Bregman tries to win us over on his version of effective altruism. That one sentence alone should have made for an easy to write review, but this review has taken me much longer than I expected. The original Dutch version of Rutger Bregman's *Morele ambitie* came out in March 2024 and I read it shortly thereafter. But instead of handing in the nasty review that I wrote back then, I kept mulling over the book. So, just in time for the release of the English version[1], here is my more balanced and thoughtful review, as well as an attempt to explain why the book lived in my head rent-free.

I read *Moral Ambition* with a specific audience in mind: students in the Philosophy, Politics and Society programme at Radboud University. I had spoken to many such students in Philosophy in Practice, a course I developed and taught for several years in the PPS programme. Teaching that course afforded me some insight in the minds of third year students, right when they are forced to consider their future careers. A recurring theme in the conversations I had with these students was the desire to really make a change. They had studied some of the largest societal challenges humanity faces—climate change, looming authoritarianism, the difficulties of overcoming patriarchy and colonialism—they were not going to be satisfied without at least making a dent in those challenges. And when deciding between different career paths such as journalism and public administration, students often weighed heavily the perceived efficacy of such career paths.

For the budding graduate, this desire for impact creates all sorts of challenges. The worst of these is a form of paralysis that arises when they realize just how many potential careers they can pursue. Sure, one could try one's hand at journalism in order to sway public opinion on the impact of climate change, but what are the odds of making it in that cut-throat world? For many, that rightly seems like a high-risk, high-reward choice. Or why not skip swaying public opinion and just aim for a slice of political power by running for political office? The rewards might be even greater, but at the same time the odds of achieving any of the limited seats at the table might be comparatively lower. Or, on the other end of the spectrum of efficacy, while landing a job at a small municipality should be relatively easy for someone

1 At the time of writing.

that graduates from PPS, the prospect of really changing the world soon disappears behind the grey walls of city hall. Given the trade-offs, none of these options seem particularly appealing.

So it was with these considerations in mind that I approached *Moral Ambition*, fearing that Bregman would try to fuel these paralyzing thoughts about efficacy and partly hoping that he would offer a way out of our desire to make a difference.

The book's ten chapters are all organised and structured around one clear goal: to get you to be morally ambitious. That is, to get you to drop whatever you are doing and devote your life to a niche and idealistic cause with a small group of likeminded and talented peers. In each chapter we are introduced to a morally ambitious pioneer who illustrates one aspect of Bregman's desired morally ambitious lifestyle. We are introduced to Thomas Clarkson, Bregman's personal hero for his fight against slavery; August Landmesser, who needed no one else to oppose the Nazis; Ralph Nader, who set up his own cult of research journalists in the fight against corporate America; and others. Each of these stories has a lesson for the reader. From Clarkson, we learn that justice requires sacrifice. From Landmesser, we learn that we must lower our threshold for action. From Nader, we learn that efficacy requires boring work and a devoted cult of followers... and so on. Brugman salts these examples with scientific research, mostly from psychology and sociology. All in his trademark style: effective and readable, but also arrogant and self-indulgent. I found that Bregman's cast of characters is a bit hit and miss. In the case of Ralph Nader, for example, Bregman is forced to admit that, while Nader's work in journalism was good, he will be remembered for sabotaging Al Gore's 2000 election campaign. Similarly, the chapter on August Landmesser ends with a weird twist where Bregman doubts whether Landmesser was even involved in the story he's just told.

The intellectual core of the book is a form of utilitarianism in the style of Australian philosopher Peter Singer. Singer, who features both prominently and uncritically in chapter eight, is famous for defending the idea that right and wrong are essentially matters of maximizing the happiness of the greatest number of living beings. In the context of Bregman's book, this means that living a good life entails ditching your career in finance to start a foundation that funds mosquito nets in Africa, or stopping investments in guide dogs for the blind in favour of solving the root causes of blindness.

When things get messy as Bregman starts introducing more and more utilitarian ethics, barely any time is spent on the critiques that those ethical theories have attracted. There is what marketeers would call a sort of alignment on display here between the utilitarianism Bregman defends and the utilitarian way he defends it. The rather premium feel of the hardcover edition I have in my hand, the empty blurbs on the back, the polished campaign around the book launch in 2024, they all signal that Bregman is more interested in moving me to utilitarian action than in ending longstanding academic debates in ethics. I think my worries about the utilitarian core of Bregman's book are best reflected in a section where he explains his philosophy by means of a Harry Potter analogy. To make the world a better place, he (2024) argues, we do not only need brave Gryffindors that found charities, analytical Ravenclaws that evaluate which policies have the highest return on investment, the Hufflepuffs that lobby and communicate, but also "Slytherin. That is the department that is known for its ambition, cunning and pride. Here would be trained advisors that help wealthy people donate their money most effectively. Without the fundraisers of the Slytherins, the whole thing would come crashing down, but you would of course have to watch out not to create a Voldemort once in a while" (137; my translation). Effectively, Bregman invites us to give in to moral corruption in exchange for efficacy. What disappears completely out of view in Bregman's world is any form of systemic critique. All forms of action are reduced to a binary 'do good effectively' or 'do good ineffectively'.

What would my imagined PPS student take from the book? First off, I think they would be put off by Bregman's style. He has a habit of offending his audience and I imagine the first chapter titled: "No, you are not good just the way you are" would already drive off some of them. I personally felt this one: "Most people past thirty rarely change course. Once anyone owns a labrador, cake server or an electric lawn mower, they are usually a lost cause" (Bregman 2024, 16). And an entire passage entitled "Category III: Idealistic but not so ambitious" (23) is meant to sideline Generation Z. Secondly, the book does contain ways to increase your effectiveness that are not intrinsically tied up with utilitarianism or effective altruism. Bregman's suggestion to not go at it alone and find a group of like-minded peers, for instance, is something that should interest the student. Thirdly, I think the student will find much to disagree with here. And there is some value in that too. It is a bit of a cliché, but only reading what you agree with tends to dull the mind and reading things you disagree with can sharpen it. I kept coming back to Bregman's ideas about the limits of idealism, the Noble Loser, and the ineffectiveness of collective action, not because I agreed with them, but because they helped me shape my own thoughts.

All in all, there was much I didn't like about the book and I can't really recommend it as a work of philosophy. But the fact that I kept mulling over some of its ideas does mean that it is something I'd recommend to the student that recognizes themselves in the PPS student in the second paragraph.

Bregman, Rutger. 2024. *Morele ambitie*. De Correspondent.

Spatial Storytelling in Yad Vashem

An Ethnography of the (Dis)Placement of the Sacred in Israel's National Holocaust Memorial

Wytze Dijkstra
(Submitted November 2024)

"I never really gave them any serious thought," mumbles Dani Dayan, Chairman of Yad Vashem, as we sit in his lofty office overlooking the enormous memorial complex in West-Jerusalem. It is early March 2023, and I have come to ask Dayan about the Bible passages that figure prominently in Yad Vashem's landscape as part of my research on the place of religious discourse in Yad Vashem's practices of Holocaust commemoration. From his office window, Dayan and I look onto the visitors' *piazza*, where we see a gigantic inscription from the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:14 on an aqueduct leading to the visitors' center. It reads: "I will put my breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your soil". Instead of lingering on this Bible passage, in which I see a strong symbolic force, Dayan instead directs my attention to a large inscription on the wall behind his desk. It is a piece of the will and testament of Gela Seksztajn, a Polish-Jewish artist who died during the Warshaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. It reads:

> As I stand on the border between life and death, certain that I will not remain alive, I wish to take leave from my friends and works… My works I bequeath to the Jewish museum to be built after the war. Farewell my friends. Farewell the Jewish people. Never again allow such a catastrophe.

"It was when I read it that I understood my responsibility. She was talking to me. The significance of that is that I represent six million people that cannot speak. That gives me responsibilities," Dayan says. Although Dayan's words strike a chord with me, there is an orchestrated feel to the manner in which Dayan presents himself, as the reverse ventriloquist to this evocative piece of writing. It makes me decide to push through with my questions on 'religion'. Again, Dayan, who is not all too eager to talk, stresses the self-explanatory nature of the 'religious' things I might see in Yad Vashem. For Dayan, these are not so much religious as *cultural* elements: "Yad Vashem is a sacred place in the secular sense of the word," Dayan continues, adding that although he is a staunch atheist, Zionism is his religion.

The above scene from my fieldwork period in Israel accurately captures the interface and connections between Holocaust memory, Israeli national discourse, and religion or sacrality that are the subjects of this paper. The scene also reveals the basic disagreement between me and my interlocutors at Yad Vashem over the meaning, presence, and nature of 'religion'. Whereas I had come to Yad Vashem to write about the function of religion in Yad Vashem's commemorative practices, 'religion', as religion, was nowhere to be found, according to the curators, tour guides and Chairmen I spoke with in Yad Vashem.

How to make sense of the apparent interface, or, fluidity, between Holocaust memory, Israeli national discourse, and 'the religious' in Yad Vashem? Below, I explore how religious text, symbolism and motifs figure within Yad Vashem's spatial constellation of Holocaust commemoration. Based on fieldwork conducted in Yad Vashem, I present the memorial as a site which offers a reexamination of the place and understanding of text and canon in religious studies, and as a site whose commemorative practices invite us to reconsider the flexibility of notions like 'religion', 'sacrality', 'memory', and 'nationalism'. Thus, as much as notions of the sacred and the religious are part of my conceptual toolbox, so too are they objects of investigation themselves. Hence the quotation marks around the central concept of this paper.

During the short period of one month I was permitted to be inside Israel in the early Spring of 2023, I visited Yad Vashem over ten times, becoming acquainted with the memorial's narrativity, its repetitive forces and its rhythms. I took multiple guided tours; I took a walk with five non-Israeli first-time visitors to Yad Vashem over the compounds; and I held interviews with several figures in Yad Vashem, most notably with Chairmen Dani Dayan and former Chairman and chief curator of Yad Vashem, Avner Shalev. In this paper I revisit parts of this ethnography.

On August 28, 1953, the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) passed the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Law. Also known as the 'Yad Vashem Law,' it heralded the founding of the memorial, which would become the central institution in Israel for Holocaust commemoration. Having been described as a grave for Jewish Holocaust victims, as "a place in the world for a world displaced" (Ockman 2006, 19), Yad Vashem is itself a monument to displacement.

Being the second most visited place in Israel after the Western Wall, Yad Vashem explicitly figures in Israel's nation-building, and actively forges links between the duty to remember and Israeli politics: young Israeli soldiers all pay a mandatory visit to Yad Vashem, and likewise this is common courtesy for international political leaders visiting Israel. With the Israeli military cemetery and the graves of Israeli politicians like Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin, among others, being on the same hill as Yad Vashem, the Mount of Remembrance, Yad Vashem actively forges links between the genocide on European Jewry and the Zionist project in Israel.

Yad Vashem can thus be said to 'Zionize' the memory of the Holocaust in an Israeli *lieux de memoire*, which has been noted (Young 1993; Goldberg 2012; Reynolds 2018). The point of departure for the current research is to see how Yad Vashem constructs, authenticates and authorizes its commemorative practices of Holocaust commemoration within a Zionized redemptive framework, and specifically, how the religious figures within this.

In the following, I take you on a walk through Yad Vashem's memorial complex. My guiding premise in this paper is that Yad Vashem, its pathways, its landscape, architecture, memorials, tour guides, and texts, are together part of a 'spatial story'; an assemblage of media that together construct the narrative of Israel's national Holocaust memorial.

In walking through the complex, then, visitors partake in, and are constitutive of, a process of 'spatial storytelling', connecting different narratives through their movement. An important element in the strategies of "spatial construction" (Feldman 2007, 1150) is human movement (De Certeau 1984, 91—110). Like the movement of the eye across the pages of a book constructs a meaningful story out of its individual letters and words, so too can human movement—a walk—through a space be said to construct a spatial story. Christopher Tilley, an influential figure in interpretative archeology, understands such spatial paths as 'texts', that is, "frequently repeated narratives, in which geographical features of the landscape act as mnemonic pegs upon which moral teachings hang" (Tilley 2004, 33). The path that I take you on runs from Yad Vashem's entrance, or *piazza*, towards and through the Holocaust History Museum, to be concluded on the viewers' balcony at the end of the museum. This path is the one most visitors to Yad Vashem take.

I divide our walk into three parts, or 'chapters', that structure the presentation of the key arguments of my ethnography: 'The Prophecy' on the *piazza*, 'The Catastrophe' inside the museum, and 'The Redemption' on the balcony (see figures 2, 3, and 4).

After describing my methodological approach to Yad Vashem, centering around my guiding concept of 'spatial storytelling', in 'The Prophecy' I present the arguments I found on the presence of 'religion' in Yad Vashem. Specifically, I center this discussion around the notion of 'heritage religion', and I use my findings to reflect on emic/etic considerations within religious studies. Building on this, in 'The Catastrophe' I take you into the Holocaust History Museum (HHM) and discuss the museological concepts that have guided the museum's exhibitions since its reopening in 2005. In walking through the HHM, I present how Yad Vashem's commitment to presenting 'the Jewish perspective' is historically and culturally negotiated, and has a spatial foundation at the heart of it.

Coming out of the HHM, in ‘The Redemption’ I argue how the sense of responsibility that the museum tries to convey to its visitors works in tandem with a narrative of bystander complicity that it constructs. I argue how Yad Vashem constitutes a social sacrality of Holocaust remembrance, in which sacrality becomes transferable, or (dis)placeable. I conclude the paper with a reflection on Yad Vashem’s grand spatial story, and on how the strand of sacrality adduced to Holocaust remembrance may, paradoxically, lead to forgetting. The relevance I signal in this paper, then, bears on the need to develop what has been called an encompassing ‘grammar’ of trauma and history (Bashir and Goldberg 2019) that can meaningfully engage in the current Israeli-Palestinian political reality.

Between Text and Spatiality—Spatial Storytelling in Yad Vashem

With the notion of ‘spatial storytelling’, I examine how religious text, both written and spoken, figures within a larger spatial landscape of Holocaust remembrance.

These texts are simultaneously in a spatial dialogue with, for example, historical narration of the Holocaust and Holocaust imagery. Religious text and notions of transcendence are integral to the spatial layout of Yad Vashem, as I show below. Examining the interplay between Holocaust memory, imaginings of the Israeli collectivity, and religious discourse on Yad Vashem’s memorial grounds, I show how a ‘nativized’ Israeli memory of the Holocaust is imbued with religious symbolism and meaning, rearticulating ‘religion’ itself. In turn, religious discourse is imbued with national significance. Traffic runs both ways across Yad Vashem’s pathways.

Space theory, spearheaded by Michel Foucault (1986), Henri Lefebvre ([1991] 1974), and Michel de Certeau (1984), among others, has been adopted in numerous fields, such as geography, political philosophy, and religious studies. Within religious studies itself, space became a significant subject of inquiry with the work of Mircea Eliade, whose ideas on sacred geographies have become foundational for scholarly work on the meaning and power of the sacred in space and time (Eliade 1959, 26). Second to Eliade, Jonathan Z. Smith worked to dislodge theory on sacred space from its base within phenomenological conceptions of the sacred and space, and reengaged it with constructionist anthropological and sociological approaches that stress the importance of ritual. Ritual, Smith writes, “is not a response to ‘the sacred’; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual” (Smith 1987, 105).

Within sociology and philosophy, storytelling and narrative have historically been conceived as both a *phenomenon*—the observable stories and narratives we find—and as a *process*. This process of storytelling involves, for Hannah Arendt and anthropologist Michael Jackson, an act of meaning-making that allows humans to position themselves in the world. As such, they argue, storytelling is foundational both to sociality as well as to individuality (Arendt 1958; Jackson 2008). In realities that are by definition unspeakable, largely beyond our grasp, storying our lives, storytelling, helps to position both the world around us and ourselves in relation to it.

In this line of thought, storytelling, as a process, pushes away from traditional boundaries between researcher and researched (Hazard 2013) and instead focuses on the interplay between self and other, between subject and object (Jackson 1989, 3). Working with this notion of storytelling, I relate to a larger academic project of moving away from Cartesian splits and acknowledging the 'dialectical' relationship (Pasi 2008, 4) between researcher and researched. In looking at how Bible passages figure in the commemorative landscape of Yad Vashem, 'spatial storytelling,' then, de-essentializes 'text' as something set apart and instead points to the omnipresence of text in the form of story (King 2017). Taking the human body as central point of focus, we see how texts are entangled in larger spatial assemblages that unfold through the body (Turner 1996, 28).

Yad Vashem might just be the perfect storyteller. In its publications, Yad Vashem continuously stresses that it wants to provide its visitors with "an emotion-driven, experiential visit, not just a sober history of the Holocaust," as writes curator Dorit Harel (2010, 26). Former Chairman Avner Shalev writes: "At the center of the narrative is the individual" (Shalev 2006, 9). In 2005, with the grand reopening of Yad Vashem after renovation, a commentator poetically described Yad Vashem as 'the Homer of the Holocaust,' saying: "If the Washington museum serves as the Holocaust's Thucydides, its historian, then the new Yad Vashem is its Homer, its poet and storyteller, enlivening the defining moments of a culture through the trails of individuals" (Oppenheimer 2005). What the above makes clear is that a difference is presupposed between a historical narration of the Holocaust on the one hand, and an emotional, storied narration of it on the other.

Prophecy—Religion as Heritage

From the light train stop on the Mount of Remembrance visitors walk the remaining distance to Yad Vashem through a freshly planted pine forest. The setting is serene. The quietness that surrounds the hill belies the disturbing images that we, as visitors, are about to encounter. As visitors walk underneath the aqueduct with Ezekiel's prophecy inscribed on it, they enter the *piazza*, which offers them a final moment of contemplation before entering. Under Jerusalem's almost fitting clear blue sky, on this hill everything feels different, somehow set apart, looming towards transcendence. Shalev writes:

> Jerusalem is a city that symbolizes deep ties for the three monotheistic religions, based on the Ten Commandments. At their heart is the commandment "Thou shall not kill", asserting the right to life of human beings created in God's image. It was from Jerusalem that the Prophet Isaiah's vision of cosmic coexistence and eternal peace was proclaimed. Now, the Mount of Remembrance, in this same city, reverberates with those values and the disintegration of the Ten Commandments' injunctions. (Shalev 2010, 9)

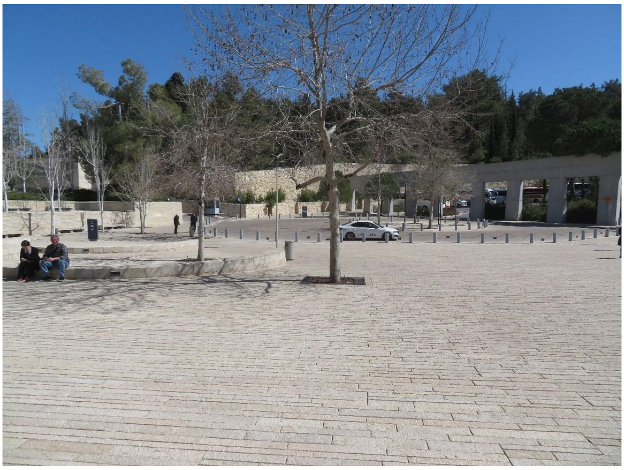

Fig. 1: The piazza, facing the aqueduct with Ezekiel 37:14 inscribed on it © Author

Yad Vashem is pregnant with an aura of sacrality. The name *Yad Vashem* ('memorial [lit. 'hand'] and name') is based on a verse from the book of Isaiah 56:5, which reads "To them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever." Isaiah 56:5 indicates the promise of God to the pious eunuchs (castrated men) to build a memorial for them in God's city, Jerusalem. Apart from the name's origins, religious parlance is omnipresent in Yad Vashem's literature and discourse: chief architect of the new Yad Vashem, Moshe Safdie, describes Yad Vashem as a 'sacred space' (Safdie 2006, 96). As we saw above, Dayan too describes Yad Vashem as a sacred space "in the secular sense of the word". Similarly, Shalev flirts with religious parlance in saying that the chief objective of the new Yad Vashem is to be an 'educational *midrash*' in the 'monastic air' of Yad Vashem (2010, 9).

A further addition to this Biblical aura is the abundant presence of Bible verses that figure in the memorial's commemorative landscape, such as Ezekiel 37:14 on the aqueduct. This verse is part of the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, in which God sets Ezekiel down in a plain full of bones, bones which represent the people of Israel. God asks Ezekiel: "can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3), after which God has Ezekiel prophesize the redemption of the people of Israel.

Similarly, visitors walking over 'The Valley of the Righteous Among the Nations', an alleyway with freshly planted trees dedicated to Gentiles that rescued Jews during World War II, encounter a verse from Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower. The righteous run to it and are safe." Further along down the path, a list of museum donators is accompanied by a verse from 1 Chronicles 29:17: "I, with upright heart, freely offered all these things".

Then, visitors encounter verses that admonish visitors to remember. On their way towards the exit at the end of their visit, for example, visitors read a passage from 1 Joel 2-3 on the wall: "Has the like of this happened in your days or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, and let your children tell theirs, and their children the next generation!"

Thus, along with verses that prophesize about the Jews' return to the land of Israel, in the complex we similarly encounter verses that either admonish visitors to remember, or admonish them to take up moral responsibility and be righteous. It seems then that Yad Vashem cloaks itself in Biblical garb, and that remembrance is subsumed into a sacred or religious discourse.

As much as it seemed apparent to me, I found 'religion' to be anything but a self-evident term in Yad Vashem. While talking with former Chairman Avner Shalev, he confides to me that the placement of the Bible verses 'was not given much thought'. Rather, he says, it went 'naturally' and Yad Vashem's curators did not have to place them 'artificially'. Similarly, Dayan "never gave the passages any serious thought", although he passes numerous of these passages every day on his way to work.

As much as I initially found 'religion' to distinctly be 'out there' in the field, observable and compartmentalizable, my interlocutors continuously blurred the dividing lines between the religious and the non-religious. Shalev says: "Yad Vashem is not a religious place. Religion is deep in our identity however". Dayan similarly obfuscates boundaries in saying that Zionism is his religion although he is an atheist. This re-essentializating position towards religion as culture, as being embedded within the national self-understanding of Israel, stands in sharp contrast to my fascination with ‘religion’ as something set apart at Yad Vashem. Whereas I was drawn to ‘religion’ in Yad Vashem as something on its own right, and out-of-place, my interlocutors, tour guides, chairman, curators, downplayed these religious motifs *as* religious motifs, stressing the arbitrariness in their coming into being. This contrast propels us to examine our conceptual toolbox.

While the present paper does not deal with (claims to) secularity extensively, the underlying dynamics of memory, the religious, and the sacred mutually informing each other and giving rise to new forms of sacrality (Meyer and de Witte 2013) do very much inform my research. Engaging with the sacred hence entails engaging with the secular. As Talal Asad points out, the secular is not opposed to the sacred. Rather, the secular “is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred)” (Asad 2003, 25). ‘The secular’ thus does not function so much as a separation between the state and religion in this paper. Rather, it is a term that guides a reflexive stance towards my own understanding of religious categories as distinct from non-religious categories of inquiry, an ordering principle that “brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life” (25). As Saba Mahmood argues, to make a distinction between the religious and the secular is in itself an operation of secularist ideology (Mahmood 2009, 87). In reiterating Mahmood, I do not mean to repeat a critique of secularity. Instead, her call points us to the fact that critical investigations of secularity are indeed critical investigations of the ideological biases and tendencies that have traditionally dominated religious studies.

Ascribing cultural value or essence to religious motifs or texts, it has been argued, fits within a large development where societies, and museums as microsocieties, continuously renegotiate nationhood, national identity, and belonging, partly as a consequence of deepening diversity (Joppke 1999). Museums, as sites where national imageries respond to national changes, play a pivotal role in narrating national history and, as Marian Burchardt points out, in canonizing religion as national memory (2020, 177). Burchardt develops the term ‘heritage religion’ to conceptualize these claims to religion as (national) culture, highlighting the representational or effective aspect of heritage religion, as well as it being politically institutionalized within power relationships as part of a politics of citizenship and belonging.

Apart from Yad Vashem’s objective of Holocaust commemoration, tied to this objective is Yad Vashem’s aim to attract visitors. This dual objective of presenting the horrors of the Holocaust in an attractive or accessible tourist environment has been thought of as ‘dissonant heritage’ (Turnbridge and Ashworth 1996). To ‘soften’ this dissonance, argues geographer Shaul Krakover, museums like Yad Vashem might employ ‘dissonance-softening policies’, chief among which is that of advancing narratives of social cohesion and heroism (Krakover 2002, 360).

For, as Burchardt notes, “despite its particularistic origins, heritage religion stands above and transcends the divergent religious affiliations of national populations and becomes a unifying national symbol” (2020, 195). What happens to Bible passages that become a unifying national symbol? Robert Bellah, who popularized the term ‘civil religion’, argues that the sacred extends far beyond traditional religions, and translates into narrative, symbols, and even structures of the state (Bellah 1967, 1). The “centrality of the Holocaust as the primary political myth of Israeli society” (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983, 7), as Israel’s ‘civil religion’, has long been studied, and it has been shown that Holocaust museums work to reinforce these political myths (Hansen-Glucklich 2014). The Holocaust and sacrality, then, interact, and are integrated into social and political structures. Religion’s capability to thus permeate national discourse, for example, undermines any stable idea of the ‘religious’, Instead, writes sociologist Jean Séguy, approaching religion as a ‘dissemination of the sacred’ allows one to find modern religion everywhere rituals, beliefs, and effervescence are found (Séguy 1988, 179). If ‘religion as religion’ is not to be found in Yad Vashem, then the ensuing question is how these religious symbolisms and motifs function within Yad Vashem’s social reality of Holocaust remembrance; or how the religious is, or functions as, a social reality in Yad Vashem’s network of relations. And what are the bearings on these ‘religious’ texts, in turn?

Catastrophe—‘The Jewish perspective’ of Yad Vashem

As we cross through the visitors’ center and head towards the HHM, we cross the ‘Bridge to a Vanished World’ (figure 2). The bridge slopes down, and as we walk, I hear a tour guide say that “this bridge forms a separation between two worlds, one that we can imagine and one we cannot imagine”. Another tour guide paraphrases part of the Sanhedrin saying: “Just remembering one story is enough, because he who saves a life is as if he saves an entire world”. The museum is a gigantic prismatic structure that is built into the mountain, almost viscerally cutting through it like a scar. Having entered, within seconds Jerusalem’s radiant sky gives way for the encompassing darkness of the museum.

In his seminal work on Holocaust memorialization, Young notes that “in every nation’s memorials and museums, a different Holocaust is remembered, often to conflicting political and religious ends” (1993, ix). This ‘nativized’ character to Holocaust remembrance around the globe propels us to look at how Yad Vashem stands in a dynamic relation to its Israeli surroundings.

Fig. 2: View of the southern end of the Holocaust History Museum © Author

How does Yad Vashem, then, fit into an Israeli or, more specifically, Jerusalemite, typography or aesthetic? It has been noted that Israeli museums conduct negotiations over the shaping of collective imageries, having bearings on group boundaries, collective identities, and the struggle for social legitimacy (Katriel 1997). Installed over a period of sixty years and with most of them still in place (albeit in different locations), Yad Vashem comprises over fifteen memorial sites. This layered typography transforms the landscape into a palimpsest of Holocaust remembrance, which reflects developments in the place and nature of Holocaust remembrance within Israeli society.

The HHM that lies behind the bridge was built in 2005 by Moshe Safdie. In following Safdie’s architectural fingerprints on Yad Vashem’s landscape, we get an idea of Yad Vashem’s commemorative career. When Safdie came to Yad Vashem in the early 1970s, he entered amidst a vast change that was taking place in Holocaust remembrance in Yad Vashem, one that reflected a broader, nationwide, change from a Socialist-Zionist emphasis on heroism and resistance in remembrance culture of the 1950s towards an emphasis on victimhood and suffering in remembrance. This development is usually pivoted around the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 in Jerusalem (Arendt 1963; Porat 1998). This change in the understanding of Holocaust trauma in Israel has had visual and spatial repercussions in memory-making.

Yad Vashem's landscape, then, can be seen as a topography of this changing memory, with the memorial sites developing 'careers' that reflect changing understandings of death and sacrifice (Feldman 2007, 1147). Historian Paolo Coen echoes the idea of layered topography in saying: "From that point on [1961] Yad Vashem continued to be articulated as a series of architectural interventions: the entire complex in effect follows the logic of a never-ending tale" (2019, 52). Whereas the older installments at Yad Vashem depict Jewish heroism and resistance, the new architecture fits into a postmodern tradition which emphasizes abstraction and loss.

Having entered the HHM, visitors encounter a prism-like museum structure, a narrow tunnel of 180 meters. The museums consist of eleven spaces, or chapters, reflecting thematic and historic turning points in the Holocaust. The floor is cut up with cracks, symbolizing turning points in the Holocaust (figure 3). Disciplined into the museum space, visitors have to go through all eleven halls, without any possibility of leaving.

If the memorial landscape of Yad Vashem as a whole reflects changes in Holocaust memory and remembrance culture, so too is this true for the insides of the HHM. Emerging in the early 2000s from the need to reach out to generations without personal recollections of the Holocaust or WWII, the major change in the museum's course since its reopening in 2005 has been to adopt the viewpoint of the Jewish victims (Shalev 2010, 11). Interweaving historical and personal "strata of Holocaust representation" (13), Yad Vashem is committed to presenting what it calls 'the Jewish perspective' of the Holocaust.

Just like in the change of status of Holocaust victims, so too has the focus on specific segments within the Jewish community changed. While the paradigmatic focus of Holocaust remembrance has traditionally been on Eastern Europe, formerly marginalized voices now come to the fore. Revisionists, Romanian Jews, Haredim, and also the Jews of North Africa, for example, increasingly occupy a place in the HHM. These changes can be said to reflect negotiations of the Israeli collectivity as a whole, and the spatial repercussions of this change present Yad Vashem with a curatorial dilemma of how to fit all this memory into the HHM, which curator Dorit Harel describes as a "battle over space" (Harel 2010, 42).

In between the exhibition galleries, one central linear corridor mediates the historical timeline through which visitors move, a timeline in which historical moments are tied together in a tight spatial sequence. Described by curator Harel as an "ideological timeline of longitude," as "the axis of historical memory" (25), the 180 meters that lead towards the light at the end of the tunnel prophesize a redemptive end. The HHM is what Safdie has called ‘evocative architecture’, as it induces in its visitors an empathetic and visceral identification with Holocaust victims, and encourages a redemptive reading of the museum narrative.

Although Yad Vashem claims to interweave historical and emotive narrativity, Amos Goldberg argues that the stress on emotional narrativity in fact works to the detriment of accurate historical representation of the Holocaust. The museum narrative glosses over crucial historical context, says Goldberg, presenting the historical background to WWII exclusively in terms of antisemitism. Modernity, racism, colonialism and imperialism, former genocides, totalitarianism and fascism, and nationalism, for example, are all omitted. From the outset, Yad Vashem’s “interpretation is very partial and therefore distortive” (Goldberg 2012, 193). Spatialized within the HHM’s architectural layout, the museum presents the history of the Holocaust as a teleological story that ultimately leads towards the establishment of the State of Israel.

Goldberg concludes that ‘the Jewish perspective’ of Yad Vashem is essentially a Zionized ‘Jewish perspective’ that largely excludes perspectives, voices, and even languages that do not sit comfortably with a Zionist view on Jewish identity. Less flattering aspects of Jewish history during the Holocaust, such as corruption, collaboration, or lack of solidarity within the Jewish community, are not presented in the HHM (Goldberg 2012). This points us to the simultaneous dynamics of memory and forgetting in order for (national) memory to form.

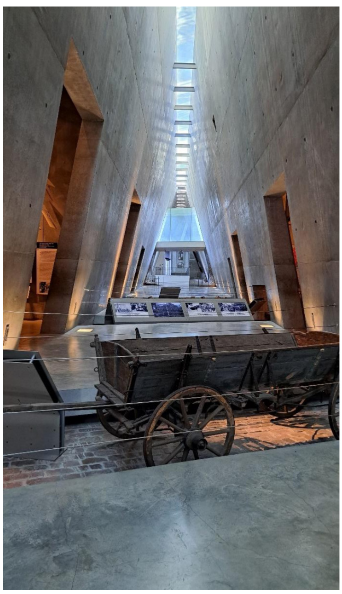

Fig. 3: The central corridor in the Holocaust History Museum © Author

As visitors progress through the claustrophobic tunnel, the exhibition intensifies, and the cries of Holocaust survivors in their video testimonies fill the halls. Visitors around me are crying as well, and the voices of a Jewish children's choir in the 1930s singing the "Hatikvah", which would become Israel's national anthem, haunt us through the tunnel like ghosts, pushing the visitors forwards.

The 'battle over space' leaves a mark on Yad Vashem's visitors, albeit an anticipated one: "The museological experience and ability of visitors to grasp and internalize the exhibits fell victim to the curating team's indefatigable desire to display as many artifacts as possible. That [...] was a mistake, reflected in the proverb 'grasp all, lose all'" (Harel 2010, 40).

In the midst of this overwhelming abundance of artifacts, described reproachingly by Harel as a "theme-park experience" (41), visitors see an abundance of artifacts and accompanying texts or videos that stress the role of bystanders in the Holocaust. From the moment that the exhibition, for many, becomes too much to bear, all that visitors are left with is to gaze at the audiovisual artifacts. In bearing collective witness, visitors are turned into voyeurs, or bystanders. In tandem with its stress on collective responsibility, Yad Vashem displays numerous texts in the HHM that tie a bystander-complicity discourse to responsibility:

> "A country is not just what it does, it is also what it tolerates."
>
> *Kurt Tucholsky*

> "I know that when I stand before God on Judgment Day, I shall not be asked the question posed to Cain – where were you when your brother's blood was crying out to God?"
>
> *Imre Bathary, Righteous Among the Nations, Hungary*

> "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me."
>
> *Martin Niemöller, "First they came" (1946)*

In walking the tight rope between collaboration and resistance, visitors to Yad Vashem are faced with a moral choice. As we saw above, Yad Vashem tries to induce a sense of responsibility among its visitors, mentioning this explicitly in its literature (Shalev 2010).

At last, visitors make it out. To the sound of Ben Gurion declaring the independence of the State of Israel in 1948, we step from darkness into the light.

Redemption—Memory and Forgetting

We enter the beautiful viewers' balcony overlooking the majestic hills of West Jerusalem, covered with cypresses, cedars, and pine trees. As freedom emerges, the claustrophobic sides of the triangular structure literally curl outward (figure 5). Nothing but silence and contemplation fill the sky. Birds fly overhead, and in the distance construction cranes are visible. From darkness, we step into the light. Presented as a sanctuary from exile and diaspora, a restored future in an ancient land, Yad Vashem presents Israel as a promise fulfilled. Death is answered with life, embedding the memory of the dead in a near mythic future.

Framed within a narrative of exile and homecoming, Safdie writes about the viewers' balcony as a "life affirming experience" (Safdie 2006, 99). Worth noting here are the unrealized design plans for the museum's balcony. Originally, Avner Shalev tells me in a café in Tel Aviv, Safdie had designed the outwardly curving edges as spread-out hands. The idea was abandoned for several reasons, but the rationale remains intact: through the opening of the museum structure, Jerusalem is staged, and indeed almost viscerally presented as the final exhibition of the HHM. The HHM is framed, literally, in the middle of a narrative of exile and homecoming, underwriting a Zionist discourse of catastrophe-and-redemption (Segev 1991, 445).

Fig. 4: View from the viewer's balcony, overlooking the hill Giv'at Beroshim © Author

Admonished to take up responsibility in remembering, this powerful *mise-en-scene* makes a deep emotional impact on most visitors. The balcony comes as the happy ending to the HHM. The viewers' balcony, then, creates an uncritical moment in the overwhelmed and impeded historical tour of the Holocaust, a moment of 'memory loss', in which the spatial order exerts considerable force over the visitors' understanding of their temporality with regards to the 'national present' (Bhabha 1990, 295).

Pointing to a similar dynamic, Lefebvre captures it thus: "the whole of social space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphoses the body that is [*sic*] may forget it altogether" ([1974] 1991, 405). At once, the movement of the visitors through Yad Vashem is crucial for its spatial story of catastrophe and redemption to unfold, but simultaneously space disciplines the body to such an extent that it may 'forget itself'. Foucault voices a variation on this logic in saying that space has a power that "draws us out of ourselves" (Foucault 1986, 23). The interaction between the HHM and the balcony, from supposedly 'produced space' towards 'natural space,' from darkness towards light, "naturalize[s] the rhetoric of national affiliation" (Bhabha 1990, 295). Israel comes as the natural solution the Holocaust. This interplay between museum narrative and landscape effectively connects the memory of the Holocaust to the memory of the Nakba (Ghanim 2017, 105).

To leave Yad Vashem, after the balcony visitors cross the upward sloping 'Bridge of Life.' They then circle back towards the visitors center, back onto the *piazza*, where Ezekiel awaits them. No doubt Ezekiel's prophecy comes as a comfort. Upon entering, in Ezekiel we encountered a dialectical relationship between death and redemption. Indeed, the prophesizing nature of Ezekiel 37:14 and the Valley of the Dry Bones lends itself for what I understand as a (dis)placement of the passage within a spatial story of catastrophe and redemption that emerges from the interplay between narrative and landscape 'down the road.'

The Valley of the Dry Bones is a story of redemption yet to come. With the historical 'redemption' of the Jewish people only coming after 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, Ezekiel 37:14 hence becomes susceptible for a reading that cuts right through time. In Yad Vashem's spatial storytelling, the 'plain full of bones' in Ezekiel 37 becomes an ahistorical plain, that stretches from the Babylonian landscapes to the ruins of Auschwitz.
The (dis)placement of the Bible passage onto the political landscape of Yad Vashem recharges the verse with the Jewish horror lived in the near past. The spatial story thus (dis)places Ezekiel 37:14 into an Israeli national discourse, but this national discourse is likewise (dis)placed in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

This reciprocal process of narration and (dis)placement in Yad Vashem's spatial storytelling blurs any sharp distinction between the 'religious' text and the 'national' narrative in Yad Vashem.

Fig. 5: An 'exultant blast of a horn.' The end of the Holocaust History Museum from the side © Author

Stories of a New Bible—Heritage as Religion

> And praised. Auschwitz. Be. Majdanek. The Lord. Treblinka. And praised. Buchenwald. Be. Mauthausen. The Lord. Belzec. And praised. Sobibor. Be. Chelmo. The Lord. Ponary. And praised. Theresienstadt. Be. Warsaw. The Lord. Vilna. And praised. Skarzysko. Be. Bergen-Belsen. The Lord. Janow. And praised. Dora. Be. Neuengamme. The Lord. Pustkow. And praised... Amen

André Schwartz-Bart, The Last of the Just (1959)
Displayed in the Holocaust History Museum, Yad Vashem

"But are they themselves not stories of a new Bible?" asks Italian novelist and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, describing the horrendous stories of fellow concentration camp inmates (Levi 1987 [1958], 71—72). Levi's question fundamentally bears on the understanding of the biblical and religion itself, and compels us to consider the fluidity or transferability of these concepts. Instead of departing from an idea of the out-of-placeness of the Bible passages in Yad

Vashem, there is an apparent interface between notions of the religious and sacred, and Holocaust memory. This propels us to soften the disciplinary lines that might run between these notions.

There is a reciprocal (dis)placement of religious text, Holocaust memory, and Israeli political reality at play on Yad Vashem's grounds. The (dis)placement of passages onto the landscape of Yad Vashem charges the landscape with biblical overtones. At the same time, the historical and political reality of Yad Vashem's landscape, a reality of the Holocaust and of the state of Israel, reflects back onto the passages that figure in Yad Vashem. The religious text and the museum narrative collide to produce a specific interface of the biblical and Holocaust memory.

We have seen here how Yad Vashem alters and engages freely with the canonical form of Biblical text. Coming to the name 'Yad Vashem', from the book Isaiah 56: 5, in Yad Vashem's self-framing, the memorial exclusively uses the first part of the verse: "And I will give them a memorial and a name". Segev has argued that the omission of the second part of the verse ("better than sons and daughters") is important because this second part strikes an uncomfortable note, suggesting that remembrance is more important than life (Segev 1991, 424). 'Yad Vashem', then, casts victims of the Holocaust as eunuchs and Yad Vashem as a new temple.

It is not the present task, however, to think about what exactly these passages mean in the memorial context. To ask what the passages mean would be to gloss over their function in Yad Vashem's spatialization of Holocaust memory. Interrelatedly and more importantly, to talk about a '(dis)placement' of text carries an ideological assumption within it that these texts are, to begin with, taken out of their contexts and are placed somewhere else. To talk about '(dis)placement', then, conveys the biases which I brought to the table setting out on my fieldwork period in Israel.

Bible reception studies have traditionally been dominated by the idea of 'original context', which signals a literal out-of-placeness in text that is found elsewhere. The meaning of texts is to be found against the background of developments in the ancient world, not in its modern contexts.

Brennan Breed talks about 'nomadic quality' of Bible verses (Breed 2014, 203). His model focuses on text as an entity that alters upon encounter with new situations. Tollerton describes the Bible not merely as a "compendium of texts, but also an idea", which, in some instances, "may come to haunt and inhabit other content" (Tollerton 2017, 583). As Tollerton argues, the quantity or quality of verses or biblical texts is not important, because a biblical idea has already done its work (585). Biblical citation has been mobilized to install sacrality on the museum grounds—from holy text to physical landmark.

Coming back to Levi's cited-above question, this thus works directly against the idea of an original context. Rather than merely looking at what lies within a text, it looks at the "world in front of a text" (Ricœur 1976, 84), at the context in which it has been received, and at how notions of the sacred 'persist' (Smith 1982). To ask whether something can become biblical attests to the fundamental conviction that the Bible, or the biblical, can alter its form upon entering new domains. Biblical, or religious, quality is thus perceived, and lived, as something transferable. It points to the fact that religious texts live, and that 'biblical quality' is thus perceived as something (dis)placeable, and, as we have seen, for many of Yad Vashem's officials and visitors, not even religious at all. This allows us to see the hinterland where the biblical or religious merges with other modes of thought. Breed introduces the notion of 'nomadology' to study how religious text travels. Along our way, we have seen how biblical quality is transferred onto Yad Vashem's grounds, and into its spatial storytelling. The history of the Holocaust is, in Yad Vashem, invested with metahistorical meaning reconfigured towards a redemptive horizon with transformative potential.

This strand of sacralization running through Holocaust remembrance at Yad Vashem, then, also works back onto Holocaust remembrance itself. In creating its redemptive horizon of Holocaust remembrance, the memorial plays an active role in what memory will become, in what history will come to mean. "Once 'secular' history is [now] cloaked in the 'timeless' garb of the sacred," writes Avril Alba (2015, 193). When notions of the sacred and the religious spill into, and merge with, Holocaust memory, what happens with the sacred itself? Is it possible to have too much memory at once, battling over space, paradoxically leading to a forgetting? An apparent danger in Yad Vashem's storytelling, from the *piazza* through to the HHM, onto the balcony and back, could be what curator Harel described earlier as a 'theme-park experience,' giving the visitor the illusion of a facile grasp on complicated events and histories, eliding the past in favor of easily accessible symbols and imagery.

Yad Vashem paralyzes most of its visitors through the heavy use of videos and images of the Holocaust. The memorial makes clear in its writing that it accommodates an emotive engagement with the memory of the Holocaust. In 'overexposing' its visitors to these images, Yad Vashem has image-focused remembrance rather than event-focused remembrance, providing emotional imagery rather than historical description. Hansen-Glucklich talks about 'iconic' quality of these images, meaning that these images move beyond their referential status, but come to stand for the event as a whole (Hansen-Glucklich 2014, 13), "cutting history off at the pass" (Anderson [1983] 2006, 157). As we have seen above in Burchardt's idea of 'heritage religion' and its unifying qualities, so too has imagery been conceptualized as having the potency to encourage social cohesion and create collective affective identities that transcend group boundaries.

The danger in this process is that oft-repeated production leads to the loss of the referential efficacy of these images and texts. When images or texts come to be the event's primary markers, the representations themselves become the object of remembrance, instead of vehicles for the remembrance of the represented events. Overexposure numbs the viewer and weakens the transformative power of images. In this sense, the bystander narrative that Yad Vashem induces in its visitors might very well work to do the exact opposite of what Yad Vashem intends to do. In this process of overexposure to easily accessible Holocaust symbols and imagery, these images might actually lose their potential sanctity.

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The Invisible Hand of Big Data

Tech Giants and Biopower

Capucine Guimbal

Introduction

Our lives are now in a rhythm with the technological objects we interact with daily. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, we engage with connected devices and systems that collect, process, and analyze our data. Whether it is our smartphones tracking our movements, fitness apps recording our steps, or social media platforms monitoring our attention and social interactions, it is becoming harder and harder to separate ourselves from data collection and its impact. This is occurring in an era where Big Tech continues to grow, collecting enormous volumes of data daily. In March 2024, for instance, search platform Google.com alone generated approximately 85.5 billion visits (Bianchi 2024). The data they collect is not simply passive records of our actions, it becomes a powerful tool for shaping and controlling behaviors, influencing decisions, and governing populations. The growing influence of these data collection systems prompts us to question their functioning and their implications. In this context, this essay explores the topic by aiming to answer the question: To what extent does big data function as a mechanism for exercising biopower by tech giants in contemporary society?

This essay begins by establishing the conceptual foundations of biopower to explore the mechanism of power exerted over individuals and populations. Using biopower as a framework, it analyzes the growing power granted by technological data collection. The essay then delves into the mechanisms behind big data, focusing on unpredictable correlations and predictive analytics, which insidiously and often opaquely control behavior. By examining the global scale of these technologies, this essay highlights the privatization of power by tech giants and its ethical and political ramifications. Drawing on the ideas of surveillance society and pastoral power, this essay illustrates how these forms of power function in today's data-driven world. Ultimately, it argues that the exploitation of big data represents a modern extension of biopower in the hands of private groups that requires extensive regulation.

1. Big Data and the Evolution of Biopower

1.1. Conceptual Foundations of Biopower

Michel Foucault identifies a fundamental shift in the way power is exercised, beginning in the eighteenth century, which he calls biopower. He explains how, over the last two centuries, a quantum leap has been made in the way states exercise their right to power. Previously, power was embedded in the sovereign's ability “to let live and make die” (Foucault 2013b, 42). In modern times, it shifted toward the management and control of life itself. It focuses on the authority to sustain and shape life—on influencing how people live and the very "how" of life. Foucault writes that both forms of power—disciplinary (anatomo-politics) and regulatory (biopower)—are not mutually exclusive, but operate on different levels (44). Disciplinary power works on individual bodies and aims to optimize their capacities to render them docile and useful. On the other hand, biopower addresses the multiplicity of men which, when united, form a global mass (64). Biopower enhances life and manages accidents, uncertainties, and deficiencies, thereby exercising governance over the entire social body (68).

Foucault explains that biopower is not centered on the body, per se, but on life itself. He describes it as a technology of power which “brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects” (69). Thus, biopower deals with probabilistic and aleatory phenomena within populations, such as birth, disease, and productivity. Through long-term observation and analysis of these phenomena, that which is unpredictable and random can be transformed into regular patterns and constants (Foucault 2013a, 69). Biopower focuses on managing random events and making them probabilistic in form, aiming for stability through regulation rather than direct control. Foucault emphasizes that individually these phenomena hold little pertinence, but at a collective level we can extract meaningful constants (66). These patterns form the basis for comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions able to act on the entire social body’s actions (Foucault 1978, 145—46). Biopower transforms the unpredictable into something actionable, enabling governance population-wide.

For biopower to gain control over its subjects, it does not reside solely in the confines of institutional structures; rather, it is dispersed throughout society. Biopower is integrated into social practices and diverse interactions made possible by culture, consumer behavior, and the exchange of information (Dolezal 2016, 221). This power does not operate only through coercion and violence, but is used for a more subtle and pervasive control over everyday life (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). It gives “rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations" (Foucault 1978, 145—146), creating a network of micro-power deeply embedded in everyone's life.

1.2. The Role of Technology in Biopower

With recent and emerging technological developments, new automated forms of data collection and expanded data storage capacities have revolutionized how information is processed. Alongside these developments, data analytics have significantly increased their ability to collect, sort, and correlate vast and expanding datasets, giving rise to what is known as big data. Big data is characterized by its volume (the sheer amount of data generated), velocity (the speed at which data is processed), and variety (the diversity of data type, including videos, texts, and images) (Andrejevic 2014). Zuboff describes big data as being "constituted by capturing small data from individuals' computer-mediated actions and utterances in their pursuit of effective life" (Zuboff 2015, 79). While individual data may seem trivial, fragmented, or ephemeral bits, they are systematically collected and transformed into actionable information when placed in a larger system. As storage and processing capacities grow, even the smallest pieces of information are rendered valuable, further expanding the reach of big data (Andrejevic 2014).

Big data's potential is amplified by machine learning, a form of artificial intelligence designed to draw inferences and identify patterns within these massive datasets (Marks 2021). The integration of such technologies into daily life has rendered data indispensable to societal governance, enabling new mechanisms and techniques for managing populations. Foucault's concept of biopower captures this dynamic, as it describes "comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions aimed at the entire social body or at groups taken as a whole" (Foucault 1978, 146). Big data follows a similar logic of action to traditional biopower. It transforms individual incomprehensible phenomena/data to create exploitable constants often without the direct involvement or understanding of those whose data are being used. This form of knowledge production facilitates extensive monitoring and control over bodily and social data (Dolezal 2016), providing a foundation for what can be described as a new form of digital biopower.

Modern technologies have intensified and operationalized these processes, enabling digital biopower on both a global and individual scale. Big data can be used to target populations both individually and collectively, using sophisticated techniques to drive individual behavior while simultaneously shaping collective trends. By integrating diverse individuals' data into massive networks, it is possible to assess and predict global patterns while subtly influencing personal decisions. This ability to transform a heterogeneous population into an anonymous and atomized collective is a foundation for control (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024, 4). Such mechanisms of power demonstrate how big data permits the exercise of biopower on a new scale. This digital biopower, though often unseen, is insidiously reshaping the structures of governance and control in the contemporary world. A central aspect of this transformation is the mechanisms of big data mining, which drive this power by replacing traditional explanatory methods. Using statistical analysis and machine learning, big data mining is used to find patterns and correlations within vast datasets.

1.3. Big Data Mining: Correlation, Prediction, and Control

The specificity of big data mining is that, contrary to traditional data analysis which often seeks to explain phenomena, it prioritizes correlation and prediction over comprehension and explanation. This shift is encapsulated in the rise of data mining, defined as "the project of discerning unexpected, unanticipated correlations" (Andrejevic 2014, 1676). While big data already existed, as the world is arguably made of complex and unprocessable data, now we are starting to make sense of and exploit data that no individual or group could comprehend. Indeed, big data mining creates actionable patterns of information that go far beyond the human mind or group's ability to detect or explain (1675—6). The patterns extracted through data mining can provide actionable information. This has significant implications as it can be used as a tool for decision-making in areas as diverse as healthcare, urban planning, policing, and consumer behavior.

Furthermore, the rise of big data introduces significant asymmetries in power and access. Being able to extract meaningful information from big data requires sophisticated and costly technological infrastructures, algorithms, and expertise. This creates a "big data divide" between those who can harness the predictive capabilities of data mining and those whose lives are shaped by these predictions (Andrejevic 2014). One could think that the solution to this divide could be granting users wider access and control over their data. However, this would only partially reduce the gap. Data grants powerful information when it is situated in a global network made of everyone's data. Access to broader social patterns gives the possibility of pattern recognition or predictive capabilities (2014). Simply having control over one’s own data would not bridge the imbalance of power.

The nature of big data mining amplifies this dynamic, as it facilitates new forms of knowledge production that enable large-scale monitoring and control of both bodily and social data. Beyond targeted advertising, data mining extends its influence to decision-making in critical areas such as healthcare, policing, urban planning, creditworthiness, job screening, and educational admissions (Andrejevic 2014, 1675). Leveraging vast datasets, data mining shifts the focus of control from observing who people are or what they have done to predicting as precisely as possible their potential future behaviors. In some cases, these predictions do more than anticipate behaviors—they actively shape or influence them.

1.4. The Societal Impact of Big Data Mechanisms

The systemic, structural, and opaque nature of big data mining permits a new form of social sorting. The scope of this power evolves as new domains of life progressively enter the digital era (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). As Andrejevic argues, "Those with access to data, expertise, and processing power are positioned to engage in increasingly powerful, sophisticated, and opaque forms of sorting that can be 'powerful means of creating and reinforcing long-term [or newly generated] social differences'" (Andrejevic 2014, 1676—7). By categorizing individuals based on patterns in their data, these systems establish new hierarchies and reinforce existing inequalities, often without the knowledge or consent of the users.

Moreover, a specific characteristic of this new form of biopower is its ability to adapt to individuals and communities. Unlike the rigid one-size-fits-all approach of physical surveillance, digital surveillance is dynamic, allowing tailored interventions for individuals and communities in real time. This adaptability is visible in targeted advertising, where developers continuously refine environments through experiments on user behaviors. They can experiment on different sections of their users to test the effectiveness of their strategies. They employ behavioral tactics such as dark patterns to maintain engagement or subtle nudge actions, ultimately impacting users' behaviors (Marks 2021). This individual adaptation is based on a detailed, constantly evolving digital profile—what some scholars term a "data double", "shadow profile", or "digital phenotype". This data double is a representation of an individual which permits the comparison of their actions to the data of the population to predict future actions (544—45). The body is thus transformed into pure data, and further, the surfaces of contact become prevalent the further this occurs. With increasing contact, we mean having more and more spheres of our lives where we produce collectible data. Indeed, “data doubles” become more and more accurate as the quantities of data we produce and collect increase. While 'data doubles' are not accurate representations of us, they are powerful in developing strategies of governance and control (D. Haggerty and V. Ericson 2000).

We can use the big data driven strategies financial institutions have put in place as an example. In recent years, they have turned their attention to new sources of data to establish their clients' credit scores. These include payment histories for phone bills, utilities, and streaming services, as well as rent and bank account transactions. This could be perceived as positive, as the user could potentially gain control by knowing what to monitor to obtain credit more effectively. Yet, as mass data mining continues, increasingly varied and restrictive correlations are being discovered. For instance, an article discovered that individuals' habits in grocery shopping (ex: shopping the same day of the week and spending similar amounts on each trip) are useful in predicting credit card payment behaviors (Youn Lee, Yang, and Anderson 2024). This example shows how consumers needing credit are unlikely to anticipate what their behaviors reveal—especially when combined with other databases—despite potential determining consequences for their lives. This is the promise of big data mining: to enable more and more unpredictable and obscure patterns. Over time we could anticipate that the advance of increasingly powerful, sophisticated, and opaque forms of surveillance technologies would encourage further social divisions (Andrejevic 2014, 1676—7).

Data mining shifts the focus of control from observing who people are or what they have done to predicting as precisely as possible their potential future behaviors.

In this context, we can ask why users fail to take drastic action to resist such pervasive surveillance and sorting. First, they do not have visibility on what information they produce and the ability to know what it can reveal. With the exception of people who refuse to participate in the direct production and sharing of their data, on average people are confronted with the inevitability of data collection. Professional life, necessary resources, and social exclusions are only a few of many of the barriers to limiting the reach of big data. Furthermore, for people to consider agreeing to exchange their data for the tools provided, they need access to the terms of the exchange. They need to know the risks, which is difficult because many negative consequences are not direct or perceptible (Andrejevic 2014, 1682). Finally, and most importantly according to Andrejevic, the vagueness and feeling of powerlessness users face when they question the sorting of their data "may be a defining characteristic of the data collection strategies to which they are subjected" (1685). He argues that alienation is not merely the result of user ignorance or laziness, but a deliberate feature of data collection to distance users from their implications. Thus, even with awareness and caution access to corrective action is limited.

2. The Privatization of Power by Tech Giants

2.1. Big Tech as Architects of Digital Biopower

We discussed the new form of digital biopower using technologies such as big data mining. It is now important to analyze who has access to exercising it. In recent years, private corporations, and more specifically Big Tech, have gained massive influence. They are considered some of the most valued and data-intensive supranational corporations in the world (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). They have increasingly gained roles traditionally assigned to states. This is visible notably in areas of cybersecurity, digital infrastructure development, public health information, and even space exploration (2). These corporations are now the key actors in the exercise of this new digital biopower. One prominent example of this shift is Google's substantial involvement in the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this crisis, Google used its technological resources to address areas of pandemic management. The company has played a central role in tracking data for pandemic modeling and monitoring variants (Google n.d.). This highlights how Google operates on a global scale, addressing public health challenges traditionally managed by state institutions. While these efforts offered innovative solutions, they also revealed the growing dependence on private corporations. This dependence is emblematic of a broader trend wherein Big Tech companies accumulate and wield what some scholars call biosupremacy, as they exercise monopolistic power over human behavior (Marks 2021, 519). Between 2001 and 2020, five leading technology companies (Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft) have acquired over 600 firms. This expansion has enabled them to extend their influence into unrelated or adjacent industries, creating a level of power comparable to that of many governments.

Their dominance is rooted in vast amounts of data collected from devices that permeate every facet of modern life—homes, workplaces, schools, and public spaces (Marks 2021). They form a global surveillance network capable of categorizing people based on health, sexuality, religion, and other personal attributes. Such social sorting extends beyond observation; it is designed to exert control and manipulation. By leveraging behavioral intelligence, companies shape social norms and exert biopower through tools like personalized news feeds, targeted advertising, and coercive design patterns. These mechanisms give Big Tech the ability to measure and modify the behavior of populations to shape societal norms in an immersive built environment (2021). This ability to shape the behavior of populations exemplifies Foucault's concept of biopower in the Digital Age. Ultimately, Big Tech biopower as they hold sway in many fields, provides them with market power and political power (556). This raises urgent questions about how biopower, once a tool of states, is now exercised by entities that report primarily to shareholders rather than citizens.

2.2. Pastoral Power in the Digital Age

The comparison between the state and Big Tech extends beyond measures such as revenue or user base size. It focuses on the nature and position of their power to influence people's actions. This perspective highlights how Big Tech now has the power to govern populations and render them governable. Aurelie Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Emmanuel Bertin analyze the specific mechanisms of this influence by drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of pastoral power, which they adapt to the context of Big Tech. Originally rooted in Christian traditions of shepherding, pastoral power refers to governance through care, guidance, and constant surveillance (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). Big Tech embodies this pastoral approach by offering tools and services that promise to enhance life—providing convenience, improved health, and augmented capabilities. For instance, Google declares on its website that its mission is "applying Google's innovation, research, and resources to promote progress and expand opportunity for everyone" (Google n.d.). However, this seemingly benevolent promise masks the underlying mechanisms of control and normalization inherent in their operations. To "care" for its users Big Tech gathers an enormous amount of information by having an eye on most aspects of life and placing users in a passive and docile position (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024).

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin observe that Big Tech's model of pastoral power is more implicit than earlier models, often operating invisibly through technology itself. Unlike state mandates, Big Tech's influence is framed as advice or optional recommendations. This subtlety allows them to extend their influence across an ever-expanding range of social activities. The result is the rapid formation of systems that encompass not just material life (e.g., Google Fit) but also social behaviors (e.g., Meta), public discourse (e.g., Reddit) and political debate (e.g., X) (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024, 6).

As individuals increasingly rely on these platforms for daily activities, a new form of dependence emerges. This dependence represents the "disincarnation" of pastoral power in the realm of Big Tech. Authority becomes detached from traditional institutions or individuals and is instead embedded in technological systems and services. Unlike traditional pastoral power, which sought to guide individuals toward moral or spiritual well-being, this modern version operates subtly and ubiquitously through the tools people use every day. Big Tech firms position themselves as indispensable intermediaries in users' lives, offering convenience, efficiency, and a sense of empowerment. However, this perceived freedom comes at a cost. The services provided by these platforms are not neutral; they are designed to monitor, analyze, and shape their behaviors (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). These platforms not only respond to users' needs but actively shape them, directing attention, preferences, and decisions. By presenting themselves as providers of care and solutions, these systems mask the ways they guide populations. Thus, the pastoral power of Big Tech achieves governance not through harsh domination but with subtle steering often unnoticed.

2.3. Surveillance Capitalism: The Extraction and Commodification of Human Experience

The dynamic of Big Tech's new form of biopower takes place in a context defined by Shoshana Zuboff as "surveillance capitalism". Surveillance capitalism refers to a surveillance-based economy where personal data is extracted, monetized, and used to predict and influence behavior to generate revenue and control the market (Zuboff 2015). It is an evolved capitalism that brought into the market a new form of extraction and logic of accumulation in our digital era. The logic of accumulation of surveillance society is based on the quantity of data they access, stock, analyze, and sell. Simple human experiences are transformed into behavioral data, about our habits, bodies, and minds. These data are used as raw materials which increase in value as their volume grows, allowing for more precise and influential predictions (79). Ultimately, those data are transformed from past virtual behavior to current and future actual behavior (85). Behavioral data is collected and monetized under the guise of voluntary participation, creating a marketplace where, as Zuboff (2019, at 3:00–12) notes, "Our futures are being sold and bought in a new kind of behavioral marketplace".

The logic of extraction employed by Big Tech implies a specific form of relation between the users and the companies. Indeed, Zuboff highlights how extraction implies a one-way process devoid of reciprocity (Zuboff 2015, 79). Big Tech services have created a dependency that most people consider indispensable for participating in modern society. The desire for convenience and effectiveness competes with a growing unease about being monitored, analyzed, and manipulated. This dependency is essential as it pushes individuals to accept or even rationalize the pervasive tracking and commodification of their lives or view it as an unavoidable trade-off for participation in the digital age (83). This imbalance is best illustrated by considering the extent of Google's knowledge about its users, compared to users' limited awareness of how their personal data is utilized to shape their online and offline experiences. People fail to grasp how and to what degree their data are being extracted and monetized. As Zuboff states “Populations are the sources from which data extraction proceeds and the ultimate targets of the utilities such data produce” (76). Thus, surveillance capitalism does not form reciprocal value exchange between producers and consumers; it relies on public ignorance and lack of options.

2.4. The Case for Regulation: Addressing Big Tech's Concentrated Biopower

As the mechanisms of surveillance and control grow more sophisticated, the influence of Big Tech extends into nearly every sphere of human activity. This concentration of biopower raises significant ethical concerns, particularly as it lacks the transparency and accountability required of state institutions. Indeed, while governments are bound to constitutional protections such as the Bill of Rights to limit abuse of power, private corporations have much more freedom (Marks 2021). This unchecked power can allow for the accumulation of power defined previously as biosupremacy. Not only does that give Big Tech the ability to exclude competition in the global market, but this monopolistic power over human behavior risks threatening democracy and human autonomy (589). This is a symptom of a “significant shift in the balance of power, with Big Tech, as corporate entities, being not merely market participants but key players in global governance and public policy.” (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024, 2).

Thus, the pastoral power of Big Tech achieves governance not through harsh domination but with subtle steering often unnoticed.

Despite positioning themselves as shepherds who act for the public interest, ultimately private corporations' primary mandate remains profit. Private companies do not have legal obligations to share the knowledge they gained nor to use it for social 'good'. Nothing is holding them from keeping their knowledge of users and using it to coerce them, shift social norms, and expend profit (Marks 2021, 546). Biopower enables private companies to polarize populations, marginalize vulnerable communities, and aggravate inequality due to systemic discrimination and oppression. Without mechanisms like robust antitrust enforcement, this concentrated biopower risks undermining societal structures and perpetuating systems of control (2021). These firms have consolidated their influence in ways that are difficult to contest or regulate. Thus, it seems important that the evolution of digital biopower in the hands of private corporations goes through observations and drastic regulations.

While this article may appear alarmist, it is not without knowledge that the evolution of technologies such as big data mining comes with a wide range of benefits. As we saw earlier, these technologies are extremely helpful in many contexts. For example, we witnessed their use during the COVID-19 pandemic, where these tools enabled more optimal crisis management. However, this article expresses concern about who has access to the technologies and the lack of clarity for users. Despite providing their data on a 'voluntary' basis, the structure of the technology they are facing is not equipped with the possibility and protections from legal framework to resist this biopower. There is a need for more awareness of the consequences of users' digital uses and the impacts it has on their social behaviors, independence, privacy, and human experience as a whole (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Bertin 2024). Through regulations, we can only hope that these technologies will serve the public interests, rather than the interests of a powerful few.

3. Conclusion

The rapid evolution of our society and its technical capacities has pushed a new way to process and create data. We began with a brief overview of Foucault's theory of biopower, which we used as a framework for analyzing the power granted by big data. Big data provides an invisible and insidious control over society and individuals by identifying constants to predict and modify behavior on a global scale. The rise of big data mining has created a "big data divide", with only a few having access to unpredictable high-sensitivity information while the others have their life impacted by it. This raises concerns as data continues to enter more and more spheres of our life, potentially leading to large-scale social sorting. Although we explored potential individual solutions, the strategies in place seem designed to keep users distant from their data. While discovering its potential as a biopower, we pointed to the fact that an aggravating concern is the fact that private Big Tech corporations are the main owners of behavioral intelligence. Big Tech's influence places them as dominant actors in the exercise of biopower traditionally associated with state institutions. Their collection and monetization of data, provide them with a global surveillance network to categorize and manipulate populations worldwide. Their current development into biosupremacy enables control over adjacent industries and human behavior. The economic model of Big Tech relies on extracting and monetizing personal data, transforming human experiences into raw material for profit. We acknowledge that their services come with many benefits, but the lack of transparency and regulations raises the alarm. Unchecked, this biopower has profound consequences, such as the polarizing of populations and the deepening systemic inequalities. As such, the evolution of biopower in the hands of private corporations necessitates robust regulatory frameworks and deepened analysis.

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Why I'm Bothered by the Word 'Neurodiverse'

Charlie Chowdhry

I don't like the word 'neurodiverse'. I especially dislike the way it's being used in everyday and institutional contexts, and I am sceptical of the way it's being applied in (philosophy of) psychiatry. Firstly, this relatively new vocabulary[1] allows ableism to be obscured and risks transforming another useful term into an ableist slur; 'neurodiverse' has taken on a euphemistic quality. Secondly, this language is of limited-to-no use to most neurodivergent people. The word has been appropriated by institutions, and the institutions who now profit from this language do not have the best interests of neurodivergent people at heart. Our options, to my mind, are either to abandon the word to the corporate wolves, or fight to reclaim it. In order to reclaim it, we must first understand what the word was intended for and what it has now come to signify.

It is at this moment that another writer might disclose their current disability or mental health status, since it is common practice to accompany radical writing with an assertion of one's marginality (perhaps as reassurance to the reader that they are reading thoughtful intra-group critique rather than a bigoted tirade). However, I am of the opinion that anybody could and should critique the evolution of language concerning disability and mental illness. The mutability of these categories means that most of us will end up having a disability or mental illness at some point in our lives. This issue concerns you, and this issue should cause you concern.

Before I substantiate my distaste for 'neurodiverse', I will begin with 'neurodivergent' and its evolution. Many people are guilty of a particularly irritating verbal slippage – saying 'neurodiverse' when they mean 'neurodivergent'. The opposite of 'neurodivergent' is 'neurotypical'. A neurotypical brain is a brain that functions normally according to medical standards. This means that anyone with a condition (or conditions) affecting the typical functioning of their brain is neurodivergent – someone with autism, ADHD and/or dyslexia, but also depression, OCD, Alzheimer's, Tourette's, diabetes, schizophrenia, a traumatic brain injury, Long Covid, menopause…

On the other hand, the term 'neurodiverse' refers to the wonderful phenomenon whereby in one place, there may be different people who have different neurotypes (kinds of brain); divergent neurotypes, but also typical neurotypes. 'Neurodiverse' is not a synonym for 'neurodivergent', a term

1 The actual origins of the word 'neurodiverse', I have discovered, are contested! It's a fun rabbit hole to go down if you enjoy reading about academic drama.

which explicitly denotes neurotypes that are problematised. An individual can not *be* neurodiverse unless they themselves somehow contain different neurotypes. I believe that this slippage occurs when someone is so uncomfortable with the word ‘divergent’ that they feel the need to euphemise it, fudging it into ‘diverse’. It says a lot about the state of neurodivergency acceptance that some of us can’t call someone ‘neurodivergent’ without feeling like we’re calling them an ableist slur.

Our options, to my mind, are either to abandon the word 'neurodivergent' to the corporate wolves, or fight to reclaim it.

Is it truly so insulting to acknowledge that someone’s brain diverges from the typical? I’m sure this has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that when someone or something is behaving annoyingly, unexpectedly or inexplicably, words like, ‘dumb’ ‘moron’, ‘stupid’, ‘maniac’, ‘lunatic’, ‘hysterical’, ‘psycho’ (not to mention the classic but hitherto socially unacceptable ‘retarded’) – all words that have their origins in medical terminology for neurodivergent conditions – are often the first adjectives in our verbal arsenal we tend to reach for. In the hands of an ableist society, the language used to describe disability is abused to the point where it becomes unspeakably offensive (Stollznow 2020).

This is the first reason that I don’t like the word ‘neurodiverse’. I see it as playing an integral part in the process whereby ‘neurodivergent’, a word that once had the potential to promote solidarity and awareness throughout and about disabled and mentally ill people, is developing an ableist connotation. In linguistics, this phenomenon is sometimes called the “euphemism treadmill”. The words we use to euphemise uncomfortable or taboo topics eventually absorb the negative connotations of the subject matter, so much so that they become pejoratives, and must be ushered out and replaced with a new politically correct word. A classic example of the euphemism treadmill is the word ‘pee’, which arose from people saying the letter ‘p’ to avoid saying ‘piss’. This is not especially concerning, since the word ‘piss’ is not a valuable resource in Urological hermeneutics. The word ‘neurodivergent’, however, is an important hermeneutical resource—not a euphemism, or something to be euphemised. It does not belong on the treadmill. ‘Neurodiverse’, a word that should exist parallel to ‘neurodivergent’, should not come to replace it.

In spite of the multiplicity of neurodivergent neurotypes, the word ‘neurodivergent’ has evolved in such a way that it is now synonymous with 'adorkable autist with ADHD'.[2] There is a person (a genre of person, perhaps) associated with 'neurodivergent'. We will call him Sheldon. Sheldon's loved ones once suspected that he had a condition called Asperger syndrome, but this disorder is no longer recognised by the American Psychiatric Association. In any case, Sheldon never pursued a diagnosis since he does not consider his symptoms to be disabling. Before the 'neurodiversity awareness movement', Sheldon worked successfully as a theoretical physicist. Following a shift towards 'neurodiversity awareness' at his workplace, Sheldon has received an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis and is permitted to use a fidget spinner at his desk as long as it doesn't distract him or other people.

I mentioned that Asperger syndrome is no longer recognised. It has not only fallen out of favour because Hans Asperger is #cancelled; it's because 'Aspie supremacy' – the idea that there are different varieties of autism, and that the Asperger's variety fundamentally differs from the others due to the apparent mildness of its symptoms – can be harmful. Asperger's created a hierarchy within autism, almost entirely on the basis of a third-person evaluation of how well the autistic person was deemed to manage their own symptoms and work within neurotypical society (i.e. how difficult the autistic person is for other people to deal with, and not how difficult it is to be that autistic person).

'Neurodivergent' has come to *characterise* a cutesy combination of the disability symptoms that are beneficial once accommodated for. With a fidget spinner in hand, our friend Sheldon can even be more classically productive than some neurotypical people. For example, hyperfocus, which is generally associated with ADHD, is the 'flow state' on steroids and is touted as a 'neurodivergent superpower'.[3] The 'mild' or even 'positive' view of Asperger's now appears to be directed towards 'neurodivergence'. Given that 'Asperger syndrome' and 'neurodivergent' have come to represent a near-identical combination of symptoms, I will go out on a limb and say that 'neurodivergent' is neo-Asperger's. Similarly to Asperger's, 'neurodivergent' is becoming the socially acceptable face of disability and mental illness, and we should

2 I am unwilling to compromise on the irreverence of this turn of phrase, but since I would not like other people to assume that they can adopt it uncritically, it is at *this* moment that I will rush to disclose that this phrasing is a lexical self-portrait of the author. User beware.

3 A psychiatrist I spoke to following my ADHD diagnosis was keen to emphasise the strengths of my disability, such as hyperfocus. I had no idea that sitting for hours playing The Sims 4 and forgetting to eat and drink until I developed a migraine was a superpower, but I was delighted to learn that this was the case.

be equally wary of the damage it could cause if we use it uncritically. It risks becoming a *character*, and that character may start wanting to exclude things it doesn't want to be compared with.

As an illustration of what I mean here, you may be wondering whether personality disorders count as neurodivergence. Interestingly, there is far more contestation over the inclusion of Borderline Personality Disorder as a neurodivergent condition than Narcissistic Personality Disorder; the question of whether NPD is a neurodivergent condition tends to be met with a resounding 'no' (e.g. Mosley 2025), whereas the inclusion of BPD in the big happy neurodivergent family seems like it is still under debate and could be on the horizon (e.g. Gillette 2023). My running theory is that the stigma surrounding NPD means that narcissism simply does not fit the *character profile* of a neurodivergent person (being someone who is relatively easy to accommodate, even if they can be a bit annoying and occasionally trigger a laugh track unintentionally). Whether or not the stigma against narcissism is justified is immaterial; neurodivergence is meant to indicate neurotypes that deviate from what is 'typical', not whether or not we morally approve of the person and what they do.

Returning now to the corporate world, the obfuscation of what 'neurodivergent' and 'neurodiverse' *actually mean* is not harmless. Institutions are able to say that they accommodate for 'neurodiversity' (which *technically* could still encompass all the disorders I listed earlier), but in actual fact simply means that they are willing to continue to employ Sheldon. Long before our friend Sheldon's workplace was 'neurodiversity aware', Sheldon had a job there. Jokes about quantum autism or Schrödinger's ASD aside, by virtue of the fact that his workplace employed him, his workplace was *already neurodiverse*, with or without his diagnosis. No doors were opened for him. All that 'neurodiversity awareness' achieved for Sheldon was to give him a stim toy so that he would be able to concentrate better on doing the exact same work he was given beforehand, presumably with the expectation that more accommodations will lead him to be more productive.

Thanks to 'neurodiversity awareness', disabled and mentally ill people can have their working conditions tweaked in order to maximise the effectiveness at which they can turn a profit. Isn't that such a nice advantage for disabled and mentally ill people? Isn't it? It isn't? I agree. Understood thus, 'neurodiversity awareness' doesn't benefit neurodivergent people, it benefits their employers. Inordinate passion and focus, once properly harnessed, means abundant productivity. Savantism, giftedness, *hoogbegaafdheid*—these traits are far from neurotypical, but are nevertheless fetishised and exploited by a working culture that incentivises and romanticises siphoning passion and focus into labour.

Incorporating 'neurodiversity' into the workplace means that certain disabled and mentally ill people are increasingly expected to contribute their labour. The fidget spinner and everything it stands for is the carrot, and the stick is currently in the process of beating the living daylights out of our disability benefits schemes. The continual narrowing of the criteria for who gets to claim benefits (generally along the lines of who is deemed to be employable), which appears to work in tandem with an increased willingness to accommodate disabled and mentally ill people in the workplace, is not an epic diversity win. It is a dystopian nightmare. If somebody no longer qualifies for disability benefits, they have no choice but to work in order to make enough money to live on.

We have achieved an awareness of how to make some neurodivergent people work more efficiently within a system that was designed to maximise productivity. The system itself remains largely unchanged.

In much the same way that bourgeois liberal Girlboss #YesSheCan feminism worked to normalise the equal exploitation of all genders in the workplace, as opposed to working against the exploitation of all genders, the neurodiversity awareness movement is giving our places of employment the know-how to extract as much labour from their employees as possible without burning them out so badly that they are forced to quit their jobs, convalesce and start to campaign for Universal Basic Income. Or something. We have achieved an *awareness* of how to make some neurodivergent people work more efficiently within a system that was designed to maximise productivity. The system itself remains largely unchanged. There is nothing radical about this kind of activism.

'Neurodiverse' used to be a powerful word with the potential to help us develop an awareness of, and ultimately embrace, the multiplicity of neurotypes in our world. However, alongside its cousin 'neurodivergent', it has become what Sara Kok (2024) would call an *epistemic fata morgana*—"a hermeneutical resource originally created by marginalized people to describe their experiences of oppression, which is taken up by dominant groups in a way that harms the marginalized group who created the resource but conceals this harm" (1). The word 'neurodiverse' has been appropriated by institutions who use it in order to enable and justify their use of neurodivergent people's labour.

By this point, my fair reader could justifiably accuse me of being a hypocrite, but I refute this—I may be a pedant, but I am no hypocrite. 'But Charlie,' my fair reader cries, 'surely it is hypocritical to criticise people for being uncomfortable with the word "neurodivergent" while simultaneously professing your discomfort with both "neurodivergent" and "neurodiverse"!'. I would respond to my fair reader as follows: those who are uncomfortable with the broader connotations of the word 'neurodivergent' are uncomfortable with the fact that activism that claims to be for the benefit of 'disabled and mentally ill people' can and should include people who are difficult or impossible to integrate into society as it is currently ordered. I am uncomfortable with the word 'neurodiverse' precisely because it enables people to have a conversation that is supposedly for the benefit of 'disabled and mentally ill people', but in fact fails to include the disabled and mentally ill people who are difficult or impossible to integrate into society. It allows our current ableist system to bend itself slightly to accommodate a certain easily-accommodated subset of disabled and mentally ill people, but not fundamentally change in its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Shifting the goalposts of acceptability to include an easily-included subset of a given community, but nevertheless leaving the goalposts intact, brings renewed harm to the remainder of the community. This is also the case within psychiatry itself, let alone that community's experience in the world at large. Just ask a transgender person.

The 'neurodiversity awareness' movement could be great. It could raise awareness of the fact that our systems were designed to maximise the productivity of one neurotype out of the many that exist among human beings. It could become a jumping-off point for activism that secures a world where diversity of thought and feelings can flourish, and wellbeing is prioritised over productivity. Once I see the word 'neurodiverse' being used in the context of radical paradigm-shifting activism, and stop seeing it used as a way to euphemise 'neurodivergent' or to coerce neurodivergent people into working (and justify shifting the parameters to qualify for benefits), I will stop being bothered by it. And while we're at it, we should consider whether we want 'neurodivergent' to become a personality type, or whether we should defend its purpose as an important epistemic resource that will carve out a place in the world for people who need things to be done differently in order to flourish. I know what I'd prefer.

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MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO'S THE MOST ARAB OF THEM ALL?
IF WE WOULD NOT EXIST, THEY WOULD NOT
VILLAIN
A FORBIDDEN DESIRE - AN EVIL MONSTER
THE 'OTHER' - AWE, FEAR AND FASCINATION
A CATEGORY CRISIS
EMBODIMENT
OF FEAR OF
TERRORISM
FEAR OF A
CLASH OF
CIVILISATION AND
MOST TELLING: IGNORANCE
THE MONSTER AS
A SYMBOL AND AS
A CONFUSION OF
CATEGO-
R
I
E

The (Islamic) Arab as Other

Ilyasse Ouanani

Monster (noun)

a. : one who deviates from normal or acceptable behaviour or character
b. : a threatening force
c. : something monstrous, especially: a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty.

(*Merriam-Webster* 2023, 'Monster')

"Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world."

(Edward Said 2003, 287)

"A granite wind from out the East
Bears the rattle of bone on bone,
And to the harlot of the priest
Comes one no man has ever known."

(Robert E. Howard 1987, 89–91)

"Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam, where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey, it's home."

(Original Lyrics to 'Arabian Nights', Clements and Musker 1992)

Introduction

Growing up, there were few movies I could watch that offered a character I could consider a heroic interpretation of myself. This is an experience that most black and brown boys share. The only character that spoke to me on some level was Jafar from Disney's *Aladdin* (Clements and Musker 1992). His exaggerated Arab-ness was a reflection of me and my family. But still, he was the villain, his looks merely an external representation of his villainy. The more Arab you were, the more villainous you were, the movie seemed to suggest. Most movies and comics depict the Arab and the Muslim in this way, as the villain, the evil 'other', foil to the West. The Muslim Arab has become, or has been for a long time, a cultural monster. Monsters inhabit the world alongside us. Their relationship to ours is one of symbiosis, if we did not exist, they would not, since they are products of our imagination and preconceptions let loose on the world. Monsters are born where we interact with the world, with others in that world. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (1996b) seven theses, as published in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996a) offer a way to analyse monsters.

Through Cohen's theory I will try to cover a specific monster in this paper, the Muslim Arab, the Other to the West. After laying out Cohen's theory in brief, I will turn to some particular instances of the monster itself. Since the portrayals of this monstrous stereotype are countless, I will limit myself to three cases. First, the classical depiction of the Saracen will offer us a way into understanding the anxiety of the Medieval West as embodied by the Muslims at the edges of Christendom. Second, the 1988 Batman comic storyline *A Death in the Family,* which will show an example of the stereotypical nature stemming from ignorance of the Muslim. Third, the 2020 Paolo Sorrentino TV series *The New Pope*, which offers a more contemporary take on the Muslim as an existential threat to the West, as the modern monster; the Terrorist. Applying Cohen's theses to the representations of Muslims in mainstream media will hopefully yield some insight surrounding our modern fears and how to understand them.

Monster Theory

Of particular note are Cohen's theses 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7, which briefly run along these lines: Cohen's first thesis holds that monsters are symbols, not merely physical entities. They embody and reflect cultural shifts. He writes that the monster's body "literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture [... l]ike a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself" (Cohen 1996a, 4). Monsters reinforce fear in their constant resurgence, their constant 'coming towards', their ceaseless appearance and threatening approach, bringing with them a new world, a new order. If the monster wins, the world will become monstrous, or so we think.

The third thesis describes the monster's very nature as problematic and slippery. Cohen himself uses the example of the alien in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), which defies every natural law of evolution: the alien reptilian, crustacean, and humanoid. It is a hybrid that cannot be included in any system of categorisation. The monster cannot be grasped, it is quickly lost again in the margins of the known world (Cohen 1996a, 6). This defiance of knowability offers us a new way of perceiving the world, it offers an opportunity of shifting our frameworks.

The fourth thesis, "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference," (Cohen 1996a, 7) holds that the monster is difference come personified, societal difference, bodily difference, and religious difference. The monster represents the 'other' in relation to culture, politics, race, economy, and sexual normativity. This is the threat of a new world order, the monster will erode normative societal frameworks, it brings change. Accepting the monster is accepting difference, which is a hard pill to swallow if you prize your normativity.

Cohen's sixth thesis presents the monster as a source of attraction, seducing us into committing forbidden acts and inducing the breaking of taboos. Cohen claims that "monsters serve as secondary bodies" (Cohen 1996a, 18) through which we can play with ideas and experiences we cannot express under the expectations of society. The body of the monster is also the repository of forbidden desire; he names hermaphrodites, nude Amazons, and lascivious cannibals as examples of this amalgamation of desire and fear. Fear and fascination mingle when the monster appears.

Cohen's seventh and final thesis shows that the monster offers a way into self-knowledge, it offers itself up as a tool of understanding. The monster, after all, can be the representation of the fears and desires of a given society, made of symbolic flesh. Scrutinising it will reveal layers of ourselves to ourselves, a re-evaluation of norms and values, prejudices, or our assumptions (Cohen 1996a, 20). Monsters are the image of fear; they arise from stories and prejudices which take on a life of their own in any given societal zeitgeist. Making the other a monster is both an attempt at categorising them as well as attempting to understand them, for better or worse.

Saracen Sensibilities

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that "Saracen" is "a name for the nomadic peoples of the Syro-Arabian desert which harassed the Syrian confines of the Roman Empire. Hence, Arabs and by extension, Muslims, especially with reference to the Crusades" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1998, 'Saracen, n. and a.'). The name embodies the threat. In medieval romance literature, the military dimension of the

Saracen is represented by Emirs, Sultans, and Champions of Islam. They are representations of the East and of Islam, symbolising "terror, devastation, the demonic" (Said 2003, 59).

In *Richard Coer de Lion*, the eponymous king falls ill, requesting pork again and again. His cohort, unable to find any pork, slay and flay a Saracen, offering up his meat to the king. Unaware of the source, Richard eats and enjoys, and the killing is sanctioned by God (Larkin 2015, 3110). Here, Cohen's fourth thesis comes into play; the monster as embodiment of 'otherness'. The Saracen is not seen as a fellow human, in his mortality, his potential loss of human life, as is usual in times of war. He is seen in his edibility, his non-humanness, conquered and conquerable not only by the sword but also by teeth. The eating betrays another facet, a cultural absorption. As Novalis, mystic philosopher at the fount of German Romanticism, tells us, to eat is to assimilate (Novalis 1997, 102–3).

Where we encounter the monstrous fully, is in the figure of the Saracen giant. The giant is the militant, barbaric, violent, threat personified. Here the Saracen's body is a marker of spiritual difference, of error: the difference of soul and faith expressed through their appearance, through their flesh (Akbari 2009, 4). The Saracen's colour, his stature, his tongues, all present an example of Cohen's third thesis, the monster as a harbinger of category crisis, he inspires awe, fear, and fascination all at once. The Saracen as personification of the fear and awe which the Europeans might have felt at seeing the growth of the Islamic empire rings true with Cohen's fourth thesis. The monster in its horror inspires a desire too, an awe, the awe of strength, the desire of exotic being. Evil seduces, and monsters can too. Next, we'll look at an image that captures this seductive nature of the monster. It encapsulates fear and attraction at once.

Holy Terror, Batman!

Batman's arch-nemesis, the Joker, exemplifies Cohen's first thesis (the monster as symbol) in the 1988 storyline *A Death in the Family*. In the comic, the Joker is recruited by Ayatollah Khomeini to represent Iran at the UN General Assembly. When the Joker makes his appearance, he is garbed in traditional Arab robes and headdress, a confusing image since the Joker is sent as a representative of Iran, which is not an Arab country. In his speech, the Joker embodies the fear of terrorism, of perceived antagonism to the West. He proclaims that the western world isn't "going to be able to kick ANYONE around ever again!" (Wolfman et al. 2009, 135) before releasing a poisonous gas into the chamber. The monster's body here is made up of cultural fears and markers: fear of terrorism, fear of a clash of civilisation, and anxiety towards the Middle East, and most telling: ignorance. The strongest fear, as some say, is fear of the unknown. The Joker embodies a monster born from mostly misunderstanding, which leads to a conflation of Arabs, Muslims, and terrorists, equating them all to the Joker, an insane supervillain (Shaheen 1994, 124).

Taking Cohen's first and third theses (the monster as symbol, and the monster as confusion of categories, respectively), the Joker's body, specifically his outfit, can be considered a confusion of categories. The enemy is frightening because we are unsure of what he really is, Arab? Iranian? Muslim? Mad? Whatever he is, the comic describes him as "magnificent. Fascinating." (Wolfman et al. 2009, 133), revealing another instance of Cohen's fourth thesis. The room fears him, but is also attracted to him, especially when garbed in Arab dress. His embodiment of East-West tensions makes him a figure of chaos, something that the Joker always represents. It is a (failed) attempt at categorisation. The Joker's insanity mirrors the writer's insanity, his destructiveness is their destructiveness. Revealing the core relation monsters introduce; Them versus Us. In this case, the West versus the East, wherein the East (or the Orient) is the harbourer of all that is Other and unkind (Dar 2010, 102).

Caliphs, Popes, and Publicity

The Young Pope (Sorrentino 2016) is a show about power, politics, sensuality, and faith. It portrays the young ambitious Pope Pius XIII (captivatingly played by Jude Law) navigating Vatican politics. Combined with its successor series, *The New Pope* (2020), the shows were meditations on love, God, togetherness, and the influence of fame and (in)visibility. Pius XIII is an enigmatic pope, not allowing himself to be seen, standing with his back to a crowd in St. Peter's square when delivering a service. His papacy is one of silence and unreachability, mirroring his own abandonment by his parents, and, seemingly, by God. *The Young Pope* offers no representation of other faiths, focusing exclusively on Christianity. By contrast, *The New Pope* offers us three concrete Muslim characters: the Caliph, a nameless waiter, and the ambassador of the Caliphate. Pius XIII falls into a coma, and the world is divided and lost without him. In the resulting vacuum, the Caliph rises.

The Caliph stands at the head of Islam, militant Islam specifically. He is an opposing force to the papacy, present only in broadcast on television screens. His first appearance sees him sitting in a brightly lit tent, wearing a body-vest over his robe and a black turban, an image reminiscent of Osama

bin Laden. We do not see his face, but we do hear his voice, jeering: "Our hatred is concrete. Our enemy is obvious; it is Iblis, it is the Christian. And as the Koran says: 'I will fill hell with you all and all those after you'". He says nothing else throughout the show.

Everything about the Caliph is to be interpreted as a threat. He mirrors Pius XIII in his refusal to be seen facing the world. The Caliph has usurped Christian tactics or trespassed on the Pope's turf, his appearance signals a category crisis and embodies Cohen's seventh thesis, which claims that monsters always make us question why we have created them, what purpose they serve, and that they show the misrepresentations of a culture. Following the seventh thesis reveals that the Caliph's profanation of Christian tactics and Christian space, as the Saracen's, as the Joker's, signal a threatening cultural shift, the encroachment of (strange) Islam into the (culturally Christian) West. The West in *The New Pope* fears an influx of strangers from the desert, fears a change of language, a change of religion. The show centers on the Vatican's place in the world, on the Vatican's relative power. Pius XIII was a charismatic and mysterious individual, the Caliph mirrors this, and thus shows what the Vatican fears; losing territory, losing religious monopoly, and perhaps even losing God.

When the Caliph does show his face, it happens after a terrorist attack at Lourdes. His stern gaze, his hands on a rifle, indicate his responsibility, his readiness to act. He does not speak anymore, his silence speaks to his commitment: not words, but deeds. It is interesting to see that a show as devoted to an exploration of love cannot represent a different faith with more nuance. The entirety of the Arab world is reduced to no more than a contextless Quranic quote used to spread hate and terrorism, to a threat.

We might go further and analyse the temporary admittance of Middle Eastern refugees to the Vatican, as also happens in the show. Their entry into this sacred space of Christianity seems to profane it. This may be depicted literally, as one of the refugees seduces and impregnates a nun, making the profanation not only one of space but also of body. The attack at Lourdes, too, is nothing but the profanation of a sacred space, a transformation, a change. Lourdes, a place of healing, has become a place of death. Again, this appears as an example of Cohen's seventh thesis, where the monster oversteps its boundaries to tell us something about ourselves. A fear of cultural shifts, a blurring of 'there' and 'here', of 'them' and 'us'.

Conclusion

Using Cohen's theses, I have briefly attempted to decipher some portrayals of the Muslim/Arab in Western popular culture. The overarching conclusion is that this figure embodies a fear of change. In every case covered in this paper, the Muslim Arab appeared as some agent of change or threatened to bring change. The Saracen, through the Islamic conquests and the Ottoman empire, threatened an invasion of Europe. An invasion bringing about a cultural and religious shift, a break with the previous cycles of society. Batman's Joker, serving as ambassador of Iran employed by Khomeini, gave us the best example of Cohen's first thesis. The monster here symbolises change, a changed world with changed ideals, which inspires fear through its strangeness, its other-ness. *The New Pope* revealed a fear of change as well. Throughout the series, he threatened to usurp the Vatican's reach, symbolising the West's hegemony. Shown through the Caliph first symbolising veiled terror before changing into unveiled terror. His lack of speech, his steady gaze, signs of confrontation and change.

The monster is one of constant vigilance, of constant confrontation. It acts as a mirror, reflecting back prejudices and anxieties, returning again and again, its appearance signalling more about us than about itself.

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Images

Figure 1. Aubert, David. *Renault de Montauban - Combat entre Maugis et l'enchanteur,* 1462-1470. 395 f. 375 x 265 mm.

Figure 2. Marv Wolfman, Starlin, Jim, and George Pérez. Batman: A Death in the Family. DC Comics Classics Library. (New York: DC Comics, 2009), 133.

Figure 3. *The New Pope: Episode 1*. Drama. HBO, SKY, Canal+, 2020.

Towards a Transformative Campus Food Policy

by the Food Systems Interest Group

Written by staff of the Radboud Centre for Sustainability Challenges and students of the Food Systems Interest Group composed this essay. Contributing authors include Mathéa Debant, Teun Kemmerling, Tiegan Wilkinson, Stan Reijnen, Adam Calo, Luka Schepens, Gilles Zuidwijk, and Bram van Hees. Contact: fig@ru.nl

Introduction

Universities around the world are tinkering with how to institutionalize sustainable food through the adoption of models like a plant-based university or the Eat-Lancet diet (Willett et al. 2019). However, an uncritical view of sustainable food may be as problematic as thoughtless consumption. As Radboud University develops its own sustainable food policy (n.d.), we need a critical yet humble approach that asks: what should we transform the food system into? And who should benefit from it?

We, the Food Systems Interest Group, are a group of students and staff devoted to diving deeper into issues of food systems research (RCSC Author Collective 2024). We are concerned/actively engaged with current debates about research on food system transformation, in both our personal lives as well as our academic work. We study the leading edge of debates on food system transformation in our personal lives and academic work. Universities ought to be experimental breeding grounds for sustainability interventions and democratic experiments. The scientific consensus evidence for shifting towards plant-based diets, based on environmental arguments in terms of land-use pressures on biodiversity and climate emissions, is strong (Vermeulen et al. 2012) and demands policy action (Whitley et al. 2017). But identifying a mere recipe for a sustainable or ethical diet tells us nothing about how to reach such a goal.

While our support for universities to promote sustainable diets is clear, the deep well of insights from critical food studies compels us to argue that a food transition should not be taken in dogmatic terms. The problem here is sleepwalking into known problematic issues of our global food system. For example, it is easy to imagine a plant-based system that still props up corporate power, drives human exploitation, threatens animal rights, and causes ecological destruction. Today, the horticultural and grain sectors deliver products with dangerous levels of pesticides (Spencer 2024). Due to this, vertically controlled monopolistic seed and chemical companies (Clapp 2021) create unsafe and dangerous working conditions for farm laborers (Courville 2016), and drive biodiversity loss (Hallmann et al. 2017). This suggests the problems of the food system are not merely a matter of what we eat, but also of how our food is produced. Therefore, we raise six food system problematics that we ought to engage with in order to reach a holistic understanding of sustainable food. To avoid the pitfalls/trappings of the current food system, we stress the need to open up space for serious debate about these issues and build towards what we call a "transformative campus food policy". In this vision, Radboud University would not only "sign-on" to a regimen of food products, but truly lead in demonstrating a pathway of/for using/leveraging university catering, education, and procurement as a tool to transform the food system.

Six food system problematics

Human exploitation

The current food system is implicated in multiple avenues for the exploitation of human beings. These include wage insecurity, child labor violations, unsafe and toxic working conditions, a driving force for migration, and human slavery. Both the animal protein and horticultural supply chains deliver these injustices. The distinctions are important. For example, the berry industry (Holmes 2023) is emblematic of labor regimes that rely on precarious work, subjection to sexual violence (Sexsmith et al. 2023), and exposure to pesticides. The meat and dairy industry, on the other hand, is implicated in unsafe working conditions in slaughterhouses and other workplace violations (U.S. Department of Labor 2023).

Despite important differences, the production of both plant and animal products in our dominant food system share structural forces that devalue human labor and thrive on human precarity. Being sensitive to and contesting animal suffering is a clear moral imperative. At the same time, we ought to have the capacity to look for interventions that reduce the suffering of all beings through any new food policy. A shift in diets is not enough to help exploited workers in the industrial food system.

Distribution of power in the food system

What if the university prioritized a standard of involvement in corporate consolidation instead of only advocating for a certain set of foods procured? Critical scholars of food systems have long pointed out the role that corporate control plays at the root of the problems that develop in production systems. The current food system from production to distribution is globally controlled by a relatively small number of (corporate) actors (Clapp 2021), who entail not only directly control of production (Clapp and Isakson 2018), but also the financing and transportation. This concentration of power and wealth leads to land grabbing, violence and dispossession (Fairbairn 2015).

Scholars like Phil Howard (n.d.) demonstrate how only a handful of companies control decisions about a large majority of our food products, agricultural fertilizers and pesticides, and seeds. The levels of consolidation and unbalanced power in the food system have led some scholars to suggest we are living in a "corporate food regime" (Levidow 2015), where the decisions about what to produce and how to produce are to be found dominantly through the logics of corporate competition rather than any other value or political force. Unlocking the transformative potential of the food system must therefore contest this corporate control.

Does mandating, for example, plant-based foods at a university make progress towards this goal? In a way, yes. Industrial meat corporations are one of the leading sources of corporate malfeasance and drivers of unethical and human exploiting practices. However, these same companies have increased their market share in the *alternative protein sector* (Mylan et al. 2023). Shifting uncritically to certain plant-based foods may offer continued dominance of the consolidated industries, when it comes to decisions about the food system. The companies that dominate the horticultural trade are the leading provisioners of pesticides, herbicides, and mechanization. Shifting products within a corporate portfolio is insufficient for bringing about broader food system change.

Toxic environments

The use of pesticides and herbicides in agricultural production is linked to mass loss of biomass in pollinating and flying insects and soil microfauna. Research indicates a 75% biomass decline in Europe (Harrison 2011), likely caused by agricultural chemicals. Worryingly, these declines may induce trophic cascades, where insectivorous bird species reliant on these insects for food are also in decline (Hallmann et al. 2014).

The monocultural grain and vegetable sectors, established through the Green Revolution, are the leading drivers of pesticide and herbicide use. These systems create unsafe working conditions for farm laborers directly working in the fields and the consumers who eat pesticide residues. Glyphosate—the world's most popular herbicide—is found in breast milk (Schroeder 2014) and male reproductive organs (Perkins 2024). Poor soil management and high winds leads to pesticide drift, where nearby residents to agricultural fields are exposed to unsafe levels of toxic chemicals. This toxic environment is globally unequal; the fields of the Global South bear the brunt of the consequences of the over-use of banned pesticides.

Low-input production systems, which involve animal husbandry to add fertilizer and control pests, is crucial in order to reduce the need for chemical pesticides. The presence of some animals in the food system may therefore provide key resources to lessen agriculture's contribution to a toxic world.

Regional politics and landscape ecology

In a changing climate, research suggests resilient bioregions (Dias et al. 2021) will be both a crucial mitigation and adaptation strategy. Therefore, peri-urban food systems must empower actors to shape dynamic and diverse landscapes. The question of how shifting to plant-based proteins from current mixed livestock operations strengthens or weakens regional food networks is crucial. How can the goal of strong, resilient bioregions be supported through a switch to plant-based diets? How might an oversimplistic switch to plant-based food hinder this goal?

One of the key arguments for a plant-based food system is the efficiency gains achieved through reduction in animal farming. However, an overemphasis on yields may lock in the legitimacy of large-scale monocultures. Smaller farms produce higher yields than large farms while promoting more biodiversity and remaining just as profitable (Ricciardi et al. 2021). A food system solution must pay attention to the way a focus on yield efficiency may foreclose the radical potential of a matrix of smallholder biodiverse farms. Regional food webs, through markets of solidarity, can realize alternative value chains that prioritizes ecological diversity, participation, and other agro-ecological principles instead of yields. These local producers have valuable local knowledge about sustainable production practices and regional varieties that could form the basis of newly imagined cultural food ways that synergize with sustainability. The extent to which a plant-based food system marginalizes rather than empowers bioregional actors is an area for crucial concern.

Cultural foods

The traditions that shape how we eat also represent a powerful pathway to sustainability. Food holds deep cultural significance, which shapes decisions about what we eat, what we produce, and how we consume. The diversity of cultural foods has been on a steady decline (Wahlqvist and Lee 2007), which may block important pathways to new sustainable and enriching dietary cultures. The homogenization of our diets disconnects people from their local food systems and undermines the social sustainability of local culinary practices. A plant-based food system can certainly create culturally rich and diverse diets, yet could fall in the trap of reproducing Western diets (Vega Mejía et al. 2018), full of refined sugar and ultra-processed cereals. Thus, the environmental and social crises that drive the plant-based transition can only be solved if we consciously adopt a food culture that prioritizes the impact on the world of the food we eat.

Arguably, some of the most sustainable food systems in the world are dependent on the cultural consumption of animals. In the indigenous salmon fisheries of the Pacific Northwest, the historic connection to salmon foodways instills a centuries-long commitment to the persistence of the fishery. Tribal efforts (Robles-Gil 2024) to preserve the longevity of salmon migrations has led to the removal of extractive dams, landscape level ecological restoration, and dignified rural work. It must be considered, then, that the persistence of the salmon species is dependent on their cultural consumption.

Animal ethics

Reflecting on the necessity and ethicality of animal oppression within our food systems challenges the legitimacy of an agriculture that relies on animal exploitation. Concepts like animal welfare fall short of recognizing nonhumans as dignity-bearing individuals. Even if animal husbandry is an important sustainability tool, a commitment to animal ethics urges us to reconsider the necessity of *any* animal involvement in our production systems.

The call for multi-species justice (Chao and Celermajer 2023)—that is, the concern for the well-being of and justice toward more-than-human life-forms—produces an uncomfortable tension between two promising forces for food system change: animal liberation and the movement for food sovereignty. While food sovereignty resists corporate control of the food system through prioritizing farmer empowerment and democratic consensus, its movements are partly dependent on animal power, which has implications for treating animals as commodities by keeping animals for manure, fertilizer, milk or meat production. At the same time, a vision of animal liberation may end up prioritizing animal interests over achieving transformative change in the production of food. After all, it was the displacement of animal-based soil amendments with fossil-fuel-derived synthetic fertilizers that unleashed the industrial livestock system onto the world.

Debating the morality and practice of animal violence within marginalized alternative food production systems is welcomed, as these tensions reveal a common antagonist. The theories of change from a food sovereignty and animal liberation perspective both oppose industrial production methods. Where multi-species justice seeks to address the roots of violence against animals, food sovereignty places the focus on the politics of food system change. Perhaps both movements can learn from each other.

Towards a transformative campus food policy

Proposals like the Plant-Based University Campaign (Vox 2024) are a welcome entry point into the broader, messy world of food politics. We join the conversation by offering this essay, to stimulate a collective need to debate questions of sustainable food rather than accept simple proscriptions. A deeper guiding concept we offer is food justice, which demands that Radboud University questions what inequities need to be undone, what forces need to be countered, and how to implement sustainable food practices at Radboud University and across any university campus. Two concrete policy changes support this goal:

A food eco-democracy

If the root problem of the food system is the unequal distribution of power stemming from/through corporate influence, then a food solution may prioritize *food democracy*. Food democracy can be transformative when students and staff actively shape the food system (Hassanein 2003) rather than consume passively. A deep or strong food democracy avoids market-thinking through the code termination of values from stakeholders such as students, professors and food and beverage. A food democracy can be realised through deploying a food policy council, a deliberative body made up of the broader Radboud community that lends legitimacy to food policy-making. An active participation in food democracy can represent different worldviews, mediates agonism between parties, and offers direction towards solutions to the many ethical and sustainability quandaries implicated in what we eat. This shifts the control away from corporate food systems to the local community, entering into direct partnerships and dialogues with farmers, rather than serving the interests of multinational companies.

However, food democracy may miss moving towards increased animal rights and multi-species justice. An eco-democracy includes the voice of the non-human, taking the environment, nature, and our planet as a point of departure rather than merely humans. While direct representation is impossible, knowledge regarding the interests of nonhuman species can still be utilized. Internationally, rights have been given to nature, such as rivers and lakes, often protected and represented by representatives and special councils, through appointing eco-advocates. The acknowledgement of rights to nature on campus (Polkamp 2022) and the establishment of a nature council have already been suggested, though no concrete action has been taken yet. The eco-democracy format has demonstrated imperfections, but this is an opportunity for universities to act as places of research and front-runners of change.

Engagement with the bioregion

The promise of local food systems is "social embeddedness" or a capacity to build social relations with food producers and workers, creating a path for equal negotiation and circumstances for farmers. Local food systems are no uncontested solution, and do not automatically lead towards food justice. Local food systems can still reproduce the problems mentioned earlier, like significant exploitation and toxic environments. However, with responsible practices and governance, local producers could be strong allies in the food transition, supporting the cultivation of culturally significant and diet-appropriate foods that students and staff would enjoy consuming. This can assist in rethinking our diets, recreating a relationship through discovering which plant-based products can be produced ecologically and locally, and which use of animals in farming would facilitate ecological production. Through these local relationships, a form of bioregionalism is advanced, driving a place-based production logic determined by what the bioregion allows, a key strategy to break the logics of environmentally destructive production.

Conclusion

Radboud University has embraced an ambitious sustainability platform, with sustainability testimonies, the Green Office, the Radboud Centre for Sustainability Challenges, as well as Radboud University hosting the Earth System Governance Conference last October, where catering was 100% vegan. Food policy is a crucial tool to help the university meet its own stated sustainability aims. Radboud University could adopt a "diet" that is claimed to be sustainable, or it could emerge as a thought leader in rethinking the agri-food system.

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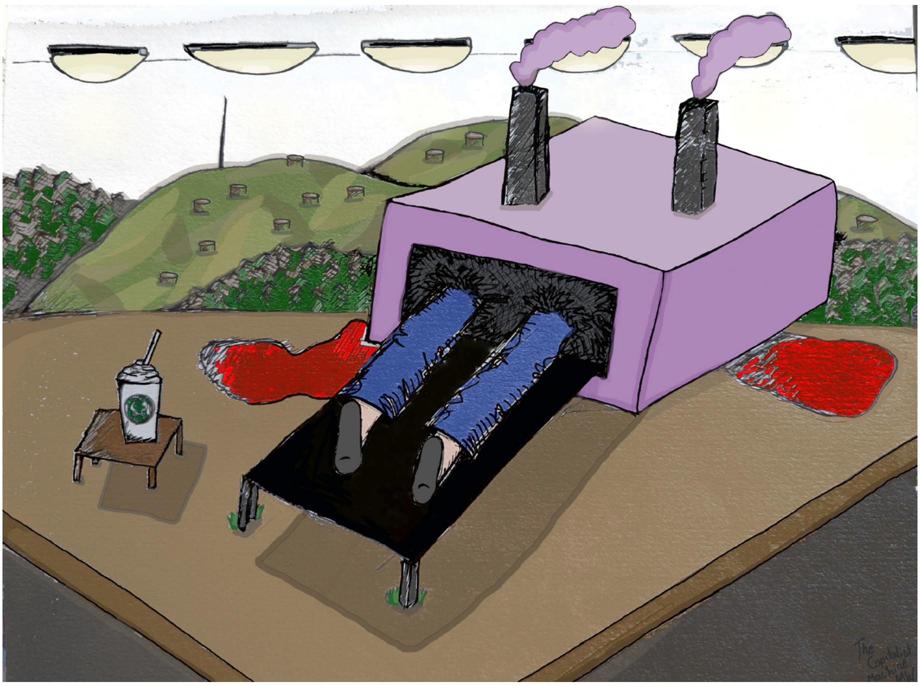
The Capitalist Machine

Subjectification Processes Under Liberal Capitalism

Biopolitics and Culture Industry

Sebastiano Colombo

Introduction

Both the categories of biopolitics and biopower have received a great deal of academic and non-academic attention in the decades since Foucault theorised the two terms in the 1970s. Many authors have struggled with those ideas, trying to understand contemporary socio-political reality, and many others have given their own contributions and definitions to the debate, which came to be a truly multifaceted and nuanced one. A debate, but also a challenge, that has been taken up by political philosophers, sociologists, postmodern thinkers and analysts of discourses, philosophers of economy and many others. This created a very open and broad-spanning discussion about the subject but also sometimes blured the clear delimitations, aims, and scope of biopolitical theory.

This short paper will try to show the clear similarities and continuities between biopolitics and culture-industrial productions in the contemporary disciplining, manipulating, and manufacturing of subjects' bodies and identities. The argumentation will rest on the shared ground from which both biopolitics and the culture industry stem, namely the liberal capitalist rule of maximum economy that underlies societal and personal life from around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries up to today.

In §1, the analysis will focus on the concept of biopower in the two senses of an anatomo-politics of the individual and a bio-politics of the population. Its relationship with the disciplinary mechanism of the Panopticon, highlighted by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, will be crucial for an understanding of the practices of disciplining and subjectifying humans operated by institutions of power.

In §2, the focus of the paper will move on to an investigation of the double logic of liberal capitalism. Biopolitics and liberal capitalism cannot be separated from each other. The two are complementary and share the common rationale and goal of realizing the rule of maximum economy to the greatest possible extreme. In the second part of this section, the concept of culture industry and its own relationship with liberal capitalism in the twentieth century will be closely scrutinised. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the rationale of the industrial and economic production of goods extends itself, comprising the world of cultural and artistic expressions, representing an intensification of the manipulative and economising power of liberal capitalism over people's lives. Therefore, it will become clearer how the culture industry not only fabricates its own wares but also the subjects that consume its contents, showing the biopolitical strength and power of the culture industry's mediatic institutions.

To describe the kind of subjects we are left with will be the aim of §3. The final product of the culture industry and liberal capitalism are subjects who are actually to be thought of as mere objects of power, whose task is to reproduce the economic system. In conclusion, by briefly touching upon Debord and Virno's reflections on culture industry and capitalism, it will be shown not only that culture has become marketed and subsumed into the laws of political economy's power, but, further, that communication altogether has been transformed into a commodity, thus allowing industrial rationality to have an all-encompassing role in subjects' formation and to penetrate deeper into the subjects' most intimate internalities.

1. Biopolitical Subjects

In the last chapter of the *Will to Knowledge*, Michel Foucault introduces the concept of biopower as a marker of a massive political shift in the Western world starting in the seventeenth century. The "power of life and death" that characterised sovereign power during the Classical Age and that was exercised through a right "to kill, or by refraining from killing" had been slowly supplemented by a new kind of power (Foucault 1978, 135-136). The old sovereign power of subtraction gradually left the stage for a specific and radically new form of power exercised at the level of human life and lively forces and aimed at constituting "a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulation" (137). As highlighted by Mills, the analysis of this political revolution is just as important, in Foucault's production, as the scientific revolution that occurred in those same centuries. Modern clinical medicine and biology conceptualised a new understanding of life and embedded themselves within the discourses of power (Mills 2017, 22). This double revolution gave birth to unprecedented institutions (*dispositifs*) like clinics, prisons, and madhouses, but also schools and factories, where power and knowledge worked together to create and regulate their subjects. The present section will investigate the modalities and effects of this economising power on life and death, both at the level of the individual and of the collective body. Later, a more detailed account of the *dispositifs* and technologies of regulatory intervention upon the singular body described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* will be provided. This will prove itself to be a powerful tool to better grasp the peculiar form of subject-formation and subject-manipulation that those techniques of power put into play.

1.1 Biopower's Building

According to Foucault, the power over life of the modern political status quo is composed of two poles that aim at absorbing and subordinating the entire spectrum of human life under its sign (Foucault 1978, 137; 1997, 242). This goal is reached by bringing both the bodies of individual human beings and the singular, larger body of humans as a species under the supervision and normative action of modern political institutions. While being interrelated as two expressions of the same power over life, the two poles have specific functions and properties in the building of biopower through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1978, 140).

On the one hand, Foucault describes the first pole as "centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics of the human body*" (Foucault 1978, 139). This anatomo-politics of the human body deals with the economisation of the dynamics of the bodies of individuals through discipline. Starting in the seventeenth century and continuing in the eighteenth, a specific rationality that aimed at gaining full surveillance and control over those bodies had been enforced through a series of *dispositifs* like schools, barracks, factories, prisons, etc. (140). This allowed and fostered the emergence of a newly created form of political influence over people's bodies and identities. An *orthopaedic* of human behaviour that answered to the rule of economic optimisation was being instilled in people by those institutions, establishments, and social structures that most of the population frequented every day. A new form of subjectification of people's bodies and souls was born.

On the other hand, the second and strongly related head of biopower is characterised as "focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity [...]. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*" (Foucault 1978, 139). This biopolitics of the population deals with the larger body of society, of human beings intended as a whole, and differentiates itself from anatomo-political power because the latter exercises itself through the fabrication and manipulation of the individual, while the former is a massifying power that reduces the entirety and multiplicity of society into an omnicomprehensive entity. This extensive and non-disciplinary form of biopower was exercised by new, specific processes that reflected another side of the alliance between power and knowledge. According to Foucault, from the eighteenth century onward a statistical knowledge and a whole new "set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, [...] the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on" was being developed in order to control and regulate the broader life of the societal body (Foucault 1997, 243). This technology of security emerges sometime later, around the end of the eighteenth century, and aims at reducing and mitigating the multiple random events and happenings that a living totality undergoes, at getting a grip over the most fundamental forces that once used to regulate the life of a societal body (249). A new understanding of human society as a mass and a need to regulate its life were born.

Discipline and security, subjectification and massification, microscopic and macroscopic are the terms that allow us to describe and categorise the emergence of the double phenomenon of biopower. The birth of a political power that, making use of modern knowledge, aims at protecting and fostering the lives of its subjects at every level comes at a cost. Biopower deploys itself through a controlling and paternalising *modus operandi*, forcing people to adopt a specific rationality that has the ultimate and constant goal of bringing human potentiality to the surface by deeply economising its forces.

1.2 Places of anatomopolitics

Michel Foucault deals more extensively with institutions and mechanisms of disciplinary control and subjugation of bodies in *Discipline and Punish*, first published in 1975, right before the series of courses at the Collège de France that dealt with the biopower, the art of governmentality, and the liberal capitalism that sustained the birth of biopolitics. While highlighting a major historical shift in the concept of punishment and the birth of the prison institution between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Foucault analyses in depth the structure and the role of the Panopticon (which literally means 'to see everything') and the rationale underneath it, Panopticism. The Panopticon was a peculiar piece of architecture conceptualised by the eighteenth-century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and adopted as the blueprint for prison buildings in the decades to follow. By means of its architecture, with a surveillance tower in the centre and cells in the periphery of the building, the Panopticon aimed at making the inmate, the worker, the schoolboy, and so on, believe that one could be observed at any time without having the possibility to know if it was actually the case (Foucault 1995, 200). Therefore, the major effect of the Panopticon was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (201).

Power does not repress subjects anymore, but it produces them.

The crucial aspects of this disciplinary system of biopower are two, namely its depth and its breadth. The first is exemplified by the pervasive nature and penetrative power of the logic that this kind of *dispositif* aimed at producing. By creating a constant state of perceived surveillance, any institution would have the power to enforce any sort of disciplinary agenda and punish those who did not align with it.[1] A panoptic institution is a vessel for the reproduction and internalisation of rules of conduct, standardised behaviours, and a specific economy of movements beyond the need for actual, physical control. It creates a system that "gives 'power of mind over mind'" (Foucault 1995, 206). The second finds its ground in the polyvalency of the panoptic schema. Even though Bentham's Panopticon is the architecture of a prison, its schema of disciplinary surveillance and punishment can be used to "reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space [...] which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons" (205), and in general to produce docile bodies and identities that can be easily directed and employed at will by the structures of power.

It is safe to say now that the biopolitical subject is a subject that is continuously invested by a power that seeks to control its most intimate behaviour to the point of creating an internalised, persistent gaze that instructs the individual on how to act and what to be, even when direct vigilance is not present. Through disciplinary control, power ceases to be something living outside its subjects, as it had been in the Classical Age, but now enters inside each and every individual, because it is conveyed and reproduces by institutions that shape the daily lives of people. Power does not repress subjects anymore, but it produces them (Mills 2017, 25). In order to really understand the logic of this mechanism for the production of subjectivities, it is now crucial to turn the focus toward the political and economic context that allowed the birth of biopolitics and biopolitical subjects, namely, liberal capitalism.

1 "Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used" (Foucault 1995, 205).

2. The Double Logic of Liberal Capitalism

During the 1978-1979 course of lectures at the Collège de France, entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics,* Michel Foucault highlights a fundamental link between liberalism and biopolitics by stating that "only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is" (Foucault 2008, 22). Although Foucault spends much of this course's lectures circumscribing and defining the specific characteristics of the two main streams of liberal political thought of the twentieth century, German ordoliberalism and American neo-liberalism, the focus of the following section will be solely on his few reflections concerning the relationship between liberal-capitalism and biopolitics.[2] This analysis will show that what really ties biopolitics and its peculiar mechanism of subject-production to liberalism is not limited to the fact that the two emerged in the same historical period. Rather, the two share a guiding and ideological principle that Foucault calls "the internal rule of maximum economy" (318).

The second part of this section will deal with the concept of culture industry, coined for the first time by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first published in 1944. In all its elusiveness and multiform manifestations, culture industry is a term employed to describe the process of massification of cultural creations. Modern expressions of culture, like film and radio, can no longer describe themselves as forms of art. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, they are industries that, through their immaterial commodities, aim at producing and reproducing the mechanisms of economic production typical of the capitalistic society (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 94-95). This will be crucial to understanding the even more pervasive disciplinary nature of the culture industry, its relationship with biopower, and the similar natures likening the biopolitical subject to the liberal capitalistic one. Hopefully it will appear clearly that the logic disciplining the human in the name of economic optimisation only reaches a newer and deeper level with the industrialisation culture.

2.1 Economisation of Humans and the Free Market

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, alongside the two sets of disciplinary and security technologies that enact the investment of life by power, a new way of governing subjects through political economy was

2 It seems that the unrealised goal of this course's lectures could be summarised by a short sentence that Foucault himself noted on the manuscript of the first lesson, "studying liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics" (Foucault 2008, 22).

born and developed in the Western world: liberal capitalism.[3] According to Foucault, liberalism need not be described as an ideology or a political theory but as a practice, a way of doing things that aims at rationalising and economising the art of government (Foucault 2008, 318). Liberalism, as an art of government that springs from society rather than from the state, is always concerned with the extent of its exercise and the assessment of its boundaries (319). Its internal principle of spontaneous self-limitation is always in line with the need for economic optimisation of the free market and its agents. Biopolitics and liberal capitalism share two principles, complementarity and sameness, that endeavour toward the submission of every aspect of life under the logic of maximum economy.

On the one hand, biopolitics and liberal capitalism are complementary in the exercise of power. The central idea of liberal thought is a concept of "a hitherto unknown nature, the historical result of radically transformed relations of living and production: the 'second nature' of the evolving civil society" (Lemke 2011, 45). Governmental practices should, it was thought, refrain from opposing this second nature, which finds its best deployment in the creation of a free, natural, and self-regulating market "ruled" by the *laissez-faire* principle. The condition of existence and survival of this natural market, as well as its counterpart, are security mechanisms "meant to secure and protect the permanently endangered naturalness of the population, as well as its own forms of free and spontaneous self-regulation" (47). Therefore, according to Foucault, "with the emergence of political economy, with the introduction of the restrictive principle into governmental practice itself, an important substitution, or doubling rather, is carried out, since the subjects of right on which political sovereignty is exercised appear as a *population* that a government must manage. [...] This is the point of departure for the organizational line of a 'biopolitics'" (Foucault 2008, 22). Although, at first glance, this framing of liberal capitalism and biopolitics may seem to oppose the one to the other, this is not the case. The naturalness of the free market is granted by the security mechanisms displayed by biopower, creating a system where people could behave as perfectly rational individuals under the eye of disciplinary and security technologies.

3 A methodological consideration needs to be made here: in his course The Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault often uses liberalism and capitalism almost interchangeably. In particular, in the lesson of 21 February 1979, Foucault partially addresses the issue of the relationship between liberalism and capitalism and the accumulation of capital, where the latter is a historico-economico-judicial system which overflows into politics too.

On the other hand, liberal rationality and biopower seem to be closely intertwined through a principle of sameness. The power over life exercised by institutions and *dispositifs* both on the level of the individual and on the level of the collective created a specific biopolitical subject. This optimised subject finds a mirror image of itself in a political economy and an art of government that continuously strives to economise and refine itself through surveillance, control, and self-limitation. Biopolitics and liberalism arguably share the same economic and economising rationale and, thus, "the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birth rate, life expectancy, race [...] were inseparable from the framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity" (Foucault 2008, 317). Once again, in the newborn liberal political economy and in biopower, the underlying principle is a logic of economisation. To gain the most at the minimum price, to exploit and allocate resources, and to actualise potentialities were only some of the objectives pursued by liberalism and biopower. For both, the ultimate dilemma was finding the most economically appetising allocation of resources: human lives and forces for biopower, and mercantile goods and monetary trades on the free market for liberalism.

2.2 The Penetration of Capitalism into Life: The Culture Industry

Through biopower, particularly what Foucault called disciplinary techniques, and the spread of the liberal-capitalistic way of doing things, a peculiar and very pervasive tendency towards economisation and mechanical optimisation of human and societal dynamics had been set in motion. This section will describe a later stage of the development of this logic, namely its appearance and penetration into the lives of artistic and cultural creations, in the realm of the most intimate of human expressions, giving birth to what Horkheimer and Adorno called the culture industry.

Twentieth-century mass media like film, radio, and magazines (nowadays we could at least add television and social media to the list) are far from being expressions of culture and art as they were intended to be at their birth. They cannot present themselves as forms of art or free human expression because "they call themselves industries," they produce commodities for large-scale consumption through standardised forms, and they share a "technical rational [that] today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of a society alienated from itself" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 95). With the creation of an industry of culture, the logic of technical and liberal-capitalistic production of goods for the free market leaves the spaces of industry and economy and enters the spaces of art, entertainment and humanistic autonomous formation and does so with the sole purpose of transferring "the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. [...] New on the part of the culture industry is the direct and undisguised primacy of a precisely and thoroughly calculated efficacy in its most typical products" (Adorno 2001, 99). According to Adorno, culture industry puts into action a specific and reductive conception of humanity, which is at the heart of the rationale thus far described. Once again, the relationship between a form of human disciplining, in this case through the products of culture industry, and liberal capitalism is one that can be described with the two principles of complementarity and sameness.

Biopolitics and liberal capitalism share two principles, complementarity and sameness, that endeavour toward the submission of every aspect of life under the logic of maximum economy.

Firstly, the industrial production of cultural goods through media and entertainment forms a bond of complementarity with another aspect that is central to human lives in modernity, namely the world of industrial production itself; the world of work in the twentieth century. Like two pieces of a symbol, the logic of economic production overflows in the sphere of private life, and, therefore, "the Ford model and the model hit song are all of a piece. But the very thought of such adaptation already implies the acceptance of the manipulation of needs by the might of production" (Adorno 2001, 79-80). Under the sign of capitalism, work and free time follow the same logic of economic industrial production of serialised goods for the free market. At work, people produce, and at home, they consume. The whole of human experience and human needs are influenced and fabricated in such a way that everything can be understood as a material, production-consumption relationship.[4]

Secondly, the overflowing of the economic logic of capitalism over to culture creates a relationship of sameness on at least two levels. One pertains to the blurring and levelling of the differences between work and private life such that "even during their leisure time, consumers must orient themselves

4 "The power of industrial society is imprinted on people once and for all. The products of culture industry are such that they can be alertly consumed even in a state of distraction. But each one is a model of the gigantic economic machinery, which, from the first, keeps everyone on their toes, both at work and in the leisure time which resembles it" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 100).

according to the unity of production" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 98). And the other regards the actual products and goods originating from the newborn industry of culture. Artistic and entertainment works are to be described now as subjected to the same rules that apply to the industrial production of every other material good. They are standardised products of the serialised Fordist assembly line. They need to be as economically profitable as possible; they need to be sold to the biggest pool of consumers possible; and therefore, "the demand made by administration upon culture is essentially heteronomous: culture – no matter what form it takes – is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with some type of abstract standards imposed from without" (Adorno 2001, 113). The normative action of the industrial administration of culture is, as should now be clear, analogous to the rules of the exchange of goods on the liberal capitalistic free market. Political economy makes its way into the last bit of life that was left to people for free and autonomous self-formation. Disciplinary and security technologies, together with the culture industry, create a potentiated form of power over life under the normative action of liberal capitalism.

3. Human Life as a Commodity

Following Horkheimer and Adorno's definition of the culture industry phenomenon, the focus of the text will now shift from the analysis of the Industrial Revolution in culture, art, and the entertainment world to the specific effects upon people and the lives that it engendered. The culture industry is to be seen both as a reflection and a deeper stage of that economising rationale that, starting from Foucault's analysis of biopower, seems to characterise life under liberal capitalism after the Industrial Revolution on every level. Departing from the same logic of domination, the culture industry also seems to be filled with elements that are typical of those *dispositifs* that displayed and administered the power over life according to Foucault. Similarly, in Horkheimer and Adorno's reflection, the culture industry has the power of creating specific subjects to better fit the system, and "the more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do as it chooses with the needs of consumers - producing, controlling, disciplining them; even withdrawing amusement altogether: here, no limits are set to cultural progress" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 115).

In conclusion to the present section, the focus will move shortly to what can be called a later development of the culture industry, namely the commodification of language and human communication, what Guy Debord calls "spectacle". Communication, linguistic practices and performances get absorbed by the world of wage labour and, therefore, by the economic rule. On this topic, the reflections by Paolo Virno in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, will also be briefly touched upon. Virno's accusation is that virtuosity, namely "the special capabilities of a performing artist," despite its semantical realm, gets subsumed under the capitalistic logic of production and becomes commodity (Virno 2004, 54).

3.1 The Subjects of Culture Industry

Under liberal capitalism, industries and factories aim at generating a specific type of worker, disciplined and docile, productive and alienated in order to continuously tend toward the maximum level of economic progress. Equally, culture that has become industry itself has an interest in, and an end goal of, creating similar subjects, namely people who produce and consume its products. To do so, culture and art needed to become commodities, measurable and standardised goods that can be bought and sold at the largest scale of the free market. However, what is most striking is what effect this kind of process has on its subjects, the producers-consumers, according to Horkheimer and Adorno.

The first instance of the action of the culture industry over the individual is an expression of repressive power. Through the production of cultural commodities, its goal is to manipulate the needs of those subjected to this form of power in order to expand itself. The individual and personal aspect of each subjectivity is so detrimental to the exercise of the culture industry that by fabricating and influencing people's needs "it appeals to the very people as thinking subjects whose subjectivity it specifically seeks to annul. [...] The identity of the species prohibits that of the individual cases. The culture industry has sardonically realized man's species being" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 116). Under the regime of liberal capitalism, and specifically through the culture industry, actual subjectivities cannot be tolerated anymore. The rule of the maximum economy requires people to all be the same, all fungible and adaptable to the norm imposed by the institutions of power: everyone is replaceable, and no one is of any specific importance. The formation of individuals as a singular mass, and culture as an industry that profits from them, creates a system that "is interested in human beings only as its customers and employees and has in fact reduced humanity as a whole, like each of its elements, to this exhaustive formula. [...] In both cases they remain objects" (118). The final achievement of this repression of subjectivities is the creation and understanding of human people as objects.

Subsequently, the second instance of the action of culture industry upon people is the impression of a standard by a productive power. After eliminating every space and form of free self-formation and having completely subsumed reality and life under the law of liberal capitalism, the latter can start creating its own world and feeding it to people in order for them to reproduce it. By representing a specific kind of reality that fits into the capitalist schema, the culture industry actually creates both the world and the view (Adorno 2001, 63-64). The boundaries are now pushed to the extreme limit point where the culture industry is a "life industry" in the sense that its products are designed "in order to *directly produce* the mind and brain required for the reproduction of capitalist society. The goal is to make the entirety of life adaptable to the demands of growth and capital" (Lotz 2018, 982). By manufacturing both a world and the objects that act in it through never-ending exposure to the liberal capitalistic rule, at work and during free time, liberal capitalism finally closes the circle. The culture industry can be described as the last piece in the puzzle of the totalitarian capitalistic project where a world of industrially produced commodities is offered for consumption and reproduction to the realm of humanity, which is nonetheless composed of objects that are just as dominated, manipulated, and fabricated to fit the system.

To close this discussion about the culture industry and its relation to forms of disciplining and producing the human, it is interesting to briefly analyse two follow-up reflections on the matter by the philosophers Guy Debord and Paolo Virno. Debord denounces the permeation of the logic of modes of production into the realm of human language and communication, stating in his first thesis that "the whole of life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*" (Debord 1995, 12). The industrial and economic apparatus cannot be escaped anymore because it is the one producing reality, through images and narratives. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, living in society means living completely within the rationale of capitalist production of goods, whether material or immaterial. Speaking and writing are just two additions to the mechanism. Moreover, Debord seems to agree with Horkheimer and Adorno. The culture industry, or the spectacles, both share an essence of domination by the economy upon the social and political. According to Debord, the spectacles act as a disciplining power that "subjects living human beings to its will to the extent that the economy has brought them under its sway. For the spectacle is simply the economic realm developing for itself - at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers" (16).

Another worthy addition to the debate on the extent of liberal capitalism and the culture industry is Virno's. The Italian philosopher argues that even the virtuosic performance, "an activity which finds its own fulfilment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a finished product" (Virno 2004, 52), gets thwarted by the commodification tendency. Not even the immaterial performance of the artist or the speaker manages to distance itself from wage labour and contemporary economic production. In the post-Fordist era, human language, speaking, and communicating are included in this production (56). Some virtuosic activities that once were confined in the realm of the speaker and the politician and that aimed at defining the spaces for political activity have become occasions for wage labour. Thus, "when hired labor involves the desire for action, for a relational capacity, for the presence of others [...] we can say that some distinguishing traits of the human animal, above all the possession of a language, are subsumed within capitalistic production" (63). In the end, in politics as well, there is not much room for strictly political activity. Everything, from items to people, from work to free time and politics, becomes subjected to the rule of the maximum economy of liberal capitalism and turns into a commodity. Life is economy.

Conclusion

The development of a series of disciplinary and security technologies aimed at regulating the movements of the bodies of its subjects from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century is just the first step in a longer historical and political process. With the birth of biopower, "the problem of life began to be problematized in the field of political thought, of the analysis of political power" (Foucault 1995, 241). Life, and in particular human behaviour on both the microscopic and macroscopic levels, became objects of knowledge and power. However, the disciplinary techniques of biopower seem to have served another purpose as well. Disciplinary institutions of biopower such as prisons, factories, schools, hospitals, and so on, are defined by Foucault as "an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (Foucault 1978, 140-141).

The most intimate realm of humanity and its creative expressions are not different from the items on an assembly line.

By creating economically efficient institutions where the most people could be disciplined with the least amount of resources, biopower provided the indispensable matter on which form needed to be impressed. As articulated earlier, the form that was administered to this matter, to the blank canvases of those disciplined and docile bodies, was the rule of maximum economy, the rule of the industrial production of goods that feed the free market, the rule of liberal capitalism. The alliance between liberalism as an art of government, as a way of doing things, with a historical, economical, and judicial system such as capitalism allowed the actual entrance of life into the structures of power. But the behaviours of subjects were not yet completely subjected to the norm of the economy of life. Life could still have been penetrated and manipulated even better and more deeply. Biopower and liberal capitalism pushed the limit even further, and the logic of industrial production of goods for the free market was impressed on the virgin lands of culture and art.

The colonisation of art and the creation of the culture industry are the twentieth-century developments of the logic of domination of life typical of liberal capitalism and biopower. The most intimate realm of humanity and its creative expressions are not different from the items on an assembly line. Cultural and artistic creations turn into entertainment products in an industry that is just like any other industry that produces objects for large-scale sale. But, as should be clear by now, those products are not ends in themselves. The ultimate goal of the culture industry is to dictate and inculcate "the conditions on which the implacable life is allowed to be lived at all" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 123). The culture industry not only gets to dominate life and subjects but also manages to create the dynamics of their souls. The boundaries of life, the world, and human experience are now set by means of commodities that are ready to be consumed, and, as the Feuerbachian saying goes, we are what we eat. The contemporary subject, by continuously feeding on objects and commodities, turns into one itself: "the peculiarity of the self is a socially conditioned monopoly commodity" (125).

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The Unwanted Bike Counter

Julia Axthelm

In Berlin-Kreuzberg, there is an exciting structure on the sidewalk that nobody actually asked for and nobody uses: a bicycle counter. According to the district office, it is intended for cyclists to "ride, stop, drink, work, relax" (extra3 2023). In an episode of 'Realer Irrsinn' ('Real Madness') on the satirical channel *extra3*, none of the interviewed passers-by really knew what to make of the 8,300-euro structure (extra3 2023). It even has an entry on Google Maps with a few ironic comments and a 2.0-star rating. What, at first, sounds like an absurd, yet trivial and perhaps all too commonplace story raises an important question: How is the design of the city actually decided? What about where a bench is placed, a train line is built, or how living space is distributed?

With our political voting choices, we place the authority for such decisions in the hands of politicians. We assume that they are the most competent to make these decisions. The simplified ideal of electoral-representative politics can be put like this: people decide on a party within the framework of democratically legitimate opinions, and a government is formed on the basis of the election results. It is assumed that this government best reflects and knows how to implement the opinions and wishes of the people. But what if this image is idealized, and democracy all too often pokes around blindly in uncertainty? An unguided experimentation with bike counters and other, more far-reaching decisions?

I will put forward the thesis that democratic action should always be understood as experimentation. In this way, we can understand political decisions as experiments that help us to better deal with the uncertainty of our actions. This allows us to reflect on the consequences of certain political decisions critically and should also make us willing to revise decisions if they do not have the desired consequences. However, one could argue that party political structures in electoral-representative processes can impair the process of experimentation, and we should improve the ability of politicians and citizens to engage in political experimentation.

What if Acting Democratically Means Experimenting?

Does the idea of democratic acting as experimenting intuitively trigger rejection or approval in us? We associate experiments with contradictory things. On the one hand, experimentation often has a planless quality to it: We carry out experiments when we want to find out something about an uncertain situation. And it is inherent to experimentation that we cannot yet know what consequences certain actions or changes will have, so we have to accept the risk that undesirable side effects may occur or that things may not develop as expected. Experimentation can be fueled by curiosity, but it can also be associated with incautiousness—we do not know exactly what will happen if an experiment goes wrong.

On the other hand, experiments often occur in a scientific context. Here, we assume that, under ideal conditions, experiments are more reliable and it is possible to deal with undesirable side effects. They are guided by a set of predefined methods and procedures that ensure their quality and allow us to gain new insights from experiments. Hypothesis testing is a central element of the scientific process. Briefly (and extremely simplified here), scientists formulate a hypothesis about a particular issue and develop an experiment that is intended to provide information about this hypothesis (e.g. as evidence or counter-evidence). The experiment is conducted, and the original hypothesis is then re-evaluated in the light of what has been observed.

And in politics? At first glance, it seems like a frightening idea that people are just experimenting here, too, and that politicians do not have as precise a plan as we think. However, it is only a realistic observation that even politicians can never infallibly predict the consequences of their actions. To understand this, let us take a brief look at John Dewey's theory of uncertainty in action and practical security. According to Dewey, we always live under conditions of epistemic uncertainty, since we can never fully and infallibly predict the consequences of our actions (Dewey 1930, 7–27). Instead of struggling to achieve absolute certainty, we should aim for practical security, the ability to navigate an uncertain world with flexibility (40–41). The attempt to attain absolute certainty always carries the risk of clinging to rigid traditions or dogmas that ultimately stand in the way of change. Practical security, however, offers us flexibility and opportunities for change, but also reliable methods. Dewey's idea was to base these "intelligent methods" on the experimental approach of the natural sciences, which makes it possible to create a reliable system of knowledge (7-9; 99-104; 260). Inquiry, experimentation, and learning from practical experience are important practices that enable us to adapt our actions flexibly to empirical observations. Although experimental methods do not make our actions absolutely certain, by focusing on what can be observed empirically, we gain practical security.

How (Not) to Experiment Democratically

Is our current decision-making system one in which experiments are already being conducted? Yes, but upon closer inspection, it is not a particularly well-conducted experiment. In order to understand this, let us take a closer look at the parallel between experimentation in science and experimentation in politics. First of all, we need a hypothesis. In politics, we could consider political statements, declarations of intent, and forecasts as hypotheses. A party that blames refugees for rising crime and therefore calls for the deportation of migrants is indirectly making the hypothesis that deportations minimize crime. A party that calls for a speed limit to protect the environment and improve safety is putting forward the hypothesis that speed limits reduce carbon dioxide emissions and accidents. Or: a party that wants to install a bicycle counter could assume that this will encourage people to take a break and chat, thereby increasing their well-being.

The next step is the experiment itself. In politics, this means that an idea is implemented: the bike counter is set up. Finally, an evaluation of the experiment is needed to assess whether the hypothesis can be refuted or provisionally confirmed: Does the bike counter fulfil its purpose of increasing people's well-being? If the answer is no, this does not necessarily mean that bicycle counters are bad in themselves, although that may be the case. This is the time to carefully consider if it was just poorly designed and lacks a roof or a cup holder. We should also consider whether the circumstances of the experiment were sufficient. Was the use of the counter perhaps only observed in winter, when fewer people cycle? At this point, further experiments or discussions may be needed to conclusively evaluate the functionality of the bicycle counter for increasing well-being. Once this is done, the hypothesis can be adjusted accordingly, and based on the new hypothesis (e.g. bike counters are useless for improving well-being; we should rather build better bike lanes), the process of experimentation can start all over again.

In a representative democracy, however, this process of experimentation seems to have some weaknesses. A strong focus on political party programs could lead to several difficulties. For example, there is a risk of dogmatism and polarization, and an imperative to toe the party line. As a result, certain political projects could be viewed not as hypotheses to be tested in the process of political experimentation, but as the only good projects, which are no longer open to debate. Projects could also be implemented that do not actually have the goal that is publicly communicated. For example, a political party might decide to build a bicycle counter to give the impression that it is committed to the interests of cyclists. Still, in reality, it is only building a counter to distract attention from the fact that it is not implementing enough effective measures for a mobility transition. In this case, even the party implementing the measures would not be convinced by the hypothesis that the bicycle counter improves the well-being of cyclists. However, this fact would be lost in the debate and hinder a process in which it could actually be discussed whether a mobility transition is desirable and what measures could be effective in achieving it. The lack of reflection on political hypotheses would be less of a problem under laboratory conditions.

Yet, in an experiment that has direct real-world consequences, mature and differentiated thought should be put into the hypothesis and the design of the resulting experiment in order to achieve good results that are in line with the actual wants and intentions of those affected. The necessity of this also depends on the scope of the negative consequences of an experiment. At worst, setting up a useless bike counter wastes taxpayers' money, but deporting thousands of people is a deep cut into the basic rights of thousands of people. Just as an ethics application has to be submitted for some experiments in a scientific context, the hurdle for political decisions should also be correspondingly high. Experimentation should therefore not mean trying out ill-considered ideas based on political party preferences. It should rather follow a process of nuanced debate that also takes into account experiments that have already been carried out. These include previous political decisions and their consequences, as well as experiments under scientific conditions, such as policy analyses and model projects.

Once the experiment (i.e., the implementation of a political decision) has been carried out, the process of experimentation all too often simply stops in politics. The decision is considered final, but may still need to be justified to citizens seeking explanations as to why their money was wasted on a bike counter. While there is hope that at least the same mistakes will not be repeated, this unfortunately seems to be the case far too often. In the case of the bicycle counter, the district office has recognized its lack of success and has not yet built any further bicycle counters.

To illustrate the failure to adapt policies to the results of previous experimentation, let us consider another example from urban planning. In urban planning, a car-centered paradigm is often prevalent: If there are too many traffic jams on the roads, more roads are built to reduce congestion. Yet, the new roads are blocked again after a short time, and this repeatedly happens until a single-lane road develops into a five-lane highway. Here, one could attest to an inability to adapt one's own convictions to what is observed. According to Thomas Kuhn's theory of science, one could say that the person is stuck in their paradigm (Kuhn 1996, 62–5; 109–110). To understand this better, it is worth taking a brief look at Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions: According to Kuhn, we are initially in a state of normal science. Here, people conduct research within certain established assumptions—that is, within a paradigm—in order to gain insights. However, in this process, there may be an increase in observations that cannot be explained within the existing paradigm, known as anomalies. When these anomalies accumulate, a crisis arises in which scientists begin to question the old framework. This crisis can only be resolved by a scientific revolution. A new paradigm emerges, and the state of normal science returns (1996). In urban planning, the established paradigm is often one in which the car is unquestioningly accepted as the primary means of transportation. Accordingly, more and more adjustments are made to the theory that building streets minimizes congestion, but these always lead to new problems. One possible solution would be for a scientific revolution to enable a paradigmatic shift: Perhaps the car is not the most suitable means of transportation in this scenario.

Improving the Methods for Experimentation

We have now seen that making political decisions always means navigating an uncertain world and that we always have to experiment a little in the process. In the current political system, however, the methodology for conducting these experiments is still questionable in many cases. Dogmatic party political convictions, the urge to push through one's own ideas, and a lack of reflection on the connections between political plans and the underlying hypotheses can hinder processes of political experimentation. Added to this are a lack of structural opportunities to test political ideas on a smaller scale and a lack of social and political acceptance for revising political decisions once they have been made. One possibility would be to improve the ability of politicians and citizens to engage in political experimentation. This could reduce bias in experimentation, enable a more reflective debate on political hypotheses, and promote critical discussion about the legitimacy of certain experiments. The question of whether these skills can be sufficiently promoted within existing representative democracies to improve political experiments cannot be answered conclusively at this point. However, it could be a promising prospect to make political systems more deliberative, direct, and participatory. Would people in such systems then also set up such exciting structures as bicycle counters? Perhaps we can only find out by trying out other ways of experimenting democratically in practice.

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Sharing in the Act of Creation

Charlie Chowdhry

Introduction

The existence of transgender people disproves the theory that sex and gender are immutable categories. Any theory claiming that gender is intrinsically linked to sex (or sex to gender) cannot stand up against the empirical evidence to the contrary: transgender people prove, by virtue of their embodied experiences, that sex and gender do not necessarily run parallel to each other. Transgender lives have a strong political and discursive significance, but this says little about what it means to *be* transgender beyond basic definitions.

Daniel M. Lavery, a transgender author, describes a way to think about *being* transgender in his memoir *Something That May Shock and Discredit You*. Lavery shares a thought from his friend, Julian K. Jarboe. He writes: “As my friend Julian puts it, only half winkingly: ‘God blessed me by making me transsexual for the same reason God made wheat but not bread and fruit but not wine, so that humanity might share in the act of creation’” (Lavery 2020). For Lavery and Jarboe, transsexuality can be understood as an individual blessing, and transitioning as a creative project.

In this paper, I will examine the philosophical content of the above quotation in order to address the question: *To what extent is transitioning a creative act*? The quotation makes several salient philosophical claims, which I will address in the latter two chapters of this paper. In chapter 2, I will explore the concept of humanity as an incomplete divine project. Then, I will compare the quotation to Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Plato’s *Protagoras*, which describe human creativity as a divine gift. The chapter will conclude with an explanation of Hannah Arendt’s view on divine and human creation. Chapter 3 will investigate the nature of creativity, and the ways in which transitioning can be considered creative. In this chapter, I will refer to the theories of Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche. First however, given the complexity of the transgender experience, I will begin my paper with a chapter that clarifies terms such as ‘transitioning’, ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’.

Chapter 1. Clarification of Transitioning

To understand the validity of a comparison between transitioning and a creative act such as making bread or wine, it is important to understand the mechanics of transitioning, both at the physical level and at the level of personal identity. This chapter cannot—and does not aim to—provide a comprehensive overview of every aspect of the trans experience or of transitioning, but it will address the components of transitioning that are relevant for this paper.

Some people define 'transgender' as a catch-all umbrella term that encompasses any gender identity other than 'cisgender'.[1] Others define 'transgender' more straightforwardly, to refer to those who feel that their gender identity is incongruent with the sex they were assigned at birth. The suffix 'gender' indicates that the word 'transgender' is concerned with an individual's gender identity. Being transgender does not necessarily involve a change to one's sex, but rather indicates the 'trans-ness' of one's gender identity (as in, a person is still transgender if they have not changed their sex, and never intends to change their sex). The word 'transsexual', on the other hand, emphasises biological sex in transition, as opposed to gender in transition; the term refers to an individual who has embodied a change in their biological sex. The term 'transsexual' is sometimes problematised by other members of the trans community for being overly concerned with one's body, which is why 'transgender' rather than 'transsexual' has become the umbrella term for the community.

However, some transsexual people prefer the label 'transsexual' over 'transgender' precisely *because* it is concerned with the body. The gender of a cisgender man and a transgender man are the same; they are both men. The difference between a cisgender and transgender person of the same gender (and, indeed, what changes when a person transitions medically) is their sex. Coming out as trans is a decision to *share* your gender identity, rather than a decision to *change* your gender identity. When you realise you are trans, nothing inside of you has changed fundamentally; you simply become more aware of your own identity. In other words, realising that you are transgender is an *unveiling* of the essence of your identity.

Transitioning is a way to embody one's gender identity. While there are many components, individual preferences and choices involved in transitioning, transitioning generally connotes a change to the body and its presentation, in order to outwardly indicate one's belonging or non-belonging to a particular gender. More specifically, transitioning involves masculinising, feminising, or 'androgynising' the body according to a norm of physical

1 Cisgender (adj.) refers to people who identify entirely with the gender that was assigned to them at birth. This definition is somewhat uncontroversial, except among reactionary groups, whom I do not care to dignify with an acknowledgement in this essay (or in general).

appearance associated with one's gender.[2] For some, this will simply involve changing one's name, pronouns or fashion choices. For others, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and surgery will provide the changes to the body that are needed. HRT for trans people involves the use of sex hormones (and in some cases, antiandrogens), which are used to cause another puberty, during which the secondary sex characteristics of the body will gradually change. Surgeries can be used to further change the body according to the needs of the individual. A medical transition usually requires a trans person to undergo HRT for the rest of their life, as their body will revert to producing the wrong hormones in the absence of medical intervention.

This form of transitioning[3] (encouraging the body through hormones or surgery to take on another form) thus entails a constant redirection of the natural processes of the body, to radically change not only the biology of the body, but the *meaning* of the body. Before transitioning, the body was simply an expression of the person's original biological sex; a body that has transitioned is a body that now represents that person's gender, *unveiled*, and is a part of the expression of their identity.

Chapter 2. Humanity as an Incomplete Divine Project; Creativity as a Gift

The aim of the previous chapter is to highlight the fact that transitioning fundamentally alters the physicality and meaning of the body, in line with a sense of identity that remains constant. Transitioning incites processes that can occur naturally, but which were not naturally occurring in the body prior to transitioning, such as a particular distribution of body fat or hair. It builds upon natural processes that have already occurred, hoping to redirect or even undo things that would otherwise continue to manifest in or on the body. Bread cannot be made without wheat; wine cannot be made without grapes; transitioning cannot occur without a body. "But", as some who believe in divine creation have argued, "God makes no mistakes." Surely transsexuality, which is by all accounts a complete overhaul of the body's original biological plan, was not the intended destiny for God's creation. Why would God "make" (in Jarboe's words) somebody transsexual? In this chapter, I will argue that humanity has long been thought of as an incomplete divine project that has

2 Traditionally, these norms are dictated by cisgender norms of physical appearance (i.e. a male man, a female woman...)

3 I cannot ever speak fully of the near-infinite diversity of the transgender experience. The meaning of 'transition,' and trans life itself, is not limited to (nor should it be limited to) mere medical interventions enacted on our flesh.

undergone radical changes since its initial creation. These changes were precipitated not by direct divine intervention, but by humans acquiring the gift of creative powers from divinity.

In *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus (2013), Prometheus, a Titan, explains the events that led him to be punished by Zeus. In lines 107-112, Prometheus says that he gave human beings "great privileges"—that is, fire, which allowed humans to develop skills in crafting. Humans were not initially created with this knowledge; they were given this knowledge by Prometheus, a god, and it has since become a part of the human condition. According to *Prometheus Bound*: "...humans in the beginning had eyes but saw to no purpose; they had ears but did not hear. Like the shapes of dreams they dragged through their long lives and muddled everything haphazardly" (447-50). Prometheus takes further credit for our creative gifts, claiming in line 506 that: "all human arts come from Prometheus".

Prometheus Bound details the extent to which humans owe their creative power to divine intervention, but in *Protagoras* (1997) Plato gives an account of why Prometheus had to give us the arts in the first place: when we were first designed by the god Epimetheus, we were not equipped to be able to survive with merely our own bodies in the same way that other animals were. If we had loyally clung to our original design, we could not have survived (321c). To help us, Prometheus stole fire from Hephaestus, and wisdom in the practical arts from Athena (321c-d). However, skill in the 'practical arts' alone was not enough to ensure our survival, and so Zeus intervened yet again, to give us a sense of justice and shame. In Plato's view, without our divine gifts, we would never have been able to adapt and survive as a species.

The story of Prometheus is a direct parallel with Julian K. Jarboe's quip—according to *Prometheus Bound* and *Protagoras*, our physical form was designed by Epimetheus (321c), but our condition had to be altered after our 'Epimethean' bodies[4] were created, in order to ensure our survival. Jarboe believes that God did not intend for him to remain in his Epimethean body. Not only are humans given our creative power by divinity, but a divine power (in this case, Prometheus) intended for us to use it for our own ends, to change ourselves and our ways of life. The divine gift of creation means that we can survive and flourish beyond what our Epimethean bodies are capable

4 I have coined the term 'the Epimethean body' to refer to the initial body of a human being that is not yet survivable. It is the body 'in the absence of change.' The context of the myth gives the term 'Epimethean' the sense that, while this body has occurred in the absence of intervention, it is not sustainable or survivable and is waiting to be changed, unlike the terms 'biological' or 'natural,' which have biologically essentialist or cisnormative connotations that do not befit the spirit of this essay.

of. The gods did not give us bread and wine as gifts: their gift was the power to create a world in which we can thrive; a world in which we can turn wheat into bread, and fruit into wine. Our Epimethean bodies were "made", but the power to transition, like our other creative gifts, is "given".

Hannah Arendt reflects on the notion that our creative powers are divine in *The Human Condition* (1998). She writes that there are three fundamental human activities: labour, work, and action (7). Labour is the activity of *animal laborans*, the labouring animal (7); humans as a living species with bodies perform labour in order to survive. Work, which Prometheus empowered us to do, is the activity of *homo faber*—'man the maker' (7). Arendt argues that, while *animal laborans* is the "lord and master of all living creatures" (139), we are still subject to natural processes that will ultimately determine our condition. *Homo faber*, on the other hand, "conducts himself as lord and master of the whole earth" (139).

Arendt elaborates:

> *Since* [homo faber's] *productivity was seen in the image of a Creator-God, so that where God creates* ex nihilo, *man creates out of given substance, human productivity was by definition bound to result in a Promethean revolt because it could erect a man-made world only after destroying part of God-created nature*. (Arendt 1998, 139, italics mine)

In other words, God can create from nothing, but *homo faber* can only create from materials that already exist, having been created by God. The work of homo faber involves taking from and destroying what God has created, in order to produce a world of things for human beings. We are divine both in our Epimethean, labouring, vulnerable incompleteness, and in our Promethean efforts to work the human condition around our Epimethean bodies.

Chapter 3. Transitioning as a Creative Act

If Jarboe believes that God gave us the power to transition as a gift, and that this gift is parallel to the gift of baking and wine-making, what do we do with this gift? If we use the gift of baking to create bread, and the gift of wine-making to create wine, what do we create when we transition? What raw material, comparable to wheat and fruit, do we start with, and what product do we create? In this chapter, I will argue that transitioning is a creative act, that this creative act takes place in and on the Epimethean body, and that the design-plan for this act is gender identity. I will proceed further than

Jarboe's comparison between the transsexual body and a craft like bread or wine, to argue that the transsexual body is not simply a product, but a work of art.[5]

At first glance, the Arendtian activity of labour corresponds to the process of transitioning as it is understood biologically. During one's medical transition, hormones and surgeries mimic a hormone cycle or the development of primary sex characteristics as they would have occurred naturally. Conversely, art, Arendt argues, "is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes" (1998, 167). Arendt conceptualises art as something stable, permanent and extremely worldly, unlike the human body. Transitioning and art appear to belong to entirely separate categories of human activity, which would mean that a parallel cannot be drawn between transitioning and art. In order to argue that transitioning is a creative act, I must first argue that a creative act can be undertaken in and on the human body, but this is something that Arendt would not agree with. While I agree with Arendt that art is the work of *homo faber*, I must disagree with her on the nature of art. With the following example, I aim to illustrate that art can be both perishable and cyclical, contrary to Arendt's view.

The 'ideal weight' of *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* by Félix González-Torres is 175 lbs, the average weight of an adult male. *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* is made of a non-traditional medium: "Candies in variously colored wrappers, endless supply" (González-Torres 1991). The artwork is an 'allegorical portrait' of González-Torres' partner, Ross Laycock, who passed away due to complications from AIDS in 1991, 5 years before González-Torres' death from the same condition. Viewers of the artwork are encouraged to take from the pile of candies, which represents the degradation of Ross' body during his illness. More candies are added to the artwork at various intervals, restoring it to its ideal weight.

Figure 1. *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* by Félix González-Torres. 1991. Candies in variously coloured wrappers, endless supply. Dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 175 lbs.

5 I have since become aware of a Hegelian argument to the same effect, but concerning the human body in general. This is something I may address in a later paper.

Nothing about Ross' portrait is worldly, and this is the very thing that makes it a portrait of Ross, as opposed to simply a pile of candies. By now, none of the original candies remain, and yet the *artwork* remains, by virtue of the meaning given to it by its cyclical, repetitive sustenance by other human beings. The artwork is not simply the pile of candies; it is the way in which the candies are taken away and replenished time and time again in a cycle. In other words, the artwork is defined by its very *unworldliness*, the fact that it is consumed and eaten away by outside forces. Ross' portrait is undoubtedly art—his portrait is the work of *homo faber*. Art, then, does not have to be divorced from a cyclical labour process. If a cyclical process which involves the body's labour and lacks worldliness can nevertheless be the work of *homo faber*, I argue that the act of transitioning is therefore also not necessarily excluded from the category of work.

Arendt describes the work of *homo faber* as fabrication (1998, 139). Fabrication involves the process of "reification": turning a design-plan into something with a physical form. According to Arendt, *homo faber* extracts the materials it uses for fabrication from nature, removing materials from their original location in a manner that either kills or interrupts a natural process (139). In other words, Arendt holds that the work of *homo faber* involves a redirection or interruption of a natural process, in order to use natural materials to bring an idea into materiality in accordance with a design-plan.

The transsexual body is the outcome of the creative act of transitioning. The transsexual body is subject to decay but, as with *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, worldliness does not characterise art—rather, human intervention and meaning create art. Transitioning requires a direct intervention, a redirection of the body's Epimethean labour; the primary and secondary sex characteristics and their functions. The 'natural' processes that would otherwise have occurred in or on the Epimethean body are halted by *homo faber*, who, according to a design-plan, fabricates the transsexual body using the Epimethean body as material. The design-plan in this instance is the gender identity of the person who is transitioning. When one transitions, one's gender identity is reified by *homo faber*, using the Epimethean body as a medium, like clay, from which the transsexual body can be created.

One might also argue that in the Arendtian sense, transitioning is action rather than work. The condition of action is the fact that a plurality of human beings live on the planet (Arendt 1998, 7). However, while plurality is involved in witnessing or consulting on one's transition, and is often a large part of one's life as a transgender person, transitioning takes place in and on one's individual body. Transgender politics and rights activism do indeed belong to the sphere of action. *Activism* produces something new, which Arendt associates with action, but, as was previously discussed, transitioning is an *unveiling* and does not produce a new gender identity. Furthermore, on a biological level, it is nonsensical to argue that puberty produces something new in the same sense as action. Arendt would argue that this biological process belongs to the category of labour, and common sense indicates that the biological processes of the body do not occur as a condition of plurality. Transitioning is an individual, deliberate transformation of the Epimethean body: work, not action or labour.

Thus I have established that the process of transitioning is work, rather than action or labour, since it is a process of *unveiling* as opposed to the production of a new gender identity. This allows us to think of transitioning along the same lines as wine-making and baking, proving that the allegory drawn by Jarboe is fitting. However, I believe I can (and should) argue further than this. I will now discuss the creative act of transitioning through the framework of Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In ancient Greek religion, Apollo and Dionysus were two sons of Zeus. Art that is made in images, such as sculptures, is 'Apolline'; "imageless art" such as music, is 'Dionysiac' (Nietzsche 1999, 14). Nietzsche writes that Greek tragedy combines Apolline and Dionysiac art in equal measure, but that the Apolline and Dionysiac are otherwise in conflict with one another (14). Artists, whether their work is Apolline or Dionysiac, create through imitation – the former is created by imitating dreams, and the latter from imitating intoxication (19). An artist who creates a combination of both the Apolline and Dionysiac is an imitator of both dreams and intoxication (19).

Nietzsche writes that in the history of Greek tragedy, the Dionysiac came first, in the form of the chorus (1999, 36). The Dionysiac chorus gave the audience the "experience of seeing oneself transformed before one's eyes and acting as if one had really entered another body, another character" (43) —that is, the Dionysiac is a representation of inner worlds, identities, and other such things that cannot simply be represented physically. The Greek tragedy, argues Nietzsche, is "the Apolline embodiment of Dionysiac insights and effects" (44).

Transsexuality is not an Apolline sculpture of sex, nor a Dionysiac musical composition of gender. Without a gender identity, a body cannot be transsexual; it would be akin to piling up 175lbs of candies in variously coloured wrappers for no good reason, and calling it 'art.' Gender identity without a body is merely discourse, activism or theory. Transsexuality is the combination of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in a sort of 'Greek tragedy.' The act of transitioning makes sense of one's Epimethean body and gender identity, reinterpreting it, and giving it meaning, in the same way that Greek tragedy gave meaning to the lives of the Greek audiences and saved them according to Nietzsche (1999, 39).

Nietzsche draws an opposition between the 'artistic man' and the 'theoretical man'—after an *unveiling*, the artistic man continues to seek out whatever remains veiled, whereas the theoretical man is content in the knowledge that he has engaged in a process of unveiling, and focuses on the discarded veil (1999, 72). He identifies Socrates as the archetypical theoretical man. The theoretical man believes that, through reason, they are able to both understand existence or even correct it (73). The theoretical man is opposed to the Dionysiac (75), and is instead concerned with the Apolline.

The 'discarded veil' upon which the theoretical man focuses is the Epimethean body ('what were you before?')—transsexuality is examined by the theoretical man according to the notion that, *reasonably*, one ought to be able to survive within their Epimethean body. The theoretical man cannot rationalise unveiling, since the Epimethean body does not offer an explanation at the level of the Apolline, so the theoretical man cannot understand it; they can merely observe it. The theoretical man may read this paper and wonder which particular aspects of transitioning fit the Arendtian-Nietzschean framework set forth here. The theoretical man may wonder whether the fluid in our post-surgery drains is fragrant like wine, whether the gradual movement of our body's fat and muscle feels like kneading soft dough to and fro, whether we can feel the splinters being pared away from our old gendered signifiers as we whittle away at our Epimethean bodies.

To the theoretical man, the transformation of the Epimethean body appears to be a brutalisation. The theoretical man sees the labour of the transition and cannot fathom the need for the work. The theoretical man does not have an embodied experience of being transsexual or transitioning, and thus they have no reason to assume that anything further has to be unveiled. Hence the question 'When will you be finished with your transition?', since, in spite of the attempts of medicine, psychiatry and politics to render a definite answer to this question, the answer can only be given by the transsexual themselves. Only the artist could know if there is more to unveil. This is not to say that this question is bigoted (nor the theoretical man themself). Rather, the theoretical man, who is embedded in the Apolline, has no access to the Dionysiac, and can only understand transitioning as a series of discarded veils, and not as the *art of unveiling*. The theoretical man thus holds a purely medical or political understanding of transgender people, since medical and political acts can have Apolline representations. All the while, the artistic transsexual man continues the process of their own unveiling, combining the Apolline and Dionysiac in their transition.

Just as the Apolline and the Dionysiac are in conflict outside of Greek tragedy, the Epimethean body is in conflict with the gender identity of a transgender person, causing dysphoria. Transitioning is the interpretation of this conflict; transitioning shapes the Epimethean body into a body that represents the identity of a transgender person. In other words, the transsexual body, like a Greek tragedy, is an artwork that is created when Dionysiac ideas are represented by the Apolline (Nietzsche 1999, 52).

Conclusion

Transitioning is not only a creative act, but its outcome, the transsexual body, is a work of art like a Greek tragedy. The transsexual body is an Apolline representation of the Dionysiac; it is an expression of a transgender person's inner world and identity, communicated through materials, sculpted from their Epimethean body using their gender identity as a design-plan. Transitioning is the *art of unveiling*, through which the transsexual body is created.

Just as the process of wine-making transforms grapes into wine, the process of transitioning transforms an Epimethean body into a transsexual body. Transitioning is work, much like any other project that, undertaken by humans, seeks to make sense of nature. Transgender life is radical, political, troublesome. Transsexuality baffles the theoretical man. To be transgender is to embrace and work with the divine incompleteness of human beings; this is what makes transgender lives so disruptive to systems that try to deny the malleability of the human condition. Whether or not one believes in divine creation, it remains the case that the work of *homo faber* is to shape the condition of human beings. Transitioning makes the Epimethean body survivable, working raw material into something inhabitable, comfortable, delicious, beautiful. We are not destined to helplessly fight for survival within our Epimethean bodies. With each individual realisation that our Epimethean bodies are not survivable, transgender people prove that human life can be reworked until it is inhabitable, comfortable, delicious, beautiful.

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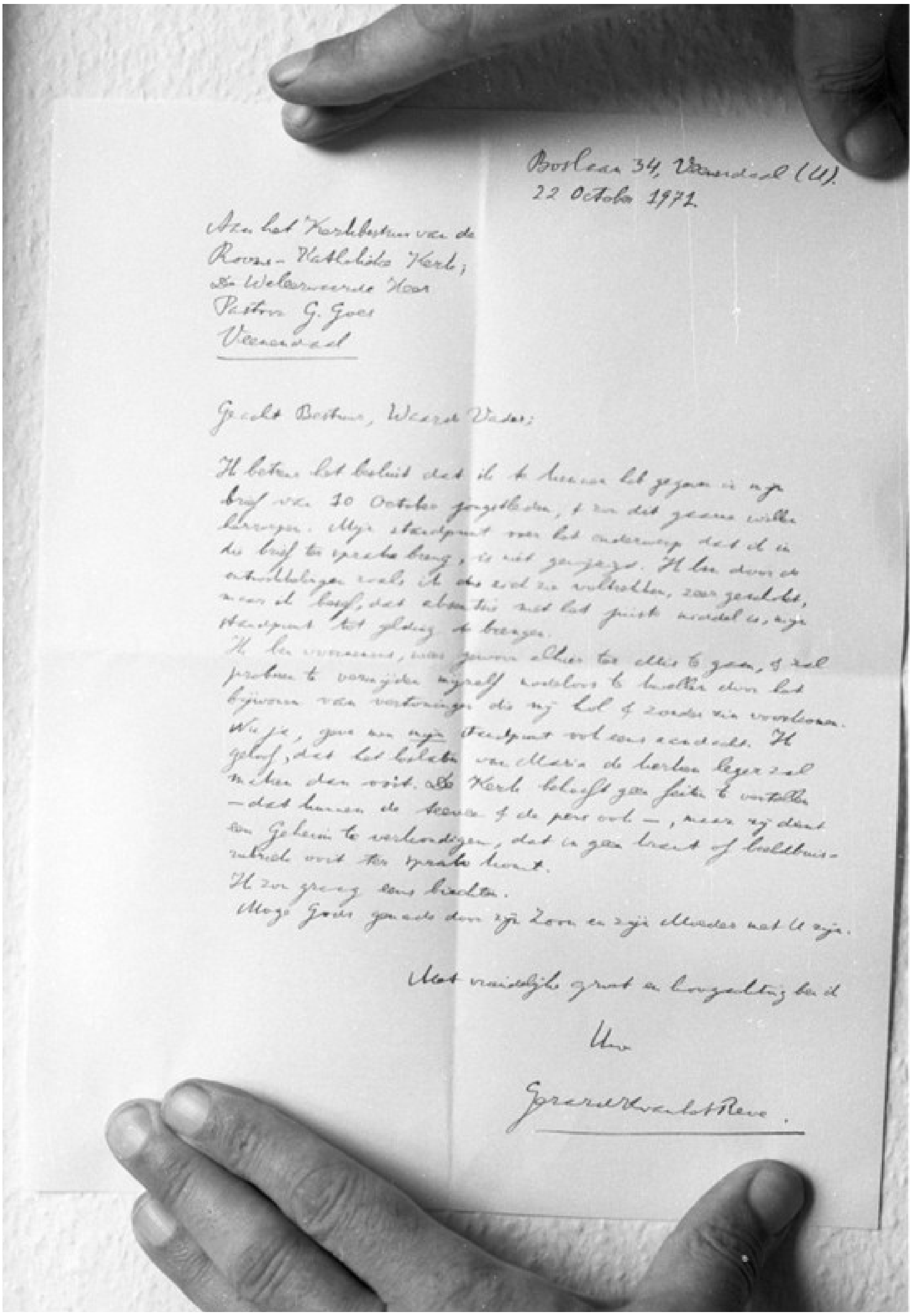

Boslaan 34, Veenendaal (U).
22 October 1971.

Aan het Kerkbestuur van de
Rooms-Katholieke Kerk;
de Weleerwaarde Heer
Pastoor G. Goes
Veenendaal

Geacht Bestuur, Weerde Vader;

Ik betreur het besluit dat ik te kennen heb gegeven in mijn brief van 10 October jongstleden, & zou dat gaarne willen herroepen. Mijn standpunt over het onderwerp dat ik in die brief ter sprake bracht, is niet gewijzigd. Ik ben door de ontwikkelingen welke ik thans voel zich voltrekken, zeer geschokt, maar ik besef, dat absentie niet het juiste middel is, mijn standpunt tot gelding te brengen.
Ik ben voornemens, weer gewoon elders ter Mis te gaan, & zal proberen te vermijden mijzelf nodeloos te kwellen door het bijwonen van vertoningen die mij hol & zonder zin voorkomen.
Wie weet, [illegible] mijn standpunt ook eens aandacht. Ik geloof, dat het beletten van Maria de kerken leger zal maken dan ooit. De Kerk behoeft geen feiten te vertellen — dat kunnen de kranten & de pers ook —, maar zij dient een Geheim te verkondigen, dat in geen krant of koffiehuisrubriek ooit ter sprake komt.
Ik zou graag eens biechten.
Moge Gods genade door zijn Zoon en zijn Moeder met U zijn.

Met vriendelijke groet en hoogachting ben ik

Uw

Gerard Kornelis van het Reve.

Figuur 1: *Brief aan het Kerkbestuur van de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk; De Weleerwaarde Heer Pastoor G. Goes te Veenendaal, 1971*. © Teigetje en Woelrat 2024, Amsterdam. Gedistribueerd met toestemming van Teigetje en Woelrat.

Ontmoeting, Conflict, Inkeer

Brieven van Gerard Reve aan de Salvatorkerk in Veenendaal

Johannes B. Vriend

Hoe de brieven aan het licht zijn gekomen

Om en nabij het midden van het land is een pastoor dienstbaar. Wanneer hij een paar glaasjes op heeft, begint hij als automatisch over de Nederlandse literatuur te spreken. Naast de Mis in het Nederlands en het Latijn kent hij ook meerdere gedichten van Achterberg uit zijn hoofd. Toen hij eens een heel gedicht van Achterberg opgedreund had, vroeg ik: "Zeg, die Achterberg, was dat niet die dichter die zijn hospita heeft doodgeschoten?"

"Dat was toch de dochter van de hospita?" vroeg hij, zijn wijsvinger op belerende wijze opstekend. "Volgens mij niet," hield ik vol.

"Ach," zuchtte hij, "wat maakt het uit? Dood is dood."

Zijn kennis van de Nederlandse literatuur reikt verder dan alleen de gedichten van Achterberg. Van Reve had hij eveneens een en ander gelezen. Het gedicht Dagsluiting had eens een beslissende rol gespeeld in het geloofsbehoud van een van zijn parochianen, zo vertelde hij. Kort daarop liet hij zich de volgende vraag ontvallen: "Wist je dat hij eens brieven heeft achtergelaten in Veenendaal?" Ik gebaarde hoofdschuddend van niet, en hield mijn oren gespitst.

"Ja, daar kan niemand chocola van maken," hernam hij. "Het handschrift is volkomen onleesbaar voor een normaal mens. Misschien dat jij er wel iets mee kunt?"

Hij gaf mij de contactgegevens van het secretariaat van de Salvatorkerk in Veenendaal. Ik besloot erheen te gaan. Aldaar werd ik met open armen ontvangen. Een secretaresseachtige vrouw bood mij koffie aan en begeleidde mij naar het kantoortje van het sobere kerkgebouw. Ik nam plaats en kreeg de eerste twee brieven in handen gedrukt.

"Ja, die Reve, die naam ken ik wel," zei de vrouw, "en ook weet ik dat hij een schrijver is. Ik heb nooit iets van hem gelezen. Laatst kwam ik de brieven tegen toen ik de kast aan het opruimen was. Ik dacht: zal ik ze weggooien, of niet? Ik heb het toch maar niet gedaan, voor de zekerheid." Ze zag mij naar het handschrift turen. "Kunt u het lezen?"

"Ja," moest ik tot mijn grote verbazing toegeven, "ik kan het lezen."

Ik hoefde niet te vragen of ze een afdruk van de brieven wilde maken; dat had ze al voor me gedaan. Thuis nam ik nog even de tijd om met name de tweede brief te bestuderen. Ik nam contact op met Tijger en Woelrat om te vragen hoe de brieven tot stand waren gekomen. Zij waren niet van het bestaan van deze brieven op de hoogte. Wel wisten ze van nóg een brief. Hier hadden ze destijds een foto van gemaakt. Deze foto kreeg ik als bijlage bij hun reactie doorgezonden; de verzameling was compleet.

Al met al is het opduiken van deze brieven een gelukkige aaneenschakeling van coïncidenties geweest.

Reve en de Salvatorkerk

Voordat Gerard Reve in Veenendaal kwam wonen, was hij al weleens naar de Mis gegaan in de Salvatorkerk. Daar was hij toen al niet over te spreken. Op 27 April 1970—boven de brief staat 1670, omdat Reve vond dat hij in opvattingen eerder thuishoort in de tweede helft van de 17e eeuw (Reve & Maas 1983, 112)—deelde hij in een brief aan Wim B. zijn ongenoegen mede. In Veenendaal zou de pastoor een theoreticus van de Franse communistische partij hebben aangehaald. Die zou alle 'misdaden', 'gangsterismen' en 'miljoenenmoorden' van de communisten jaar in jaar uit hebben goedgekeurd en toegejuicht. Volgens de pastoor zou deze theoreticus: “rake en gezonde kritiek op de kerk,’ hebben geuit, “die wij [...] ons maar eens terdege, wij christenen, moesten aantrekken, etc” (34). Hij schreef voorts: “Ik spuug erop, langzamerhand, op het hele Nederlandse katholicisme. Alles is domheid, onbegrip, symboolblindheid, en aanbidding van het rapaljair geweld. De goddelijkheid van Christus wordt nu vrijwel overal openlijk in de kerken geloochend. Overal is de zwakzinnigheid en de geestelijke achterbuurt in opmars” (34).

Uit de eerste brief aan het bestuur blijkt dat hij zich op 13 juni 1971 toch formeel als lid bij die parochie inschreef. Hij woonde al vanaf mei van dat jaar in Veenendaal (Reve & Maas 1983, 61). Er zaten dus enkele maanden tussen zijn intrekken in Veenendaal en zijn als lid intreden in de parochie.

Het zal niemand verbazen dat het in enkele maanden op een conflict uitliep. Na een jongerenmis, die samen met twee reformatorische kerken georganiseerd werd, heeft Reve zijn ongenoegen uitgesproken. De Mis bevatte naar zijn beweren geen enkel credo en de naam van Maria werd geen één keer genoemd. “Een religie zonder credo is toch onzin?" schreef hij aan Simon Carmiggelt (Reve 1982, 110). Reve vond “de amputatie van Maria en alle op haar betrekking hebbende leerstellingen” kennelijk uitingen van welwillendheid jegens de reformatie (111) en dat was ogenschijnlijk niet aan hem besteed. Op 10 oktober 1971 schreef hij een van toorn doortrokken brief aan het kerkbestuur; de tweede brief die hij aan het bestuur schreef. Deze brief is opgenomen in *Brieven van een Aardappeleter* (Reve 1993, 155–6). Hij laat erin kennen dat hij zich graag zou willen uitschrijven als lid van de parochie en geen mededeling wil ontvangen. “Ook geen bezoek, in Godsnaam” (155). In deze brief verwoordde hij dezelfde bezwaren als in de brieven aan Carmiggelt: het 'verminkte' credo en de afwezigheid van Maria in de Mis (156).

Wat opvalt aan deze brief is de volkomen eigenzinnige wijze waarop Reve de godsdienst bezag. De doorsnee Veenendaalse kerkganger moet iets gedacht hebben als: waar maakt deze man zich druk om?

In de religie was Reve concessieloos. Voor hem was de godsdienst, in een welhaast Jungiaanse zin, het middel om in contact te staan met het onbewuste. Dit contact loopt via de symbolen. Zodra de godsdienst zijn symbolen verliest, is het dus weinig meer waard. Voor Reve was dit een kernachtige kwestie waar wel degelijk iets van afhing. De brief lijkt daarenboven een uiting van eenzaamheid: het onvermogen gelijkdenkenden te ontmoeten. Het lijkt als in een roes van woede geschreven.

Volgens Tijger en Woelrat, de toenmalige levenspartners van Reve, was hij verwend door de eerdere kerken die hij bezocht.

“Gerard ging in Veenendaal wel naar de Mis,” lieten ze via de mail weten, “maar de Veenendaalse kerk was veel minder inspirerend dan de mooie schuilkerk *Onze Lieve Heer Op Zolder* in Amsterdam en later de *Sint-Vituskerk* in Blauwhuis, die hij gewend was te bezoeken. Ook was hij niet blij met de, in het Nederlands vertaalde, liturgie. Al met al nogal een sof, om een veel door hem gebezigd woord te gebruiken. Ter compensatie begon hij het bedevaartsoord in Kevelaer te bezoeken” (Teigetje en Woelrat, mail aan de auteur, 2024).

Toch was de breuk met de kerk in Veenendaal niet definitief. Reve schreef nog een derde brief aan het kerkbestuur (Reve 1971), waarin hij aangaf dat hij zijn besluit uit de parochie te stappen betreurde. Hij stond nog wel achter de bezwaren die hij verwoord had. Hij wilde graag weer bij de betreffende pastoor, dhr. Goes, biechten.

Deze derde brief aan het bestuur is nooit opgenomen in *Brieven van een Aardappeleter*. Lezers van dat boek zullen dus vermoeden dat de brief die erin staat de laatste brief was, maar Reve heeft wel weer contact gezocht met de parochie en verzoeningspogingen gedaan. Het is niet duidelijk of hij nog vaak in Veenendaal naar de Mis is gegaan. Vanaf begin 1972 was Reve al niet meer zoveel in Veenendaal te vinden en schreef hij met name vanuit Weert (Reve & Maas 1983, 82). Er zijn geen verdere brieven van Reve aan het kerkbestuur bekend en nergens legt hij verslag van een verder contact. Ik heb gedurende mijn bezoek aan het sobere kerkgebouw niemand kunnen spreken die hem nog als lid herinnerde.

De eenzaamheid aangaande geloofsopvattingen is een centraal thema gebleven in zijn werk, en bleef een patroon in zijn persoonlijke leven tot zijn overlijden.

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Bruno's Cave

Marleen van Haalen

There once was a lantern that shone very bright
It tried to illuminate with all of its might
But the harder it shone, the faster it burned up
It feared if its light dimmed, its project would stop

Though as its flame grew smaller, it became aware
That there were a lot more lanterns out there
Some were far away and others nearby
Their light as clear as cold deep blue sky

The ones that were connected could help each other
As free and equal sisters and brothers
The bigger the family, the more power the lanterns hold
While the ones cut off would grow dim and cold

Once the lantern saw, it couldn't help but feel
That the other lanterns' lights were just as real
It wasn't so grand on its own after all
In fact, isolation would mean its downfall

Ultimately, the lantern can only be in one spot
And so it needs others to brighten what it cannot